



## Introduction

The Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ – his noble ḥadīth, his sayings, doings, and affirmations – enjoyed the good fortune from the very beginning of complete meticulous care and being acted upon by the noble Companions and the outstanding Followers, so that it was completely safeguarded and transmitted in minute detail in realisation of the saying of Allah, exalted is He:

It is We Who have sent down the Reminder

and We Who will preserve it.

(Sūrat al-Ḥijr: 9)

A part of the preservation of the Reminder and the Noble Book is its preservation – the Sunnah’s – because it explains it [the Book] and makes its judgements and its aims specific. He said ﷺ:

And We have sent down the Reminder to you

so that you can make clear to mankind

what has been sent down to them

(Sūrat an-Nahl: 44)

The situation of Madīnah in the Sunnah

Every city which Islam opened up and in which the Muslims became settled had its portion of knowledge which differed from each other sometimes a little but sometimes a great deal according to the number of the Companions who came to it and resided there. The portion of Abode of the Prophetic Emigration – Madīnah al-Munawwarah – was the fullest portion because of the abundance of Companions there, since it, and Makkah al-Mukarramah after its opening to Islam, were the first Dār al-Islām and the place for which the Muslims’ hearts longed.

The Sunnah lived in it, there it overflowed and spread in all the lands of Islam and it was inherited by people, generation from generation, tribe from tribe. The number of fuqahā<sup>3</sup> and ḥadīth scholars multiplied extensively, for it has been transmitted that Mālik said, “I showed this book of mine to seventy of the fuqahā<sup>3</sup> of Madīnah.” When Mālik was growing up the Sunnah had taken the path towards being recorded and registered.

Madīnah’s precedence in the recording of the Sunnah

The Sunnah was recorded in Madīnah al-Munawwarah before all of the other great capital cities. Imām Muḥammad ibn Shihāb az-Zuhrī (died 124 AH) the Madīnan and shaykh of Mālik composed in it, Mūsā ibn ‘Uqbah (died 114 AH) the Madīnan and another shaykh of Mālik, Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Muṭṭalibī (died 151 AH) the Madīnan, and Ibn Abī Dhi’b Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān (died 198 AH) the Madīnan.

During the lives of these men and after them other imāms of the ḥadīth and the Sunnah composed works in Makkah al-Mukarramah, Kūfa, Baṣra, and Khurāsān, but the first place in recording the Sunnah belongs to the notable people of knowledge of Madīnah al-Munawwarah

Imām Mālik’s composition of the *Muwaṭṭa’*<sup>3</sup>

Imām Mālik's composition of the *Muwatta'*<sup>2</sup> comes among the number of books which record the Sunnah in Madīnah and elsewhere (the Ten Books) in terms of recording and is the first in terms of compiling it according to fiqh categories.

The people of knowledge mention that Imām Mālik's composition of the *Muwatta'* was only because of the suggestion of the Abbasid khalīfah Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr made during one of his Ḥajj journeys. Al-Manṣūr invited him to visit him and Abū Ja'far honoured him and made him sit beside him asking him many questions. His manner, knowledge, intellect, the penetration of his thinking and the soundness of his answers pleased him and he recognised his station in knowledge, in the dīn and as an imām of the Muslims.

The noted scholar and historian Qāḍī Imām Ibn Khaldūn said in his *Muqaddimah*:

Abū Ja'far had a rank in knowledge and in the dīn before the khilāfah and after it. It was he who said to Mālik while indicating to him to compose the *Muwatta'*, "Abū 'Abdullāh, no one remains on the face of the earth more knowledgeable than me or you, but the khilāfah has occupied me. You must compose a book for people by which they will benefit. In it you should avoid the concessions (*rukḥṣah*) that Ibn 'Abbās grants, the severities of Ibn 'Umar, and the unusual and singular positions (*shādhah*) that Ibn Mas'ūd takes. Arrange it and make it accessible (*watī'*)<sup>1</sup> for people." Mālik said, "By Allah! He taught me composition on that day."

Imām Mālik composed the *Muwatta'* according to the method which Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr had indicated. He compiled the choicest of the ḥadīth and the traditions narrated among the People of Madīnah, and he gathered the practice (*'amal*) which was transmitted by large numbers of one generation to large numbers of the next generation (*tawātur*), avoiding the concessions granted by Ibn 'Abbās, the severities of Ibn 'Umar and the singular and unusual positions adopted by Ibn Mas'ūd, confining himself in narrating only from the shaykhs of the People of Madīnah except for six people: Abū 'Zubayr from Makkah, Ibrāhīm ibn Abī 'Ablah from Shām, 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Mālik from al-Jazīrah (north-west 'Irāq), 'Aṭā' ibn 'Abdullāh from Khurāsān, Ḥumayd aṭ-Ṭawīl and Ayyūb as-Sakhtiyānī from Baṣra. He completed the work in the khilāfah of al-Mahdī.

Thus was completed the composition of this book the *Muwatta'* in which Imām Mālik collected the ḥadīth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the verdicts of the Companions and the Followers, and the view which he considered the consensus of the People of Madīnah which he did not leave. So he collected together the ḥadīth in the widest sense and whatever is connected to them of the traditions of the first generation because they are the major reference for practical rulings.

The number of ḥadīth and traditions narrated in the *Muwatta'*

Al-Abhurī Abū Bakr said, "The sum total of what is in the *Muwatta'* of traditions from the Prophet ﷺ, and from the Companions and the Followers is one thousand, seven hundred and twenty ḥadīth, of which those with a chain of transmission are six hundred, the mursal ḥadīth [ascribed directly to the Prophet ﷺ without mentioning the Companion or Companions from whom it was heard] two hundred and twenty-two, and the mawqūf [statements made without ascribing them to the Prophet ﷺ] six hundred and thirteen. Of the verdicts of the Followers there are two hundred and eighty-

<sup>1</sup> His command *watī'* comprises the senses of facilitating, making something easy, accessible and smoothing a path, and it is from this that one meaning of the name *Muwatta'* derives: The Smoothed and Levelled Path Made Easy for People.

five.”

The particular merits of the *Muwattaʿ*<sup>2</sup>

The *Muwattaʿ*<sup>2</sup> has very many particular merits by which it is distinguished from the other books of ḥadīth which I shall mention here briefly:

First, that it is the composition of an imām who was a faqīh and a scholar of ḥadīth, a major mujtahid (person who could exert his intellect to arrive at a judgement) whose judgement is followed, about whose imāmate in fiqh and in ḥadīth the imāms of his own age and subsequent ages testified without there being any dispute.

Second, the Imām of the Imāms, faqīh, ḥadīth scholar and mujtahid Imām ash-Shāfiʿī bore witness to the *Muwattaʿ*<sup>2</sup>, and he is sufficient for you. He said:

There is not on the surface of the earth a book which is more ṣaḥīḥ after the Book of Allah than the book of Mālik

Third, that it is one of the compositions from the middle of the second century of the hijrah, so that it precedes everything and is preceded by nothing else since it is the first book in its category, and whatever precedes has superiority. He was the Imām who laid the path for composition of works on ḥadīth according to the categories of fiqh and all the trustworthy ones after him modelled themselves on him such as ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Mubārak, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī, an-Nasāʿī, Ibn Mājah and others

A brief biographical notice on Imām Mālik the author of the *Muwattaʿ*<sup>2</sup>

He was Mālik ibn Anas ibn Mālik al-Aṣbaḥī al-Ḥimyārī the Madīnan, Abū ʿAbdullāh, the Imām of the Abode of the Hijrah, one of the four Imāms. He was born and died in Madīnah. He was firm in his dīn, remote from the rulers and kings. He was denounced to Jaʿfar the uncle of al-Manṣūr al-ʿAbbāsī who had him flogged which dislocated his shoulder. Ar-Rashīd sent for him to come to him and narrate ḥadīth to him and he said, “Amīr al-Muʾminīn, knowledge is come to, it does not come. It is visited, it does not visit.” So ar-Rashīd went to his house and leaned against the wall.<sup>2</sup> Mālik said, “Amīr al-Muʾminīn, a part of honouring the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is honouring knowledge,” and so he went and sat before him.

His prestige covered the horizons, so that the people of the cities and the provinces narrated ḥadīth in his name, and his fatwās were widely published and called to mind in Egypt, Shām and all the lands of the west. In Andalus he was the Imām along with whom no other imām was mentioned. He had authority in Madīnah which reached to the degree of the authorities who governed it.

Allah chose Mālik with a quality which clung to him, i.e. awe. The rulers were in awe of him, and they would feel humbled in his presence. The awe they had of him reached a limit such as kings and amirs did not attain, so he was held in awe even though he had no authority.

Mālik lived highly esteemed in himself, and honoured by people until he died in 179 AH.

The *Muwattaʿ*<sup>2</sup> of Imām Muḥammad

<sup>2</sup> In some accounts, ar-Rashīd sat down on a small raised seat on which Imām Mālik ordinarily sat in order to teach.