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Toward a Methodology of Understanding the *Nature and Scope* of the Concept of Sunnah

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Abstract

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It is a well-known fact that the Qur'an, Sunnah, and to a large extent *Ḥadīth* have been used as the principal sources of Islamic thought from its very genesis. The claims of the utmost importance in following the Qur'an and Sunnah¹ as the most authentic and legitimate, if not the only, epistemological and methodological parameters governing Muslim intellectual discourses have been echoed throughout the entire Islamic intellectual experience. However, a systematic interpretational mechanism that would permit a more clearly defined heuristic in the unfolding of the Qur'an

¹ And the *Ḥadīth* body of literature as their primary interpretational vehicle.

and Sunnah's objectives, scope, character, and the nature of their inter-relationship is yet to be put in place.

As such the aim of this article is to outline several features of a new methodology which would permit us to better understand the *nature* and *scope* of the Sunnah and its inter-relationship with the body of Quranic and *Ḥadīth* texts. It will do so by outlining some salient features of a new methodology that will allow for the conceptual differentiation between Sunnah and *Ḥadīth* beyond those proposed so far. The article will argue that the way the *nature* and *scope* of the concept of Sunnah is understood or defined is inextricably linked with the way the *nature*, *objectives*, and *character* of Quranic revelation is conceptualized. Additionally, the paper will argue that apart from its *ʿamal* or practice based component, the Sunnah comprises of *akhlāq*, *fiqh*, *ʿaqīdah*, and *ʿibādah* elements which are epistemologically and methodologically independent of *Ḥadīth* but organically linked to a particular type of Quranic hermeneutic. The paper will also attempt to clarify, briefly, the proper position or place of *Ḥadīth* literature in the overall Qur'ano-Sunnahic hermeneutic.²

Numerous modern scholars such as I. Goldziher,³ J. van Ess,⁴ J. Schacht,⁵ G.H.A. Juynboll,⁶ F. Rahman,⁷ Z.I. Ansari,⁸ W.A. Graham,⁹ I. Ahmed,¹⁰

² By the term Qur'ano-Sunnahic hermeneutic we wish to emphasize the hermeneutically symbiotic relationship that existed between the two concepts during the formative period of Islamic thought. See our discussion below.

³ I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1889-90).

⁴ J. van Ess, *Zwischen Hadith und Theologie* (Berlin, 1975).

⁵ J. Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964); *The Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950).

⁶ G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, 1983); *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith* (Ashgate, 1996); *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature-Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden, 1969).

⁷ F. Rahman, 'The Living Sunnah and al-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah' in *Hadith and Sunnah: Ideals and Realities: Selected Essays* (Kuala Lumpur, 1996).

⁸ Z.I. Ansari, 'Islamic Juristic Terminology before Shafi'i: A Semantical Analysis with Special Reference to Kufa', *Arabica*, 19 (1972).

⁹ W.A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special References to the Divine Saying or Hadith Qudsi* (Hague, 1977).

¹⁰ I. Ahmed, *The Significance of Sunnah and Hadith and their Early Documentation*, Ph.D. Thesis (Edinburgh, 1974).

B.M. Wheeler,¹¹ M.M. Bravmann,¹² H. Motzki,¹³ and most recently Y. Dutton,¹⁴ Kh. Abou El-Fadl,¹⁵ W. Hallaq,¹⁶ and A. Duderija¹⁷ have alluded to the semantical and conceptual differences between the *Ḥadīth* and Sunnah, restricting the definition, nature, and scope of the Sunnah,¹⁸ however, primarily to the *‘amal* or *practice* of the Prophet perpetuated by the subsequent generations of Muslims. Based on this distinction, for example, our knowledge of the performance of the daily canonical prayers, hajj rituals, circumcision, etc. would not depend upon their written documentation. The existence of other aspects of the Prophet’s Sunnah such as those which could be termed ethico-moral, legal, and creedal in character has not been clearly recognized and was principally deduced from various *ḥadīth* which not only often sent contradictory and/or mixed signals/messages regarding a particular issue, but had a very questionable epistemological value. Moreover, a systematic and coherent mechanism for deducing and defining non-*‘amal* elements of the Sunnah without any reliance on *Ḥadīth* is yet to be developed. The consequences of this lack of systematicity have been at least partially responsible for the emergence of conflicting views on a variety of issues pertaining to both the realms of Islamic jurisprudence and belief, yet all claim to be firmly rooted in the Qur’an and Sunnah/*Ḥadīth*. The author aims to bring more clarity and introduce more systematicity to the way the nature and the scope of the Sunnah is to be understood.

1) The Nature of the Qur’ano-Sunnahic Hermeneutical Relationship

In order to develop a comprehensive and coherent definition of Sunnah we need to firstly examine the nature of the relationship between the Qur’an

¹¹ B.M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (New York, 1996).

¹² M.M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam-Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts* (Leiden, 1972).

¹³ H. Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz* (Stuttgart, 1991).

¹⁴ Y. Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qur’an, the Muwatta and Madinian ‘Amal* (London, 2002).

¹⁵ Kh. Abou Eld-Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford, 2003).

¹⁶ W. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁷ See footnote 19.

¹⁸ Apart from work by Duderija, cited in next footnote.

and Sunnah. During the early pre-classical period of Islamic jurisprudence the concept of Sunnah was organically linked to that of the Qur'an and was not considered as an independent entity.¹⁹ This coupling of the Qur'an and Sunnah is based on two premises. Firstly, it is based on the principle of the '*Bedeutungsbeduerftigkeit*' of the Qur'an (i.e. its need of/for interpretation) on whose basis its *distinct* ethico-moral (*akhlāq*), law (*fiqh*), and creedal (*aqidah*) teachings are to be deduced and contrasted against the prevalent socio-cultural values, worldview assumptions, and norms governing pre-Quranic Arabia. Secondly, it is based on the need for the practical manifestation of certain Quranic injunctions which are to be carried out in action (*amal*) but were not described in detail in the Qur'an (e.g. how to perform prayer, hajj, ablution etc.). We refer to these as ritual-based (*ibadah*) components of the Quranic worldview. Therefore, the function and scope of the Sunnah would involve a practical embodiment of the Quranic '*aqidah*, *akhlāq*, *fiqh*, and '*amal*' *ibadah*,²⁰ which permeate the Qur'an in the form of the phrase 'Obey Allah and His Messenger.'

The concept of Sunnah, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,²¹ underwent several semantico-contextual changes and was deduced on the basis of variant epistemological and methodological tools until it became more or less completely identified with the *Hadith* toward the end of the second half of the second-century Hijrah. This *Hadith*-based Sunnah was seen as something additional to, a necessary exegetical supplement to, and an explicator of the Qur'an rather than the other side of the same coin. With this event Sunnah's organic link and the symbiotic relationship with the Qur'an was severed. The traditional post-Shafiite function of the Sunnah was based exactly on this reasoning and was expressed in the well-known maxim in

¹⁹ See A. Duderija, '*Neo-Traditional Salafis as True Custodians of Sunnah: A Critical Analysis of the Neo-Traditional Salafi Methodology (Manhaj) of Sunnah and its Underlying Epistemologico-Methodological Assumptions in the Light of Most Recent Scholarship on Muslim Tradition*', unpublished Honours thesis (University of Western Australia, 2004); cf. Graham, *The Divine Word*, op. cit., Chapters One and Two.

²⁰ Practical embodiment of the Qur'an can be divided into actions that pertain to rituals such as prayers, hajj, fasting, etc. which are termed '*ibadah*' or worship, and non-ritual based actions (*mu'āmalāt*) including commerce, marriage, and charitable deeds of various kinds, etc.

²¹ A. Duderija, 'The Evolution in the Concept of Sunnah during the First Four Generations of Muslims in Relation to the Development of the Concept of an Authentic Hadith as Based on Recent Western Scholarship', unpublished article.

Islamic jurisprudence affirming that the Qur'an's interpretational need of the Sunnah (in the form of its sole vehicle, the *Ḥadīth*) is greater than the Sunnah's interpretational need of the Qur'an.²²

The concept of Sunnah, however, is incompletely understood/defined unless we clarify its actual *nature/character*. As we have previously argued, the need for Sunnah as a source in Islamic Law ultimately derives its legitimacy from and is organically linked to the Qur'an itself. In other words the character, aims, and objectives that govern the Sunnah are to be congruent with the nature, aims, and objectives of the Qur'an itself (i.e. *maqāsid al-Sunnah = maqāsid al-Qur'an*). If we accept this as true then the nature and character of the Sunnah will depend upon the way we understand the *character, nature, and objectives* of the *Quranic revelation*.

The Qur'an as a scripture can be said to deal with four distinct but related fields concerning its function as the *hudan lil-nas*, the guidance for humankind, namely: ethico-moral, creedal, legal, and ritual/worship aspects. Using traditional Islamic terminology they would translate into *akhlāq, aqīdah, fiqh*, and *'ibādāt/mu'āmalāt* elements. Therefore, as argued above, the function, nature, and scope of the Sunnah pertain to the embodiment and manifestation of the Quranic *akhlāq, aqīdah, fiqh*, and *'ibādāt/mu'āmalāt*.

This assertion brings us to the crucial question as to how we establish what the nature, character, and objectives of Quranic revelation is/are. The answer to this problem will depend upon the applied methodology of interpretation of the Quranic text, such as the extent of its contextualization (relationship between its content and context); the scope of the use of reason in its interpretation; the recognition (or otherwise) of the assumptions/pre-suppositions governing the understanding of the nature of ethical value in the Qur'an and its socio-cultural embeddedness (i.e. its ethical and socio-cultural pre-suppositions); the extent of corroboration and systematicity of Quranic and non-Quranic evidence in its interpretation; whether or not making of a distinction between its socio-culturally contingent and universal dimensions is present; the nature of the dynamics between morality and law; the tools governing derivation of meaning; and

²² *'al-kitāb [Qur'an] ya'ū bi-'l-jumal yakshifūhā al-Ḥadīth wa-'khtisār tadulla 'alayhī al-sunnah*, Ibn Qutayba, *Tāwil Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, ed. M.Z. al-Najjar (Beirut, 1393/1972), 87.

making a distinction between its ethical and legal injunctions and other considerations.²³

It is precisely on this basis of various approaches/assumptions of the nature, character, and objectives of the Qur'an that not only are different concepts of the nature and the character of Sunnah developed, but that of the Qur'an itself.

The purpose of this article is not to present a new Quranic hermeneutic. Several contemporary Muslim scholars such as F. Rahman,²⁴ H. Hanafi,²⁵ H.N. Abu Zayd,²⁶ A. Wadud,²⁷ A. Barlas,²⁸ F. Esack,²⁹ and A. Saeed,³⁰ to name a few, have already made significant contributions to this field of study. What follows is a discussion on some of the practical implications of a methodology of the Sunnah that, in all of its aspects, is independent of *Ḥadīth* but ultimately depends upon a particular Quranic hermeneutic as illustrated on the basis of several examples.

2) Nature of the Concept and Scope of Sunnah

Based on the above we have argued that four elements of the *scope* of the Sunnah ('*amaliyyah*/'*ibadiyyah*, '*akhlāqīyyah*, '*fiqhīyyah*, and '*aqīdiyyah*) are completely derived from the Qur'an and that the understanding of its nature would depend upon the nature of the Quranic hermeneutics and the assumptions governing that process. Therefore in order to define the nature of the Sunnah more precisely we need to examine the nature of a certain Quranic injunction (in the light of a particular hermeneutic) that pertains to it directly or indirectly. For the sake of brevity we will limit

²³ For an insightful overview of these considerations see S. Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an* (Oxford, 2004).

²⁴ F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: The Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, 1982).

²⁵ H. Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World* (Heliopolis, 2000), ii.

²⁶ H.N. Abu Zayd, *Re-thinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutic* (Utrecht, 2004).

²⁷ A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman-Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (2nd Edn., Oxford, 1999).

²⁸ See footnote 35.

²⁹ F. Esack, 'What Men Own to Women? Islam and Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia', <<http://uk.geocities.com/faridesack/fewhatdomenowe.html>> accessed 18 June 2007.

³⁰ A. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London, 2006).

ourselves to one example of the Sunnah ('*amaliyyah*/'*ibadiyyah*,³¹ *fiqhiyyah*, *akhlāqiyah*, and '*aqādiyyah*).

i) *Sunnah 'amaliyyah/'ibadiyyah: Female Prayer Leader of a Mixed Congregation*

Lets us consider the question of the recently much debated question of the 'sunnacity' of the female prayer leader of a mixed congregation. Proponents of this initiative have argued that not only is there nothing in the Qur'an nor the Sunnah (without basing this view on a particular hermeneutic) that disapproves of this action but that there is additional written evidence in a form of a *ḥadīth* (that a certain woman was commanded by the Prophet to lead her congregation in prayer) which can be used as a positive legal precedent for female prayer leaders.³²

Those who considered this practice as contravening the principle of Sunnah (as they conceptualize it) argued that it goes against the concept of *ijma'*³³ whilst some were of the opinion that, since the practice is not based on a *mutawātir ḥadīth*, it cannot come under the aegis of Sunnah '*amaliyyah*, and therefore is not part of the Sunnah.

An alternative methodology which the author proposes would be based on the Quranic hermeneutic which distinguishes between universal, gender egalitarian Quranic verses (along with the overall Qur'ano-Sunnahic aims) and socio-culturally contingent/embedded Quranic verses which are

³¹ Although Sunnah '*amaliyyah* is to a large extent 'independent' of the Quranic/text (e.g. Quranic exhortation to prayer and its injunctions pertaining to *wuḍū'*, also pilgrimage rituals) as it consists of pure actions (rather than beliefs and morals) and it can be perpetuated independently of the existence of written (or for that matter oral) records, it is not influenced by Quranic hermeneutic as much. However, the nature of Sunnah '*amaliyyah* can be influenced by its other constituents or upon consideration of other Quranic evidence. The constitutive elements of Sunnah can also embody a mixture of two or three elements (e.g. how to behave when praying); as such we shall consider Sunnah '*amaliyyah* too.

³² <http://www.muslimwakeup.com/main/archives/2005/03/women_imamat.php> accessed 15 May 2006.

³³ We shall not address the legitimacy and the position of *ijma'* as a source of Islamic Law here because of the fact that there is no consensus on the bindingness of the *ijma'* as a conclusive and self-sufficient indicator, just as there isn't any consensus on the nature of *ijma'* itself; e.g. is it qualitative/quantitative, temporal/generational, or universal, etc? For more on the institution of *ijma'* see, among many, W. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge, 1997); A. Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 1984).

patriarchal and non-egalitarian in nature by contextualizing revelation and giving precedence to moral injunction over the de-contextualized, literal interpretation of evidence/or lack of it.³⁴ In this case universal principles of equality and justice (which are identified as the most powerful methodological interpretive tools ultimately rooted in the Quranic concept of Tawhid)³⁵ would *outweigh* and *supersede* all other evidence,³⁶ and thus, as such, bring the practice of female prayer leaders under the Sunnahic purview.

ii) *Sunnah akhlāqiyyah: Unilateral Divorce by Repudiation (talāq)*

Talāq, the institution of unilateral divorce by repudiation initiated by males only, is traditionally considered both a practice that is in accordance with the Quranic³⁷ and Sunnahic teachings³⁸ subsequently elaborated upon by exclusively male *fuqahā'* in the second, third, and fourth centuries after Hijrah.

This institution originated, was firmly established, and prevailed in the socio-cultural and economic fabric of seventh-century pre-Islamic Mecca and was, like slavery or the 'distribution' of women and children as spoils of war, considered culturally and morally acceptable. It was somewhat modified but not abolished by the Qur'an, improving the situation of the wife to some extent. It was further fine-tuned by the Prophet's insistence on the gentle and kind treatment of women and his consideration of

³⁴ See A. Duderija, *Approaching Qur'an and Sunnah: Pre-classical, Classical and Progressive Methodologies* (n.d.) at <<http://www.understanding-islam.com/related/text.asp?Type=rarticle&raid=296>>

³⁵ For more on this see A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, 2002).

³⁶ In the case of the female prayer leader, the actual absence of any direct evidence or a precedent.

³⁷ There are, in fact, no clear Qur'anic injunctions to suggest that this is the case. The Qur'an, however, assumes and tries to mitigate its existence (just as in case of slavery). See Kh. EL-Fald, 'The Pearls of Beauty', in his *The Conference of the Books: The Search for Beauty in Islam* (Lanham, 2001), 265-79.

³⁸ Although there is sufficient evidence to argue that the Prophet himself was repudiated on several occasions by women, see F. Mernissi, *The Veil and the Female Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991) and also her *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London, 1986).

divorce as ‘the most hated permissible thing to Allah’, as the well-known tradition in a form of a *ḥadīth* puts it.³⁹

Should we still consider this institution as being part of the Qur’an and Sunnah *akhlāqīyyah*? Well, if our Quranic hermeneutic takes into account the above briefly sketched context behind this institution in the light of the mitigating effects of the Quranic injunctions and the Prophet’s example, a moral trajectory can be extrapolated—a trajectory toward its complete abolition on the basis of the principals of its moral repugnance and contradiction with the broader Qur’ano-Sunnahic principles of justice and equality.

iii) *Sunnah-fiqhiyyah: Stoning to Death for Adultery*

The view that the Sunnah prescribes and in actual fact overrides and/or particularizes or expands upon the Quranic injunction of lashing-stoning to death for adultery is based purely on non-*mutawātir* *Ḥadīth* evidence (which is in itself highly problematic and inconclusive)⁴⁰ as well as a particular understanding of the Qur’ano-*Ḥadīth* dynamics.⁴¹

As with all other *ḥudūd* ordinances found in the Qur’an that echo or more frequently restrict/mitigate pre-Islamic practices (e.g. cutting off hands, putting bodies on the cross, long multigenerational blood feuds, etc.) it can be argued that these customs were part and parcel of the culturally acceptable norms of punishment⁴² but that they could no longer be justified on the basis of a Quranic hermeneutic which considers the universal values of the Quranic concept of *karāmah* (human dignity), justice and equality,⁴³ as taking precedence over culturally embedded *ḥudūd*

³⁹ This assertion of the Prophet’s treatment of women is based upon corroboration of all the *ḥadīth/sīrah* evidence and not on isolated reports.

⁴⁰ See for example J. Burton, ‘The Origin of the Islamic Penalty for Adulter’, *Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 26 (1979), 16-27.

⁴¹ Which in simple terms says that if additional evidence is to be found in the *Ḥadīth* literature on a particular issue/question that is not evident in the Qur’an, this evidence is legally binding and can *supplement* and in this case override or particularize a clear Quranic injunction.

⁴² Punishments in other cultures/religions at the same time were just as brutal, e.g. punishments in the Bible as part of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

⁴³ *Ḥudūd* ordinances are discriminatory on the grounds of gender and class; e.g. when being stoned to death, the male body is covered up to the waist but the female body up to the shoulders, slaves get half the punishments of free persons, etc.

ordinances. The claim that they act as a deterrent and in many cases are extremely difficult to prove⁴⁴ cannot be used as counter-arguments since their usage would contravene earlier identified universal ethical Quranic principals.

iv) *Sunnah 'aqīdiyyah: Belief in the Dajjal/Anti-Christ, Mahdi, and the Second Coming of Christ*

The belief in *Dajjal*, Mahdi, and the Second Coming of Christ rests solely on *Ḥadīth* evidence that is *not* based on *mutawātir* transmission of knowledge but on *'ahad* or isolated reports and therefore cannot be accepted as part of Islamic belief (i.e. as an additional article of faith—part of *'aqīdah*).⁴⁵ Indeed, the rationally-oriented streams present from the very beginnings of the development of Islamic thought argued that the articles of faith are to be based solely on direct and clear Quranic evidence and to be restricted to the belief in Allah, his angels, his 'books', and his Prophets.⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, for something to be considered as part of the Sunnah, in its pre-Shafiite sense, it must either be deduced from the Qur'an or in the case of the Sunnah *'amaliyyah/ibadiyyah*, must have reached us via a *mutawātir* chain of transmission as did the Qur'an. The belief in *Dajjal*, Mahdi, Anti-Christ, and others⁴⁷ thus cannot be considered as part of Sunnah *'aqīdiyyah*.

In all of the instances cited above, it can be deduced that the nature of the Sunnah is directly related to the way we approach Quranic interpretation, the tools and assumptions which govern it, and whether or not we make a clear conceptual distinction between Sunnah and *Ḥadīth* epistemologies.

⁴⁴ For example, in the case of adultery where four witnesses need to be the witnesses of the act taking place right in front of them. In this case too, however, discrimination is present since the female might fall pregnant and thus show obvious signs of adultery; therefore the punishment becomes incumbent upon her, but not the male.

⁴⁵ See Zysow, *Economy of Uncertainty*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ The *Mu'tazilah and the People of Kalam*. See W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford, 2002).

⁴⁷ Such as the belief in the punishment in the grave. For a debate on the epistemological and dogmatic validity of these and related issues see Watt, *Formative*, op. cit., Chapters 5-10.

3) The Sunnah-Hadith Dynamics

The examples above, on various elements of the scope of the Sunnah and its nature, bring us to the question of the place of *Ḥadīth* in Islamic thought. Numerous generations of Muslims have in the past advocated various views as to what the proper value of *Ḥadīth* in the overall Qur'ano-Sunnahic hermeneutic should be, ranging from their complete rejection to the complete, literal, and blind following of *Ḥadīth* as the only vehicle of the transmission of Sunnah. The latter view of complete identification of *Ḥadīth* with the concept of the nature, character, and scope of Sunnah completely divorced from the Quranic revelation or based on a very literal, de-contextualized, and fragmentary approach to Quranic hermeneutics has gained ground among so called adherers of the *Salafi* or Wahhabi school of thought (which methodologically comes closest to the Hanbalite/*Ahl-Ḥadīth* school of thought). It should also be pointed out that although the traditional schools of thought such as *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, and Shafiite have developed a more systematic methodology of interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, their own models need a serious revision in the light of a new hermeneutic (for example their definition of Sunnah is nearly completely identical to that of the *muhaddithūn/ahl-Ḥadīth*).⁴⁸

So, briefly, what is a proper place/understanding of *Ḥadīth* vis à vis the concept of Sunnah? It must be emphasized that a vast majority of *Ḥadīth*, especially those pertaining to law, unlike *'amal* and/or the Qur'an's contingent definition of Sunnah, do not have an epistemological *mutawātir* value and therefore cannot take precedence over the Sunnah, which is methodologically and epistemologically dependent on *mutawātir* written evidence.⁴⁹

In conclusion, both Sunnah and *Ḥadīth* were definitionally quite ambivalent and fluid concepts during the pre-classical era of Islamic thought and therefore underwent several semantico-contextual changes before being considered largely identical. The recognition of practice-based Sunnah that is independent of *Ḥadīth* by several scholars still did not systematically resolve the issue of the nature, scope, and definition of Sunnah. This article argued for a new methodology of understanding the concept of Sunnah that is directly related to the question of the nature and objectives of

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this issue see the work cited in footnote 21.

⁴⁹ W. Hallaq, 'The Authenticity of Prophetic Hadith: A Pseudo Problem?', *Studia Islamica*, 89 (1999), 75-90.

the Quranic revelation itself. It suggested that the scope of the Sunnah, like that of the Qur'an, comprises of its '*amaliyyah*' *ibadiyyah*, *fiqhiyyah*, *akhlāqiyyah*, and '*ibadiyyah* elements and that the Sunnah compliance or otherwise of a particular belief or action is ultimately traced back to the principles governing Quranic methodology of interpretation. We have also seen that Quranic as well as non-Quranic evidence based on or supplemented by the *Hadīth* evidence, if in contradiction with previously identified universal principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah, cannot be considered part of the Sunnah. Therefore, if divorced from a broader Qur'ano-Sunnahic hermeneutic, *Hadīth* evidence should never be considered as a self-sufficient indicator to qualify as part of the Sunnah. Its use or otherwise in Islamic law, legal theory, and theology ought to always be considered in relation to the broader questions governing the nature of Qur'ano-Sunnahic hermeneutics.