



**Open Access**

**Al-Irfan** (Research Journal of Islamic Studies)

**Published by:** Faculty of Islamic Studies & Shariah  
Minhaj University Lahore

**ISSN:** 2518-9794 (Print), 2788-4066 (Online)

**Volume 10, Issue 19, January-June 2025,**

**Email:** [alirfan@mul.edu.pk](mailto:alirfan@mul.edu.pk)

الحرفاء

## **The Intellectual Legacy of Sharh al-Sunnah: Imam al-Baghawi's Systematic Defense of the Signs of Prophethood**

**Sidra Parveen**

Character Building Unit Manager, Chaudhry Abdul Khaliq Center for Contemporary Islamic Sciences (CAKCCIS), Superior University, Lahore

[Sidra.parveen@superior.edu.pk](mailto:Sidra.parveen@superior.edu.pk)

**Hafiz. Falak Sher Jan**

Lecturer, Chaudhry Abdul Khaliq Center for Contemporary Islamic Sciences (CAKCCIS)

### **ABSTRACT**

Imam Al-Baghawi's Sharh al-Sunnah is a foundational text in Hadith studies and Islamic jurisprudence encompassing theological discourse legal principles and an extensive discussion on the signs of Prophethood (علامات نبوت). This study critically examines the historical significance of the text its methodological framework and Imam Al-Baghawi's contributions to the preservation and interpretation of the Sunnah. As a distinguished scholar of the Shafi'i school Al-Baghawi adhered to a rigorous and balanced approach in Hadith compilation, classification and legal analysis. A central aspect of Sharh al-Sunnah is its detailed exposition on the signs of Prophethood documenting various miraculous occurrences in the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) including the splitting of the moon, water emerging from his fingers and inanimate objects acknowledging his Prophethood. These narrations serve as theological affirmations of his divine mission. The study further explores Sharh al-Sunnah's reliance on authentic sources systematic organization and scholarly commentary underscoring its enduring relevance in Hadith scholarship and Islamic law. Given the advancements in manuscript studies, digital tools and Hadith authentication methodologies a contemporary critical analysis of this work is warranted. The findings emphasize Sharh al-Sunnah's continued significance as an essential reference in classical and modern Islamic scholarship.

### **Keywords:**

Sharh al-Sunnah, Imam Al-Baghawi, Hadith methodology, Islamic jurisprudence, Prophetic signs, classical Islamic scholarship.

## Research Questions

1. How does *Sharh al-Sunnah* contribute to the preservation and interpretation of Hadith, particularly within the frameworks of Islamic jurisprudence and theology?
2. What methodologies does Imam al-Baghawi adopt in *Sharh al-Sunnah* to authenticate Hadith and affirm the signs of Prophethood?

## Research Objectives

1. To critically analyze the historical significance, methodology, and scholarly contributions of Imam al-Baghawi in the classification of Hadith and legal analysis as reflected in *Sharh al-Sunnah*.
2. To examine the discourse on the signs of Prophethood within *Sharh al-Sunnah* and evaluate its role in reinforcing theological doctrine in Islamic intellectual heritage.

## Biographical Profile: Name, Origin, and Education

Imām al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH/1122 CE), formally known as *al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Shaykh al-Islām Muḥyī al-Sunnah Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī*, was a distinguished authority in ḥadīth, Islamic jurisprudence, and theology. His scholarly legacy remains central to Sunni Islamic tradition, especially within the Shāfiʿī school, to which he belonged. Revered for his moderation, precision, and encyclopedic knowledge, he is most noted for his works in tafsīr, ḥadīth, and fiqh, and is rightly remembered by later scholars as *Muḥyī al-Sunnah*—"The Reviver of the Sunnah." (1)

Al-Baghawī was born in the region of Baghshūr, though the use of the nisbah *al-Baghawī* is said by some to derive from a smaller town known simply as *Bagh*, located between *Herāt* and *Marw al-Rūdh* in Khurāsān. This region produced numerous prominent Islamic scholars, including Abū al-Aḥwaṣ Muḥammad ibn Ḥayyān al-Baghawī, Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn Manīʿ al-Baghdādī, Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Baghawī, and Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Baghawī.(2)

Though many biographical dictionaries reference him, details about his birth year vary. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī states he was born in 433 AH (1041 CE), while his death is widely reported to have occurred in 516 AH (1122 CE). Ibn Khallikān diverges slightly, listing 510 AH (1116 CE) as the year of death. Based on internal and comparative

(1) Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. (1998). *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah

(2) Al-Samʿānī, ʿAbd al-Karīm. (1988). *Al-Ansāb* (ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUmarī, Ed.). Beirut: Dār al-Jinān.

evidence, it is generally accepted that al-Baghawī lived for over 80 years, likely placing his birth in the first quarter of the fifth Islamic century. (1)

Imām al-Baghawī was raised and educated in a robust intellectual environment marked by deep devotion to the Shāfi‘ī madhhab. His formative training under Shāfi‘ī authorities is reflected in his major juristic work *al-Tahdhīb*, a compendium that remains one of the most authoritative sources within the school. He was known for adopting the methodological approaches of *tarjīh* (preferential legal reasoning), *taṣhīh* (validation of rulings), and *ikhtiyār* (juristic discretion). Despite his rootedness in the Shāfi‘ī school, he demonstrated intellectual openness by examining the opinions of scholars from other schools and prioritizing scripturally grounded reasoning over blind adherence to any single position. (2)

His quest for knowledge led him to *Marw al-Rūdh*, where he studied extensively under the celebrated jurist *al-Qāḍī Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Marwazī*. Imām al-Baghawī excelled in this apprenticeship, becoming the most reliable transmitter of his teacher’s knowledge. Following his advanced studies, he traveled widely throughout Khurāsān, acquiring aḥādīth through direct transmission (*samā’*) from numerous renowned scholars. He carefully evaluated each report’s chain of narration, developed a mastery in isnād criticism, and synthesized legal opinions with academic rigor. (3)

Eventually settling back in *Marw al-Rūdh*, he began to write prolifically and mentor students. His works in tafsīr, such as *Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl*, and in hadīth, such as *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, are widely respected to this day. His exceptional academic contributions earned him the titles *Shaykh al-Islām* and *Muḥyī al-Sunnah* from later generations. He passed away in 516 AH (1122 CE) and was buried beside his teacher *al-Qāḍī Ḥusayn* in the *maqbarah Ṭālqānī*, at approximately 80 years of age. (4)

## Teachers and Influences (Asātidhah)

Imām al-Baghawī studied under a large number of eminent scholars and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) of his era, establishing a solid scholarly foundation that spanned the disciplines of Hadīth, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and theology (*kalām*). The following are among the most prominent of his teachers, whose influence shaped his intellectual trajectory and refined his legal and exegetical methodology:

1. **Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Marwazī** (d. 462 AH/1070 CE): Known as *Faqīh Khurāsān*, he was one of the senior Shāfi‘ī authorities of his

(1) Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. (1968). *Wafayāt al-A’yān* (Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Ed.). Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.

(2) Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. (1964). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 36–39; 153–154). Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ḥalabī.

(3) Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. (1957). *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.

(4) Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl. (1998). *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr.

- time and a specialist in *tarjīh* (legal preference). Imam al-Baghawī was among his foremost students and inherited his juristic methodology. (1)
2. **Abū ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Malīḥī al-Harawī** (d. 463 AH/1071 CE): Referred to as *Musnid Marw*, he was a leading transmitter of hadith in Khurāsān. Imam al-Baghawī narrated many traditions from him, preserving his transmissions with exceptional accuracy.(2)
  3. **Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf al-Juwaynī** (d. 463 AH/1071 CE): Also known as *Shaykh al-Ḥijāz*, he was the father of the famous Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. He held a significant position in hadith and legal studies, and Imam al-Baghawī benefited from his deep theological insights. (3)
  4. **Abū Bakr Ya‘qūb ibn Aḥmad al-Ṣayrafi al-Naysābūrī** (d. 466 AH/1074 CE): A well-known transmitter and scholar of *musnads*, Imam al-Baghawī received several narrations from him with an emphasis on reliability and authenticity. (4)
  5. **Abū ‘Alī Ḥassān ibn Sa‘īd al-Manī‘ī al-Marwazī** (d. 463 AH/1071 CE): Known as *al-Ra’īs al-Kabīr*, he was a scholar of great repute whose expertise in isnād validation had a marked impact on Imam al-Baghawī’s hadith methodology.(5)
  6. **Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṭalḥah al-Naysābūrī al-Qushayrī** (d. 465 AH/1073 CE): A master of both jurisprudence and spirituality, he was considered an authority in zuhd and *‘ilm al-naḥs*. Imam al-Baghawī transmitted hadith and ethical insights from him. (6)
  7. **Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī**: Associated with *Shīrāz*, a village in Khurāsān, he was one of the lesser-known but reliable scholars from whom Imam al-Baghawī transmitted knowledge.
  8. **Abū Sa‘d Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-‘Abbās al-Khaṭīb al-Ḥumaydī**: A notable narrator and preacher, he contributed to Imam al-Baghawī’s refinement in hadith style and homiletic tradition.
  9. **Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Aḥmad al-Jawzjānī**: From *Jawzjān*, near *Balkh*, he transmitted both hadith and legal doctrines with clarity and precision.

---

(1) Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. (1998). *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz* (Vol. 4, pp. 1420–1421). Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.

(2) Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. (1964). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 36–39; 153–154). Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ḥalabī

(3) Ibn al-Imād al-Ḥanbalī. (1997). *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab* (Vol. 4, p. 213). Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr.

(4) Al-Sam‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm. (1988). *Al-Ansāb* (‘Abd Allāh al-‘Umarī, Ed.). Beirut: Dār al-Jinān

(5) Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. (1957). *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.

(6) Al-Qushayrī, ‘Abd al-Karīm. (2000). *Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif

10. **Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Muẓaffar al-Dāwūdī al-Būshanjī**: Recognized as a leading figure in Khurāsān, he was celebrated for his piety, scholarship, and mastery in transmitting reliable narrations.

These teachers, along with numerous others mentioned throughout *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, constituted the scholarly chain (*sanad*) that grounded Imam al-Baghawī’s authority in the Islamic sciences. His exposure to such a diverse array of scholars allowed him to inherit a tradition of methodological rigor, balance, and authenticity that characterized his later works.

### Students and Transmission Legacy (Talamīdhah)

Imām al-Baghawī’s intellectual influence extended widely through his teaching and mentoring of scholars across Khurāsān. His reputation for precision in *ḥadīth*, deep juristic insight, and theological moderation attracted students from across the Islamic world. The following are among his most prominent disciples:

1. **Shaykh al-‘Allāmah Majd al-Dīn Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad ibn As‘ad ibn Muḥammad Ḥafadah al-‘Atṭārī al-Shāfi‘ī al-Uṣūlī al-Wā‘iz** (d. 571 AH/1175 CE): He was a close student who transmitted the complete *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* directly from Imām al-Baghawī. His transmission became the primary source for subsequent generations. The significance of his scholarly legacy is evident in the multiple documented *samā‘āt* (audition records) of this work by later scholars. (1)
2. **Abū al-Futūḥ Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Ṭā‘ī al-Hamadhānī al-Muḥaddith al-Wā‘iz** (d. 555 AH/1160 CE): He compiled the renowned work *al-Arba‘īn fī Irshād al-Sā‘irīn ilā Manāzil al-Muttaqīn*, in which he selected forty traditions heard from forty different shaykhs, each of whom narrated from a companion of the Prophet PBUH. Many of these reports were transmitted through his chain to Imām al-Baghawī. (2)
3. **Abū al-Makārim Faḍl Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Nawqānī**: The nisbah *al-Nawqānī* refers to a town near Ṭūs. He was among the last known transmitters of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* and received *ijāzah* (authorization) directly from Imām al-Baghawī. He remained alive until approximately 600 AH and later granted transmission rights to Fakhr ‘Alī ibn al-Bukhārī, the teacher of the renowned historian Imām al-Dhahabī. Through this chain, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* was transmitted widely in the scholarly circles of Marw and beyond. (3)

(1) Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. (2001). *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* (Vol. 20, pp. 421–427). Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah.

(2) Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. (1993). *Al-Mu‘jam al-Mufahras li-Aḥādīth al-Taṣānīf*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah.

(3) Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. (1964). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā* (Vols. 4–5, pp.153–154). Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ḥalabī.

In addition to these three major figures, numerous students of Imām al-Baghawī spread his teachings and writings across Khurāsān, ensuring the preservation and dissemination of his scholarly tradition. His students maintained his principles of textual rigor, balanced jurisprudence, and theological clarity, traits that distinguished *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* as a canonical reference in Sunni Hadith literature.

The prominence of his pupils in both hadith narration and legal theory reflects not only Imām al-Baghawī's scholarly stature but also the vibrancy of his teaching circles. His legacy lives on not merely through his writings, but also through these intellectual heirs who ensured that his insights were carried into future generations of Islamic scholarship.

## Personal Traits and Scholarly Recognition

Imām al-Baghawī is widely celebrated in the Islamic scholarly tradition for his piety, moderation, scholarly precision, and deep commitment to the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Biographical dictionaries and classical references unanimously affirm his status as a preeminent authority in *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and *'aqīdah*. He is often referred to with honorifics such as *Imām*, *Ḥāfiẓ*, *Shaykh al-Islām*, and *Muḥyī al-Sunnah*, reflecting his immense stature and contribution to Islamic thought.

## Statements by Classical Scholars

### 1. Imām al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH/1348 CE) writes of him:

“He was a great Imām, a scholar, a leader (*qā'id*), a ḥāfiẓ, Shaykh al-Islām, reviver of the Sunnah (*Muḥyī al-Sunnah*), and a master of authorship.” (1)

Al-Dhahabī further highlights his asceticism (*zuhd*), devotion, and consistency in teaching, noting that he would never teach without performing ablution (*wuḍū'*). His dress was modest, and he wore a small turban, embodying simplicity and spiritual discipline.

### 2. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771 AH/1370 CE) remarks:

“He bore the titles *Muḥyī al-Sunnah* and *Rukn al-Dīn*. I read in one of the texts that he was granted this title after he authored *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, following which he saw the Prophet PBUH in a dream, who said: ‘You have revived my Sunnah.’ From that day forward, he was known as *Muḥyī al-Sunnah*.” (2)

---

(1) Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. (2001). *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (Vol. 20, pp. 421–427). Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah.

(2) Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. (1964). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 36–38). Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ḥalabī.

Al-Subkī's father, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, esteemed al-Baghawī highly and cited him extensively, particularly in his *Takmilah Sharḥ al-Muhaddhab*, praising his concise yet authoritative discourse in legal matters.

**3. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH/1373 CE)** described him as:

“A master of the religious sciences, the most learned scholar of his time, a devout and pious man, abstinent from worldly pleasures, and sincere in his worship.”(1)

**4. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH/1505 CE)** wrote:

“He was an Imām in tafsīr, ḥadīth, and fiqh. His books remain among the most respected sources in each of these fields.” (2)

**5. Ibn Ṭughrī Birdī (d. 874 AH/1469 CE)** described him as:

“An Imām, ‘allāmah, faqīh, muḥaddith, and mufasssīr — he combined all virtues of the ‘ulamā’.”(3)

**6. Ibn Khallikān (d. 681 AH/1282 CE)** referred to him as:

“An ocean of knowledge. He interpreted the Word of God, clarified the difficult sayings of the Prophet and transmitted and taught Hadith with excellence. He was known for not accepting inheritance after his wife's death and lived with extreme simplicity.” 4

## Lifestyle and Character

Imām al-Baghawī lived a life of asceticism and moral integrity. He was known to consume coarse bread and only added oil when his body became weak. His humility was such that he refrained from claiming ownership of his deceased wife's inheritance. These traits, as reported by his students and biographers, reflect a deep inward sincerity that matched his external scholarship.

His avoidance of sectarian bias, careful consideration of opposing views, and insistence on scriptural integrity made him a paragon of academic objectivity. Even while adhering to the *Shāfi'ī* madhhab, he freely evaluated positions from other schools, consistently adopting the view most closely aligned with the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and rational deduction.

(1) Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl. (1998). *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Vol. 12, p. 163). Cairo: Dār al-Fikr.

(2) Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. (1999). *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (p. 356). Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(3) Ibn Ṭughrī Birdī. (1929). *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa al-Qāhirah*. Cairo: al-Mu'assasah al-Miṣriyyah.

(4) Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. (1968). *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān* (Vol. 2, pp. 132–133). Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.

## Theological Creed and Madhhab Affiliation

Imām al-Baghawī (rahimahū Allāh) is universally recognized as a leading representative of **Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah**, embodying the orthodox Sunni theological and juristic tradition. His writings reflect a consistent adherence to the core beliefs and legal framework established by the earliest generations (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), while maintaining clarity, moderation, and intellectual rigor.

## Theological Orientation

Al-Baghawī’s creed aligns closely with the theological mainstream of Sunni Islam as articulated by Imām al-Ash‘arī (d. 324 AH) and Imām al-Māturīdī (d. 333 AH), though he generally presents his views without explicitly affiliating with either theological label. His approach in *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* is to present the theological positions of the *salaf* in a systematic, yet accessible, manner—avoiding speculative theology (*kalām*) where possible and emphasizing textual evidence from the Qur’ān and authentic Sunnah.

His *‘aqīdah* reflects key Sunni affirmations:

- Affirmation of Allāh’s attributes (*ṣifāt*) without *ta’ṭīl* (negation), *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism), or *ta’wīl* (figurative reinterpretation), in line with the principle of *bilā kayf* (without asking how).
- Belief in the beatific vision (*ru’yat Allāh*) for the believers in Paradise.
- Recognition of the superiority of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-khulafā’ al-rāshidūn*) in order of succession: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī (raḍiya Allāhu ‘anhum).
- Rejection of innovations (*bid‘ah*) in creed and worship that deviate from the Prophetic model.

In *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, Imām al-Baghawī clearly defines the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah and explicitly refutes theological deviations such as those of the **Mu‘tazilah**, **Jahmiyyah**, and **Rāfiḍah**, citing their divergence from the textual and historical continuity of the Ummah.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Madhhab Affiliation and Juristic Orientation

Imām al-Baghawī was a committed scholar of the **Shāfi‘ī** school of jurisprudence. His expertise and deep understanding of Shāfi‘ī legal principles are most clearly reflected in his juristic works, particularly:

- al-Tahdhīb fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī
- al-Anwār fī Sharḥ Ma‘ānī al-Akhhbār

---

(1) Al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd. (1983). *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (Vol. 1, pp. 55–60, Introduction; Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt & Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, Eds.). Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī



Despite his rootedness in the Shāfi'ī tradition, al-Baghawī did not exhibit sectarian rigidity. On numerous occasions, he preferred juristic opinions from other schools if they were more closely aligned with scriptural evidence. He often adopted a principle-centered approach based on Qur'ān, authentic *aḥādīth*, and the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the early generations, even when these positions differed from his own madhhab.

Al-Subkī notes that Imām al-Baghawī reached the level of **ijtihād** within the Shāfi'ī framework—capable of independent reasoning based on the sources of Islamic law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)—though he refrained from creating a distinct legal school of his own. (1)

### Scholarly Impact and Balance

Imām al-Baghawī's theological moderation and legal integrity contributed significantly to the enduring credibility of his works. His *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* continues to be cited as an authoritative Sunni manual on creed, fiqh, and prophetic narrations. It has been used as a reference in refuting theological extremism and in constructing a balanced Sunni worldview grounded in scriptural fidelity and ethical orthodoxy.

Al-Dhahabī emphasized that the widespread acceptance of his writings and their blessings (*barakah*) stemmed from his sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) and correct intention (*ḥusn al-qaṣd*). (2)

### Scholarly Significance of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*

*Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, authored by **al-Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Farrā' al-Baghawī** (d. 516 AH/1122 CE), is widely regarded as one of the most authoritative and comprehensive works in the tradition of Sunni *ḥadīth* literature. Its depth of exposition, careful arrangement of themes, and synthesis of narrations from the *ṣaḥīḥ*, *sunān*, and *musnad* compilations position it among the essential classical manuals for scholars of both hadith and jurisprudence.

Al-Baghawī's work represents the culmination of the **Shāfi'ī legal-hadith tradition**, deeply rooted in the scriptural sources yet enriched with commentary and juristic reasoning. Unlike earlier hadith collections which often left interpretation to the reader, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* offers careful elucidation of difficult narrations (*gharīb al-ḥadīth*), legal implications (*ahkām al-ḥadīth*), and responses to theological and sectarian controversies.

The text is also valued for its methodical presentation of the **signs of Prophethood** (**'alāmāt al-nubuwwah**)—including miraculous events from the life of the Prophet PBUH such as the splitting of the moon, trees and rocks greeting him, and water flowing from his blessed fingers. These narrations serve as theological affirmations of his divine

(1) Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. (1964). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 36–39). Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ḥalabī

(2) Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. (1998). *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz* (Vol. 4, pp. 1420–1421). Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

mission and have been cited by generations of Sunni scholars in defense of orthodox belief.(1)

## Purpose and Motivation Behind Its Composition

Imām al-Baghawī was driven to write *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* in response to a growing trend of **religious rigidity and legal literalism** he observed in his time. He noted that certain individuals had become excessively attached to specific jurisprudential texts and schools, often neglecting the Qur’ān and Sunnah as primary sources. Their rigid allegiance to sectarian fiqh led to a disregard for reflective interpretation and spiritual insight.

In the introduction to *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, al-Baghawī emphasizes that it is the duty of scholars to guide such individuals back to the **original sources of Islam**—the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of His Messenger PBUH through works that are both **comprehensive in narration** and **accessible in interpretation**. By drawing from the practices of the early Hadith masters (*muṣannifūn*), he aimed to compile a work that would unify divergent scholarly trends under the umbrella of textual fidelity and reasoned understanding.(2)

He therefore organized his book topically—grouping aḥādīth under major themes such as *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*, *Kitāb al-Buyū’*, and so on—mirroring the structure of earlier canonical works. Each major division was further subdivided into *abwāb* (chapters), allowing for precise thematic focus and detailed juristic commentary.

## Key Features and Methodological Distinctions

The methodological strength of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* lies in its **integrated approach** to textual verification (*takhrīj*), hadith interpretation, and jurisprudential application. Below are its core distinguishing features:

### a) Use of Canonical Sources and Chains of Transmission

Imām al-Baghawī extensively sourced his narrations from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *al-Tirmidhī*, *al-Nasā’ī*, and other trusted compilations. He often cited the complete *isnād* up to the Prophet (PBUH) and noted whether a narration was *muttafaq ‘alayh* (agreed upon by Bukhārī and Muslim), or from one of the two. When the narration was not found in the *ṣaḥīḥayn*, he relied on authorities such as *al-Tirmidhī* for hadith grading and would often repeat their judgments verbatim or with slight paraphrasing.(3)

(1) Al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd. (1983). *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (16 vols.; Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt & Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, Eds.). Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī

(2) Ibid., Vol. 1, Introduction.

(3) Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. (1972). *Al-Kifāyah fī ‘Ilm al-Riwāyah*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif.

## b) Thematic Commentary and Legal Insight

Al-Baghawī regularly provides legal commentary (*fiqh al-ḥadīth*), especially when a narration has implications for ritual law, contracts, punishments, or ethics. He cross-references *madhhab* opinions and provides **evidentiary reasoning** (*istidlāl*) for preferred views. When juristic disagreement exists, he outlines all major opinions and offers *tarjīḥ* (preferential reasoning) where warranted—even if it diverges from the Shāfiʿī position.

## c) Treatment of Weak Narrations

Although he generally avoided weak (*ḍaʿīf*) narrations, al-Baghawī occasionally included them **without commentary** when used as supportive evidence (*shawāhid*, *mutābiʿāt*) or when clarifying a vague term within a stronger narration. His discretion in including such reports reflects a nuanced understanding of hadith sciences, not a lapse in scholarly rigor.

## d) Linguistic and Lexical Analysis

Difficult or rare words are explained concerning classical linguists such as Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, Ibn Qutaybah, and Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī. These lexical notes often precede or follow the hadith commentary, ensuring clarity for both jurists and lay readers.

## e) Harmonization of Apparently Contradictory Narrations

When narrations appear contradictory, Imām al-Baghawī seeks **reconciliation** (*jamʿ*), or notes valid contextual differences. This approach avoids hasty dismissals and reinforces a unified understanding of the Prophetic tradition.

## The Signs of Prophethood (ʿAlāmāt al-Nubuwwah) in *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*

One of the most distinguished features of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* by Imām al-Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH) is its comprehensive treatment of the **Signs of Prophethood** (ʿalāmāt al-nubuwwah)—the miraculous occurrences that confirm the divine mission of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). These signs serve not only as theological affirmations (*dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*) but also as epistemological proofs of his veracity for both contemporary audiences and future generations.

Al-Baghawī includes a dedicated thematic focus on these signs, drawing on rigorously authenticated *aḥādīth* that detail supernatural events witnessed by the Companions. His treatment is structured, textually grounded, and often accompanied by brief theological reflections. The narrations are cited to demonstrate how **extraordinary manifestations supported the Prophet's PBUH truthfulness**, as predicted in the Qurʾān and confirmed through empirical experience.

## Qur'anic Foundation of Prophetic Signs

Al-Baghawī begins his section with Qur’ānic verses that frame Prophethood as divinely sanctioned and universally manifest:

"He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion, even though the polytheists may detest it" (Qur’ān 9:33).

He cites Imām al-Shāfi‘ī’s interpretation that this verse signifies **intellectual and theological dominance** of Islam over all other religions, even before the eschatological finality of the Prophet's message.(1)

He also references verses that challenge humanity to produce something like the Qur’ān, thereby establishing the inimitability (*i’jāz*) of the Qur’ān as the **everlasting miracle** and principal sign of Prophethood (Qur’ān 2:23, 17:88).

### **Narrative Evidence of Miraculous Signs**

The *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* provides extensive narration-based evidence for ‘*alāmāt al-nubuwwah*. Among the most notable signs mentioned are:

#### **1. Splitting of the Moon (*shaqq al-qamar*)**

Narrated by Anas ibn Mālīk (raḍīya Allāhu ‘anhu), the Prophet PBUH split the moon into two halves in response to a request from the people of Makkah. They saw Mount Ḥirā’ clearly between the two halves (Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī 4864; Sahīḥ Muslim 2800). Al-Baghawī includes this event to emphasize that miracles were *specific responses to the disbelievers’ demands*, not continuous or universal spectacles.

#### **2. Inanimate Objects Greeting the Prophet PBUH**

Jābir ibn Samurah (raḍīyā Allāhu ‘anhu) narrates that the Prophet PBUH said: “I know a stone in Makkah that used to greet me before I received revelation—I still recognize it.”(2) Additionally, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib reports that when walking with the Prophet PBUH, trees and rocks would say: *al-salāmu ‘alayka yā Rasūl Allāh*.

#### **3. Water Emanating from His Fingers**

Anas ibn Mālīk narrates that water flowed from the Prophet’s PBUH fingers, enabling an entire group of three hundred companions to perform ablution (Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī 3578). Al-Baghawī notes that this miracle **surpassed that of Mūsā** (‘*alayhi al-salām*) since water naturally flows from rock, but not from human flesh.

#### **4. Multiplication of Water and Food**

(1) Al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd. (1983). *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (Vol. 1, pp. 55–60, Introduction; Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt & Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, Eds.). Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī.

(2) Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, 3578–3580.

In the incident of Ḥudaybiyyah, Jābir reports that over 1,500 companions drank and made ablution from a single container after the Prophet PBUH placed his hand in it (Sahīh al-Bukhārī 3576). Al-Baghawī presents this as a clear instance of *kharq al-‘ādah*—a suspension of natural law in favor of divine assistance.

## 5. The Speaking Tree and Crying Tree-Trunk

Abū Zubayr narrates from Jābir that a tree trunk in the Prophet’s PBUH mosque cried audibly when he stopped leaning on it during sermons. The Prophet PBUH embraced it, and it calmed (Sahīh al-Bukhārī 3584). This event, documented with *mutawātir* strength, is emphasized as a testimony from the natural world to his Prophethood.

## Theological and Methodological Notes

Imām al-Baghawī is careful to:

- Provide authenticated chains (*isnād*) for each narration.
- Distinguish between universally witnessed signs and those seen only by specific individuals or groups.
- Defend the legitimacy of signs that critics claim were insufficiently public, by referencing the Qur’ānic pattern of **targeted miracles** followed by divine retribution for rejection (cf. Qur’ān 5:115).

He also includes the **rejection of signs by some polytheists** as fulfillment of divine wisdom: the signs were enough for those seeking truth, but not coercive to those bent on denial. This aligns with the Qur’ānic principle of **free will with accountability**.

## Findings (Results)

1. *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* serves as a foundational source in the disciplines of ḥadīth and Islamic jurisprudence. It is firmly rooted in the principles of scholarly balance, textual rigor, and intellectual integrity.
2. The book presents a verified and detailed exposition of the **signs of Prophethood** (**‘alāmāt al-nubuwwah**) and miraculous events associated with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, grounded in authentic narrations. These narrations contribute to affirming the truth of the Prophet’s mission and serve as sources of spiritual conviction and theological certainty.
3. The work of Imām al-Baghawī is a comprehensive reference in *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and *‘aḳīdah*. It demonstrates meticulous attention to the soundness of narrations (*ṣaḥīḥ*), their proper transmission (*takhrīj*), and their contextual understanding (*dirāyah*).
4. Al-Baghawī’s methodology reflects an academically rigorous and non-sectarian approach. Although he was a leading Shāfi‘ī scholar, he evaluated opinions from other legal schools with fairness, presenting their evidence in a scholarly and unbiased manner.

5. In light of current scholarly standards and the advancement of hadith authentication techniques, the study of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* necessitates a deeper and more systematic engagement with its rare manuscripts. Doing so would further enhance its academic value and ensure its preservation for future generations.

## Recommendations

1. Efforts should be made to collate, verify, and edit **previously unedited or rare manuscripts** of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* using advanced digital research tools. A **new, critical edition** of the text should be produced to reflect modern scholarly standards.
2. The legal discussions (*fiqhīyyah mabāḥith*) found within *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* should be examined in **comparative perspective**, aligning them with parallel rulings and methodologies from other Sunni schools of jurisprudence. This will foster a broader inter-madhab understanding of Islamic law.
3. Greater focus should be placed on **hadith authentication (takhrīj) and isnād studies**, allowing for the reevaluation of specific narrations in light of modern hadith criticism methodologies and chains of transmission validation techniques.
4. The theological, jurisprudential, and ethical content of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* should be explored in relation to **contemporary academic and intellectual challenges**, so that the insights of this classical text may contribute meaningfully to modern discourse in Islamic studies and ethics.

## Manuscript Tradition and Published Editions of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*

The scholarly legacy of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* is not only reflected in its wide transmission and recognition across centuries but also in the preservation of its manuscript tradition (*mukḥṭūṭāt*), many of which remain housed in renowned libraries around the Islamic world. These manuscripts serve as vital witnesses to the intellectual and textual history of Imām al-Baghawī's contribution to ḥadīth sciences and Sunni orthodoxy.

## Surviving Manuscripts

Several manuscripts of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* are preserved in both **complete and partial forms**, dating from different centuries and regions. Among the most significant are:

1. **Maktabat al-Azhar (Cairo)** – This library holds one of the earliest and most complete copies of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*. Though some folios are missing, it remains a critical source for textual collation (*taqrīb al-nuṣūṣ*) and comparison.
2. **Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah (Cairo)** – This national archive includes multiple volumes of the text, some written in **Naskh script**, indicating copyist activity in the late 7th and early 8th centuries AH. Marginal annotations (*ḥawāshī*) in these manuscripts reveal scholastic discussions and variant readings from later transmitters.

3. **Jāmi‘ah al-Islāmiyyah (Madīnah Munawwarah)** – Houses a partial manuscript of the first eight volumes of the work. The scribe provides extensive chain-of-narration listings (*isnādāt*) and variant readings, suggesting it was used for advanced hadith transmission (*samā‘* and *ijāzah*).
4. **Süleymaniye Library (Istanbul)** – A well-preserved manuscript in the Ayasofya collection, dating to the 9th century AH. This copy is notable for its clear calligraphy and consistency in hadith referencing methodology, following a standardized rubric for isnād clarification.
5. **British Library (London)**, and **Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris)**, – Hold partial or abridged versions under various catalog entries, reflecting the geographic spread of the text and its influence across linguistic and intellectual boundaries.

The range of these manuscripts—across **Khurāsān, Egypt, Hijaz, and the Ottoman world**—demonstrates the high scholarly demand for *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* over several centuries and its role as a principal teaching manual in Islamic seminaries (*madāris*).

## Published Editions

Among the printed editions of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, several deserve mention for their scholarly merit and editorial methodology:

- **Beirut Edition – al-Maktab al-Islāmī (1983)**  
Edited by **Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt** and **Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh**, this edition remains the most widely used critical version. Based on multiple manuscripts, it includes detailed *takhrīj* (hadith sourcing), explanatory footnotes, and commentary where necessary. Arna’ūt’s team also referenced earlier editions for comparative analysis, making this the current academic standard.<sup>1</sup>
- **Dār al-Fikr (Damascus)** – Earlier editions of the text were published here without critical apparatus or manuscript comparison. These prints were useful for general reference but lacked scholarly rigor in hadith grading and variant analysis.
- **Online Digital Editions** – Several PDF versions have been released via al-Maktaba al-Shāmilah and international academic repositories. These versions often reproduce the Beirut print without modification but are valuable for textual searches and digital citation.

## Need for a New Critical Edition

Despite the contributions of existing printed versions, there is a growing consensus among researchers that **a comprehensive critical edition remains a scholarly necessity**. Such a project should:

---

(1) Al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd. (1983). *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (Vol. 1, pp. 55–60, Introduction; Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt & Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, Eds.). Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī.

- Collate and compare at least **five complete manuscripts** from geographically diverse repositories.
- Include a detailed **introduction on textual history**, the author's methodology, and his sources.
- Provide full **hadith authentication and cross-referencing** with canonical Sunni collections (*kutub al-sittah* and others).
- Offer **comparative fiqh analysis**, mapping Imām al-Baghawī's legal reasoning within the broader Shāfi'ī tradition and across schools.

\* \* \* \* \*