

# THE REPORT BY IBN RAJAB HANBALI (795 AH) ON STAGNATION OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY AH (FAL 'ILM AL-SALAF 'ALÁ 'ILM AL-KHALAF)

## O RELATÓRIO DE IBN RAJAB HANBALI (795 AH) SOBRE A ESTAGNAÇÃO DAS CIÊNCIAS ISLÂMICAS NO SÉCULO VIII AH (IL 'AL AL-SALAF ALÁ' ILM AL-KHALAF)

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**Abstract:** Undoubtedly, the study on finding the causes of stagnation of Islamic sciences from the sixth century onward is among the important and valuable issues in the history of Islamic education. This was a period in the history of science when the glittering light of Islamic sciences went out and the evolution and growth that we see in the third, fourth and even fifth centuries left the Islamic society. The issue of stoppage of the Ijtihad chapter among the Sunni Muslims led to imitation and stagnation and the fanaticism of the four Sunni religions; the leadership of this approach was assumed by Hanbalis (Hanaabilah). In such an atmosphere, freedom of thought was accompanied by heresy and cooperation with the E'tezal school, which is indicated by the investigation of the books of that era. The present paper, which is based on the report by Ibn Rajab Hanbali (736-795), has been prepared with regard to the report of the book "Faql 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf". After briefly reviewing the biography, compilations, teachers, and religious and political conditions of the time of this Hanbali scholar, the amount of his attention to the sciences of his time and his excessive caution and fear concerning new sciences and also reliance solely on the righteous predecessors' legacy are examined. After classifying sciences into useful and useless (useful vs harmful knowledge) ones, he seeks to reject new sciences. His constant concern about and frequent attacks on new sciences (sciences outside the framework of the Book [scripture] and the Tradition), especially philosophy and theology, and his defense and strong prejudice in this respect should be considered. Accordingly, the above-mentioned book is the full-length mirror of the eighth century AH on the increasing stagnation of Islamic sciences. **Keywords:** Ibn Rajab Hanbali; righteous predecessors; stagnation of Islamic sciences; useful science; useless science.

**Resumo:** Sem dúvida, o estudo sobre as causas da estagnação das ciências islâmicas a partir do século VI está entre as questões importantes e valiosas na história da educação islâmica. Este foi um período na história da ciência quando a luz cintilante das ciências islâmicas se apagou e a evolução e o crescimento que vemos no terceiro, quarto e até quinto séculos deixaram a sociedade islâmica. A questão da paralisação do capítulo Ijtihad entre os muçulmanos sunitas levou à imitação e à estagnação e ao fanatismo das quatro religiões sunitas; a liderança dessa abordagem foi assumida por Hanbalis (Hanaabilah). Em tal atmosfera, a liberdade de pensamento foi acompanhada de heresia e cooperação com a escola E'tezal, que é indicada pela investigação dos livros daquela época.

O presente artigo, que é baseado no relatório de Ibn Rajab Hanbali (736-795), foi preparado com relação ao relatório do livro "Faul 'Ilm al-Salaf' alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf". Depois de rever brevemente a biografia, compilações, professores e condições religiosas e políticas da época deste estudioso Hanbali, a quantidade de sua atenção para as ciências do seu tempo e sua excessiva cautela e medo sobre novas ciências e também confiar apenas nos justos O legado do predecessor é examinado. Depois de classificar as ciências em úteis e inúteis (útil versus conhecimento prejudicial), ele procura rejeitar novas ciências. Sua preocupação constante e ataques frequentes a novas ciências (ciências fora da estrutura do Livro [escritura] e da Tradição), especialmente filosofia e teologia, e sua defesa e forte preconceito a esse respeito devem ser considerados. Assim, o livro acima mencionado é o espelho do oitavo século AH sobre a crescente estagnação das ciências islâmicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Ibn Rajab Hanbali; predecessores justos; estagnação das ciências islâmicas; ciência útil, ciência inútil.

## Introduction

In fact, the end of the third century AH can be regarded as the epoch of the end of the scientific movement, especially the four Sunni religions. It is the century in which Islamic sciences gradually lost its dynamism and increasing development, and imitation and fanaticism prevailed the frameworks of Sunni schools' followers based on the Holy Quran and the Tradition. Meantime, Hanbalis are the great pioneers of Salafiyyah. However, this issue was not only related to Hanbalis, but the imbalance and lack of interaction between other sects made everyone determined for this agitation and stubbornness and prejudice. There was no trace of the tolerance and flexibility of the previous periods and worthless conflicts and disputes have been leaning towards limitedness and scientific stratification. However, the role of Nizam al-Mulk Tusi (408-485 AH) should not be ignored in the construction of Nizamiyya schools and the sectarian strife, who gave the power of the show to the Ash'aris (followers of Ash'arism) by establishing guidance and debate centers. He gave freedom to the government in Islamic education, i.e. Shafi'i religion, and this means deviation from the path of knowledge and science. This policy created a dominant tradition for the sultans and rulers and the Islamic society was agitated and finally, textualism and tradition-raising were followed by Islamic scholars in the next centuries (from the sixth century onwards). Ibn Rajab (795 AH) is among the scholars influenced by the social, political and religious atmosphere of the society of that time when riots and disputes were abundant and his writings are full of scientific isolation and seclusion and the constant emphasis on the return of science to the righteous predecessors; an issued called "scientific stagnation". This research which is written based on one of Ibn Rajab Hanbali's (795 AH) works, i.e. Faql 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf<sup>1</sup>, is among the very important books for providing a bright image of Islamic education in the eighth century AH and presents a full-length mirror of education scholars for the readers. This study aims to express the issue of scientific stagnation in this century; the method based on the Book and the Tradition and the Quranic verses and prophetic hadiths is of interest to him. It should be noted that nothing has been done in this area; only in the Great Islamic Encyclopedia Volume 3, below the word "Ibn Rajab", a scholar named Abdul Amir Salim has introduced Ibn Rajab and called him as Ibn Naqib by mistake while he was one of Ibn Rajab's teachers. In the book "Exploration of educational views in Islamic civilization"<sup>2</sup>, Majid 'Arsan al-Kaylani has briefly stated some matters. However, this is a novel and valuable issue that can be considered by researchers and is an introduction to further research.

## Brief biography of Ibn Rajab (736-795 AH)

Abul Faraj Abdul Rahman bin Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman Salami, nicknamed as Zainuddin, is a great Hanbali (Baghdadi's religion) narrator, preacher and jurist (Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 25; Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 130; Al-Hashemi, 1993: 60; Zarkoli, 1954: 1/44; Ibn Emad, 1992: 8/578, 579). His birth was recorded to be in Baghdad and he has grown up there as well (Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 25; Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 131; Ibn Emad, 6/397). It seems that he was brought up in a scholarly and knowledgeable family and shortly after birth, his father decided to travel to Damascus (Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 131; Ibn al-Hamid al-Najdi, 1995: 1/136, 137) and at the age of 12 (Al-Hashemi, 1993: 397), he continued to gain knowledge in Damascus and heard hadiths from Muhammad bin Dawood al-Attar and others (Al-Hashemi, 1993: 397) and stayed with his father in Damascus for about 8 years (Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 6). After Damascus travel, his restless soul brought him to Egypt in search of truth (Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 131). He sought knowledge in the presence of masters like Sadruddin Abul Fath al-Maydumi and Abi al-Haram al-Qalanesi (Na'eimi, 2006: 96) and others (Al-Hashemi, 1993: 397; Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 26). Constant presence in the gatherings of scholars and learning from them and listening to their words plus his father's avidity for him to learn indicated the value and importance of science and knowledge for this family and they set scientific education before their eyes and even his grandfather, Abul Hasan bin Muhammad Abul Barakat ibn Mas'ud al-Baghdadi, was a hard-working and vibrant scholar in the scientific field of those days in Baghdad so that he was considered among the jurists and scientists who have a scientific circle in Baghdad, and seekers of science and narrators of knowledge eagerly came to him and in Damascus,

<sup>1</sup> It means superiority of the predecessors' knowledge over the posterity's knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Written by Kaylani, Majid 'Arsan (2008), translated by B. Rafi'ei, Tehran: Publications of Seminary and University and Organization of Compilation and Study of Human Sciences Books.

people enjoyed his presence (Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 131). Based on the report by Ibn Hajar, he was a benevolent, pious and virtuous man (Ibn Hajar Asqalani, 1993: 131; Al-Hashemi, 1993: 61). Ibn Rajab is, in the first place, his father's student, who was avid for gaining knowledge like his father. In his meetings for education, men and women of all ages and classes participated and one can rightly call him a popular scientific figure in his age. Engagement of Ibn Rajab (795 AH) in learning hadith was so profound that he was one of the most trusted scholars of his time among the Hanbalis of Damascus. Beside hadith, he read and compared Quran with narratives and hadiths and nothing could keep him away from it. However, he was a devout and pious individual (Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 28; Al-Hashemi, 1993: 62). Ibn Rajab (795 AH) also acquired knowledge in Hijaz and Qods (Ibn Emad, 1/397) and heard hadith from Osman bin Yusuf in Mecca and perhaps it was for these reasons that he was considered the most knowledgeable person of his time in understanding the causes of hadiths (Salim, 2004: 548; Al-Hashemi, 1993: 62). Ibn Rajab (795 AH) became prominent in the field of jurisprudence, principles, history, literature and virtue, which is manifest in his valuable works. He was staying at Sekriyya School in Kase Foroushan (Qassaein) neighborhood (Na'eimi, 1/96). Historians and narrators of hadiths believed that Ibn Rajab was an influential and strong person and his dignity was inherited from his master, Ibn Qayyim. This influential and independent figure had a great influence on his disciples and followers (Al-Hajjaji, 1996: 28; Al-Hashemi, 1993: 162) so that his position and dignity was considered to be like his master, Ibn Qayyim<sup>3</sup>. His influential personality and independence of opinion have had a great influence on his disciples and followers and everyone followed his advice (Al-Hashemi, 1993: 62). His character can be understood from his extensive compilations. He became familiar with the hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) since childhood. Considering the circumstances of the life of Ibn Rajab, the political, social and historical events that will be briefly addressed later inevitably had an impact on his personality. Finally, Ibn Rajab died in 795 AH after years of righteous life and serving the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) and paying attention to the righteous predecessors (Ibn Emad, 8/581; Al-Hajjaji, 40; Al-Hashemi, 86).

### **Ibn Rajab's works**

Ibn Rajab has numerous writings, including: 1) Comprehensive description of Abi Isa al-Tarmadhi; 2) Description of Arbaeen al-Nawadi; 3) Al-Bukhari's description which is called Fath al-Bari fi Sharh al-Bukhari in which the words of predecessors have been reflected; 4) Al-Qawaid al-Fiqhiyyah which implies the complete understanding of religion; 5) translations of Hanbalis called Tabaqat ibn Abu Ya'li; 6) interpretation of Surah al-Fatiha; 7) Al-Dhayl 'ala Tabaqat al-Hanabilah; 8) Badr war; 9) Al-Takhvif min al-Nar; 10) Al-Tayif al-Ma'arif fi ma li Mavasim al-Am Min al-Wazayif; 11) Bayan Faql 'Ilm al-Salaf 'ala 'Ilm al-Khalaf. There are many other writings that are 55 according to Al-Hajjaji, some of which have been published and some have not (Ibn Emad, *ibid.*: 580/8; Al-Hajjaji, *ibid.*: 28-32; Al-Hashemi, *ibid.*: 73, 274). What is raised in this research from among the various writings of Ibn Rajab is the book "Bayan Faql 'Ilm al-Salaf 'ala 'Ilm al-Khalaf" which has been explored and analyzed as a source and basis in the discussion of the stagnation prevailing the eighth century AH although this does not mean inattention to other writings of this scholar. What is understood is that his manner in Islamic education relies on the righteous predecessors and this issue does not negate his asceticism, piety and virtue. The way he adopts in Islamic education in the eighth century AH is based on the Book and the Tradition, solely relying on Quranic verses and prophetic hadiths. His opinions and references in quoting some of the hadiths are weak or have some mistakes (Al-Hajjaji, *ibid.*: 35-37).

### **Teachers of Ibn Rajab (795 AH)**

As previously stated, his first master, i.e. his father Al-Sheikh Shahabuddin Abul Abbas Ahmad bin Abdul Rahman, was a righteous scholar, and after him:

<sup>3</sup> In 691 AH, he was born in Damascus. His name is Muhammad bin Abi Bakr bin Ayyoub bin Sa'd ibn Hariz al-Zar'ei Somma al-Dameshqi Shamsuddin Abu Abdullah ibn Qayyim al-Jouzieh (Al-Zarkoli, 1994: 475). During the scientific movement, he was grown up in the land of Egypt and Damascus and his influence on his contemporaries is undeniable, and his scientific acceptance and movement were in Arabic language and literature, theology, Sufism and Sharia courses. Ibn Qayyim has compilations on various issues, including the book "Akhbar al-Nisa" in history (Al-Hashemi, 13).

- 1- Al-Qazi Abul Abbas Ahmad bin al-Hasan bin Abdullah known as Ibn Qazi al-Jabal (771 AH)
- 2- Sadruddin Abu Saeed Khalil ibn Kamikadi al-'Alani (761 AH)
- 3- Jamaluddin Abu Soleiman Dawood bin Ibrahim al-Attar (751 AH)
- 4- Muhammad bin Ismail bin Ibrahim al-Attar known as Al-Khabbazi (752 AH)
- 5- Shamsuddin Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Abi Bakr ibn Qayyim Jouzieh (751 AH)
- 6- Fathuddin Abu al-Haram Muhammad bin Muhammad bin al-Qalansi al-Hanbali (765 AH)

This group includes the most important teachers of Ibn Rajab Hanbali (795 AH). However, there are other teachers who have influenced his education and personality.

### **Ibn Rajab (795 AH) life circumstances**

During the lifetime of this Hanbali scholar, the Islamic lands were dominated by a state of chaos and disturbance. The position of Ibn Rajab's life at this point in history that coincided with political events is remarkable. This land (Damascus) that was formed by Mogul (one of the greatest and most powerful governments, i.e. the Mamalik rule) after the fall of Baghdad (656 AH) survived for more than two and a half centuries by pretending to support the Abbasid Caliphate. Following the collapse of Baghdad, the home town of scholars and scientists and schools and great libraries (Baghdad) were destroyed. In this vast land, knowledge and science were abandoned. Many scholars were murdered or forced to flee. The scientists who could survive this great calamity went to Egypt and Damascus and this land became the focus of attention and gathering of scholars and thinkers from the Islamic East (Ghofrani, 1987: 24). There are many cases indicating that in this period, political pressures and various kinds of turmoil and disturbance were increasing every day in the Muslim world (Al-Hajjaji, 43-45). In the foreign dimension, the crusaders overcame the Islamic lands so that in 567 AH, the crusaders arrived in the Alexandria River (ibid.: 45). In the social dimension, the Islamic world faced many problems and was hurt by all the conflicts and disputes across the world (for further study, see Al-Hajjaji, pp. 47-49). In such a gloomy atmosphere replete with mismanagement of the rulers in the political, social and economic dimensions, there was no longer a place for the emergence and production of science. Scholars' scientific achievements and productions bear fruit in a calm atmosphere whereas prejudices increased in this period and the thoughts were not able to see the light of true science. The spirit of creativity and renaissance faded, and fanaticism and imitation prevailed the minds. In such circumstances, people like Ibn Qayyim Jouzieh (751 AH) and Ibn Rajab (795 AH) sharpened their pens for struggle against fanaticism and imitation and return to the texts of Quran and the Tradition and stoppage of the Ijtihad chapter (Al-Hajjaji, 49). In this way, issuing Fatwas became the most prominent rational work and scientific production, which included the exploration of the texts of previous scholars and religions to answer them based on the fact that they are fixed texts and cannot be changed and interpreted. Even the field of Sufism was infiltrated by imitation and fanaticism. For example, Qadariyyah and Rifa'iyyah followers clashed with each other in a long struggle over the supremacy of Abdul Qadir Geylani (591 AH) and Sheikh Ahmad Rifa'i (Kaylani, 2008: 308). The intellectual sphere of the leaders and the influence of benefactors and supporters also played a major role in the stagnation of science at this time. Disunity prevailed the society and benefactors had restrictive thoughts and one-sided religious orientations. On the other hand, there was disagreement between jurists, narrators and philosophers with theologians. This suggests that the inheritance of righteous predecessors should be invoked and one should suffice to follow the righteous predecessors for the protection of the ideas and thoughts against the thoughts of philosophers. This is clearly evident from Ibn Rajab Hanbali's speeches and writings. Although he was a student of Ibn Taymiyyah<sup>4</sup>, conflict and interference of his thoughts with Ibn Taymiyyah prevented him from being a full imitator. It should be explained that Ibn Taymiyyah, while calling for pursuing the manner of righteous predecessors, only emphasized their beliefs, thoughts, research and investigations and did not disapprove that scientific achievements be added to their results, but his fatwas are a new type of innovation,

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4 Taqiuddin Abul Abbas Ahmad bin Abdul-Halim bin Abdul-Salam ibn Abdullah bin Taymiyyah al-Harrani al-Hanbali. He was born in Harran in 661 AH and learned jurisprudence and principles from his father in Damascus and was the pupil of masters such as Shamsuddin bin Abi Omar and Zainuddin bin al-Munji. He considered Sibawayh book and turned to the interpretation of Quran. While not married, he died in Damascus prison in 728 AH (Ibn Emad, 8/150, 151; Abdul Hamid, 2011: 56).

improvement and revision (Kaylani, 2008: 311). Ibn Rajab merely goes back to the past sciences and divides the sciences into useful and useless ones without any concern, just as can be clearly understood from the research related to the book "Faḍl 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf". The author seeks to explain whether there is a relationship between stagnation of Islamic Sciences in the eighth century AH and writings of Ibn Rajab (795 AH). In other words, to what extent has he influenced the stagnation of Islamic Sciences in this century with respect to the book Faḍl 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf?

### **Brief introduction of the book Faḍl 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf (795 AH)**

This book is in a digital form. The book begins with the praise of Almighty God and greeting to the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny and his innocent companions. The first discussion is a brief description of the meaning of science and its division. Afterwards, the Word of Revelation about praise or dispraise of science is cited and also, a reference is made to Quran and writings of Sunni Imams. For example, Sahih Moslem, Sunan Nesaei, Jame' Tarmadhi and Sunan ibn Maje about science and interpretation and also regarding the science with no use and special attention paid by Ibn Rajab to reliance on the righteous predecessors are among the notable and attractive points in this book. He has repeatedly drawn the reader's attention to predecessors and wants not to go beyond the Tradition and Quran and intends to merely move in the path of previous Imams since he considers dealing with new sciences as a heresy whose end is problematic, leading to hell, and there is no benefit in this regard.

### **Ibn Rajab's view on the education of the eighth century AH based on the book Faḍl 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf**

The term "salaf" (predecessor), whose plural is "aslaf", means forebear, ancestor, race and predecessor. The compound term "Salaf al-Salih" versus "Khalaf al-Salih" means righteous predecessors (Azarnoush, 2012: 466). In Dehkhoda dictionary, it means predecessors and its plural includes "aslaf and soluf", meaning someone who lived in the past (fathers and relatives) (Dehkhoda, 2006: 2/1706). The term "salaf" is also applied to a group of ancients as mentioned in the Word of Revelation: "We put predecessors as examples for posterity" (Al-Zukhruf/56).

When we say "Qom-e-Salaf", it refers to the first people that existed in the past and when it is said "Salaf al-Rajol", it means her fathers are in the past (Al-Sobhani, 2010: 13). Today, the term "salaf" (predecessor) is also used and is applied to the followers of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. For Hanbalis, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal is the most famous Sunni Imam who is the source of many of the narratives quoted by companions and followers in the field of faith and religion. Ahmad Taymiyyah (728 AH) is the revitalizer of Salafiyyah in the eighth century AH and his followers are commentators of hadith. Salafis claim that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) guided the whole nation\_ both the predecessors and posterity. It is only worthy to resort and refer to Quran and the Tradition after the demise of the Prophet, based on Hadith al-Thaqalayn<sup>5</sup> (Al-Sobhani, 21, 22). Salafiyyah cannot be regarded as an Islamic religion, whether jurisprudential or theological, but it is based on resorting to predecessors. Ibn Rajab Hanbali is also from this group, who founded a teaching method based on scientific Salafism and considered the issue of referring to the ancestors. In the book "Faḍl 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf", he talks with certainty and special enthusiasm about the definitive division of science into two types in the first section of his writing and refers to useful and useless sciences and expresses his view by relying on the righteous predecessors (Ibn Rajab, 1). In the beginning, he states that the purpose of this division is to inform and remind and pay attention to and carefully consider the science of predecessors and refer to their scientific superiority relative to posterity and in order to benefit from strong backing in his speech, he refers to Quran and cites some verses from Quran in this regard; i.e. one time science in the position of praise and another time in the position of dispraise, which by the useful science, he means special attention to the righteous predecessor's legacy. In his opinion, useful science is the one that is profitable, as documented

5 I leave you two precious things; the Book of Allah, the Quran, and Ahlul-Bayt. This is a successive (Mutawatir) hadith between the two Shiite-Sunni sects and there is no doubt about its accuracy.

by these verses of the Quran: *“نُوحِ عَىٰ آلَ نُوْحٍ عَىٰ نَذَلَا وَيُوْتَسَىٰ لَهُ لُقُ”* (Zumar/9), *“ظَلَا نَمِشَ”* (Taha, 114), *“أَمَلَع يَنْدِز بَر لُقُ”* (Al-Imran/18), *“ظَسْرُقَلَابِ أَمَىٰ أَقْ مَلْعَلَا أَوْلُوَاوْ يَكْتِي الْعَلَاوْ وَهُ الْآ ظَلَا الِ خُنْإِ”* (Fatir/28) and *“عَامَلْعَلَا مَدَابِعْ نَمِ ظَلَا يَشْخَىٰ اَمْنَاوْ”* (Baqarah/32) (Ibn Rajab, 1). This is the same as the useful science (knowledge) and on the other hand, he talks about the useless science. He invokes these Quranic verses: *“أَوْلِمَحْ نِيْذَلَا لَثْمُ”* (Jumu'a/5). Other Quranic verses are Surah A'raf (verses 169, 175, 176) and Surah al-Jasiyah (verse 3). His reliance on Quranic verses is evident. He believes that division of sciences into useful and useless ones provides for tradition and indeed, in this way, he seeks to return to the past and righteous predecessors as in the following, he is afraid of useless science and calls for useful science (beneficial knowledge). After Quran and the Tradition, he resorts to Sahih Moslem, Sunan Nesaei, Sunan Tarmadhi, Sunan Abu Na'eim, Sunan Abu Dawood and interpretation of Sa'sa'a bin Suhan and other Sunni elders. He considers magic among the useless sciences and states that it is harmful to religion and the world (Ibn Rajab/10). One of the useless sciences is genealogy whose knowing or not knowing does not solve a problem and in fact makes no difference. He refers to Abu Dawood and Ibn Maje and their speech. These two people have divided sciences into three types and only three types of science- and knowledge-seeking should be promoted and anything other than these three groups is indeed a kind of pedantry and is not much important: Ayat Muhkamat, Sunnah Qaemat and Farizat 'Adelah (Ibn Rajab/10).

But genealogy science is necessary in that it brings closeness and bonds of relationship and just knowing the bonds of relationship and nothing else. He does not recommend beyond that. In connection with Arabic language and literature and astronomy, he almost has the same opinion. He believes that knowledge of language is sufficient to the extent of knowing the Quran, and astronomy is just useful for routing and navigation on land and sea and nothing else (Ibn Rajab/11). In the following, he deems as necessary the knowledge of religious and jurisprudential rulings about women's halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden) (10). He relies on different narratives to prove his thoughts and seeks to pay special attention to and limit the sciences in any way possible. It seems that he does not approve rational exploration and search in scientific and religious concepts and stands against it and relies on the words of righteous predecessors. He avoids delving into astronomy and says: When a person accepts and analyzes a branch of astronomy, it is like he has gained a branch of magic and this, in fact, is the useless science which is inconsistent with his intellectual foundations. He recommends for sciences, especially Tasyir<sup>6</sup> science, to the extent that guiding and recognizing qiblah and paths become possible and he even goes beyond that and considers as criterion what is permissible for the public (ibid.: 11). If we pay attention to the speech of this Hanbali scholar, we see that he continuously emphasizes limitation and stereotyping and deprives himself and his followers of scientific movement and endeavor and believes that it causes suspicion and conflict among Muslims in the city (ibid.: ). He states that, whether in the past or present, it leads to making mistakes by the companions and followers in their prayers in many cities and regards it to be futile and useless (ibid.: ). Although he considers Arabic language and literature in speech like salt in food (ibid.: 13), he mentions that parts of mathematics are necessary to the extent that they are related to religious obligations and discussion of will and property that should be distributed among needy people; but beyond that, there is no need for it and it is useless and a waste of time (ibid.: 13). Ibn Rajab (795 AH), in his speech, cannot approve some new sciences and easily ignores them and particularly objects to some of his companions and struggles with new sciences with all his power. He believes that after the age of the companions, some have expanded science and called it knowledge and assumed that anyone who is not aware of these sciences is either ignorant or aberrant (ibid.: 14) while Ibn Rajab's stance is different and he considers all these newly-established sciences as heresy.

He refers to Bayhaqi's words and quotes Ibn Mas'ud that whenever his followers recalled astronomy, stop them (ibid.: 14). Then, he invokes the words of Ibn Abbas who says that he told Meymun bin Mehran: Avoid looking at the stars since they invite you to soothsaying and avoid divination because it leads to atheism and avoid the curse of one of the Companions of Muhammad (PBUH) because it ultimately ends in the fire of hell (ibid.: 14). From the standpoint of this scholar,

<sup>6</sup> The hypothetical course of an imaginary body or point in the sky to another imaginary body or point in order to predict the longevity of people and lucky an unlucky times.

moving towards knowledge and delving into sciences are equivalent to aberration and offence, and a misguided man has a bad fate. In Ibn Rajab's view, the Book and the Tradition are the source for solving all sciences and problems and he considers the consensus of the predecessors to be clear. He states that Mu'tazila and Jahmian are a kind of heresy and aberration. Righteous predecessors have gone the right way and interpretation, comparison and hesitation do not make sense. He looks for such a point in the word of Ahmad bin Hanbal who did not investigate the verses of Quran when interpreting them.

He does not approve to follow the tradition of posterity except for following the Imams of Islam which is considered as the main pillar of imitation by people like Ibn al-Mubarak, Malik, Al-Thawri, Al-Awza'i and Al-Shafi'i, Ahmad, Ishaq, Abu Ubayd and so on (ibid.: 16). Ibn Rajab also turns away the face from theologians and disputes with them and while resorting to the mentioned Imams, he believes that their words are not of the same quality as the words of theologians and does not consider philosophers as superior to theologians. He quotes Abu Zur'a al-Razi: Anyone who has a science with him should not keep it and if for dissemination, there is a need for something that is of the same quality as theology, it is not useful (ibid.: 16). He also states the jurisprudence that is created by Hanafi jurists among new sciences since these sciences are also void of rational rules and secondary principles of jurisprudence (ibid.: 16). He puts aside this category of science, whether in opposition to or in favor of tradition, because rational rules have entered into it although these rational sciences can be interpreted and returned to the texts of Quran and the Tradition. This is the point that the author believes to aggravate the stagnation of sciences and prevent the rational movement in its natural and evolutionary path; the issue that has led to suppression and creation of the great wall of intellectual stagnation in Islamic sciences.

In rejecting the rational rules and disapproving them, Ibn Rajab, in addition to the Imams of Islam and the four traditions, has invoked Hanafi jurists of Hijaz and Iraq who also rejected and disapproved them (ibid.: 17). Ibn Rajab considers the imams and jurists of hadith as the followers of true hadith; the hadith that was common for the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) or at least a group of them and people after them, but what the righteous predecessors agree on its abandonment should not be practiced and considered because the righteous predecessors abandoned it based on knowledge and awareness and it is correct not to do it (ibid.: 17). This stereotyping of Ibn Rajab can be clearly seen in the materials of his book and perhaps propaganda like this suggests his orientation to limitation and spinning around himself; the same thing that the silkworm does with his life. In other words, comprehensiveness and multi-sidedness cannot be observed in Ibn Rajab's scientific view and he intends to base his speech and thought on the solid pillars of Sunni Imams and the elders in order to survive shakiness and attacks of his opponents. So, he says that Salafi Imams disapprove controversy and disputes over haram and halal issues and in fact, this is not the manner of the Imams of Islam (Sunni Imams). He regards the conflicts between the Shafi'is and the Hanbalis as the evil phenomena of Iraqi jurists, which lead to the compilation of Khalaf books (books with opposing opinions)<sup>7</sup> which, in turn, are nothing except dispute and controversy and all these controversies have happened recently and have no basis and have deprived them of the useful science (ibid.: 19). He states that it is a waste of time that has no benefit. He mentions the following as the source of aberration in new sciences and controversy with reliance on the Quranic verse: "لَدَجَلًا أَوْتُوا آلَ إِدْمِ عَجَبٌ هَؤُلَاءِ لَدَجَلًا" and then continues: "كل موبىضاف" "نومصخ هوق مه لب لادج ال" (AlZukhruf/58). After referring to this verse, he talks about the righteous predecessors and says: "Whenever God wants goodness for a person, He opens the doors of affairs to him and closes the doors of controversy for him and whenever God wants evil for a person, He closes the doors of affairs and opens the doors of controversy" and constantly resorts to the words of others (ibid.: 19) to the extent that quotes Malik bin Anas that controversy in science removes

<sup>7</sup> "Opposing or disagreement" (Khalaf), like debate, belongs to the principles of jurisprudence, which are the religious arguments of Mujtahids based on their difference of opinions and thoughts and this disagreement that has long come about among the followers of the five Islamic religions is based on the arguments about the authenticity of the opinions of each regarding the religious issues and chapters of jurisprudence. For example, we can refer to the book *Al-Khalaf fi al-Ahkam* or *Masail al-Khalaf* by Sheikh Tusi (Azkaei, 2007: 197) and it is said that it is the science in which the quality of the objection of religious arguments and incompetency of the reasons that are contradictory are discussed and which deals with religious issues and purposes. It is believed that "Khalaf" has been established by Abu Zayd Abdullah bin Omar bin Isa Hanafi Samarqandi (Dehkoda, 1998: below Khalaf/9905).

the light of knowledge. He continues that disputes in science bring cruelty and sarcasm. He believes that the manner of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal is that when questions are repeatedly asked from him, he says: I don't know (ibid.: 19).

He maintains that the words of predecessors and Salafi Imams, such as Shafi'i, Malik, Ahmad and Ishaq, are based on knowledge of jurisprudence and believes that the religious orders' reliance on theology is insignificant and his words reject the anti-tradition statements with the most delicate references and phrases. What brings superiority and guarantee is the Imam's word which is very brief and concise. The great amount of opposition and dispute silences no one; what created silence was science and fear of God.

He extends the discussion on new issues to silence and fear of God and provides numerous examples and quotes Omar bin Abdul Aziz that the ancients stopped in science<sup>8</sup> and disregard it with sharp eyes without disputing over science while they were the most powerful scholars of their time and if they wanted to do it, they would do it and these are confirmed by the numerous words of the righteous predecessors (ibid.: 21). It is inferred that research in science and the development of sciences and deep thinking and the use of common sense to create new sciences are in vain and one should think and move within the framework of the ancestors, which is the predecessors' legacy and deviation from that rule means destruction, decline and aberration. Ibn Rajab steps further and considers many of the conflicts of his age to be caused by the controversies and disputes and this is the effect of the blight-stricken and agitated situations of his era, which have dramatically influenced his thoughts and writings. In the following, he says that the modern scholars (posterity) assumed that anyone whose words, controversy, opposition and dispute in issues related to religion are greater is the most knowledgeable scientist who is peerless while in Ibn Rajab's view, this concept is pure ignorance. In order to comfort and convince his followers, Ibn Rajab attracts their attention to the great companions and scholars of those periods like Abu Bakr, Omar, Ali (AS), Mo'az, Ibn Mas'ud and Zayd ibn Thabit. Their words were very brief and concise, even briefer than the words of Ibn Abbas while they were wiser than him. This hierarchy continues so that he considers the words of followers to be greater than the words of companions whereas the companions are wiser than them and this chain continues.

He believes that the controversies and disputes of the modern scholars (posterity) are abundant and their knowledge is low since they have endeavored in the prolongation of words (stretching of speech) and knowledge is not abundance of narratives and controversies, but knowledge is a light that falls into the heart, through which people understand the truth and distinguish between right and wrong, which is called the "short phrase obtained for purposes" (ibid.: 21). Indeed, Ibn Rajab can be considered as the pioneer of combat against intellectual conflict and the development of science in his age. He marginalizes and rejects scrutinizing and delving into new sciences and to prove it, he takes advantage of the Prophet's (PBUH) word which says: "God sent me as prophet only for communicating his message, and definitely, complicating the words is an evil matter"<sup>9</sup> (ibid.: 22). This statement means that what the Prophet communicated was spoken by him and abundance of speech and complication of words are disapproved. He dispraises this manner by referring to the hadith by the Prophet (PBUH): "أَرَحِسَ نِيَابِلًا نَمَّ نَأً" and believes that it is loquacity and verbosity. The surprise of his beliefs becomes more evident when his attention is attracted by people who believe in the lengthening of speech and at the same time consider themselves to be wiser than the predecessors because they are verbose and controversial while it is an illusion and he states that individuals like Al-Awza'i, Laith and Ibn al-Mubarak and their class are superior due to their shortness of speech.

Basically, he maintains that the prolongation of speech or verbosity in science which is the same as the growth and evolution of science is in contrary to the great legacy of righteous predecessors. He even announces that expansion and development of new knowledge leads to distrust in righteous predecessors and additionally brings an accusation of ignorance and poor knowledge: "?????????? ????? ?????????? ?????? ??????" (ibid.: 23). He praises the speech of Ibn Mas'ud in his statements about companions where he says: "The companions' hearts are surely

<sup>8</sup> In the author's opinion, by "stopping" in these lines, it means resorting to the Book and the Tradition and not going beyond them, determining the boundaries of science and, in other words, stagnation. (p. 11)

<sup>9</sup> نَأطىشئلا نم مالكلأ قىقىشئت نَأً و أعلبم ال إأىبن نأغبئى مَل مللا نَأً

candlesticks of the Ummah (nation)” and their knowledge is wider and their pretension is lower (ibid.) and this points out that in the periods after companions, useful science is less and pretension which is the same as useless science is more. Brief and short speech is the characteristic of Ibn Rajab as he quotes Ibn Mas’ud: “You are in the age when there are numerous scholars and few orators, but after you, time will come when scholars are few and orators are numerous (ibid.). Thus, scholarliness and emergence of useful science are the result of conciseness of speech, which is praiseworthy. In his statements, he refers to Yemeni people and regards them as faithful and jurists because they are less developed in terms of theology and development of new sciences. That is to say, they have moved in the path of righteous predecessors and the amount of science they possess is useful science and they use their tongue as needed and do not approve verbosity that leads to useless science.

### **Top sciences from the perspective of Ibn Rajab (795 AH)**

As previously stated, determining a specific framework and not allowing to move and deviate from those predetermined rules and frameworks are followed by scientific restrictions, resulting in immobility and stagnation of science. It was mentioned earlier that the division of sciences into useful and useless ones is a division that is, in itself, a kind of limitation and fanaticism. In Ibn Rajab’s opinion, the top sciences include interpretation of Quran, meanings of hadith and speaking of halal and haram; of course, that part of the statements that have reached us from the companions and followers and followers of followers until it ends in the famous Sunni Imams whom he imitates. Those we mentioned or narrated are the best sciences that need contemplation and profound thinking and other than the cases mentioned, the spread of science is not good and they just prolong the speech, which is evident from their words; therefore, it has no scientific and useful aspect and just brings disputes and conflicts. What is contradictory to the words of the mentioned Imams and leaders is mostly annulled or is put among the sciences that have no use and benefit (ibid. 23). Concise speech and avoidance of verbosity and loquacity that can be observed in the words of some posterity are a useless effort because these statements are found in the shortest terms and concise concepts in the speech of the predecessors and nullity does not exist in the words of Imams unless people after them (Imams) hesitate too much for understanding them. Hence, people are required to refer to the words of the elders and righteous predecessors to receive the true science; otherwise, they will have to follow the posterity. True knowledge is distinguished from the false knowledge when the new science is modified and examined and whoever does not so, his traditional matters are suspicious and unreliable. Consequently, the right and wrong will be confused and there will be no trust. In this way, anyone with poor knowledge for narrating the hadith of the Prophet and righteous predecessors, because of his ignorance of the accuracy of the hadiths, is not trustable and will nullify the sciences that all people possess, due to his lack of knowledge concerning their accuracy.

### **Attacks on philosophy, theology and Sufism**

#### **Attacks on philosophy, theology and Sufism**

In Ibn Rajab’s view, the involvement of theologians and philosophers in science is pure evil and quite harmful (ibid.: 24) and the establishment of new sciences, esoteric sciences and knowledge and Sufism will lead to a great danger as soon as they are affected by opinions, revelation and intuition. Thus, in addition to theologians and philosophers, Sufis are also subjected to the attacks of Ibn Rajab who rejects them. He quotes Junaid: “Our knowledge is bound to the Book and the Tradition, and in our knowledge, we do not follow anyone who does not read Quran and hadith (ibid.: 25).

### **Conclusion with the praise of useful science**

From the standpoint of Ibn Rajab, useful science is the one that conforms to the Book and the Tradition and understanding their meanings and has come to us through the companions and followers; issues in halal and haram, piety and endeavor to distinguish between right and wrong and attempt to understand the principles, and they (the Book and the Tradition) are sufficient for

anyone with reason.

God assists anyone who is engaged in useful science and has a pure intention for God and asks God for help and God grants him guidance, grace and good will and intelligence, and useful science bears fruit in a special manner, which is indeed the fear of God. As God says: “لَا يَخَىٰ إِلَهًا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُمْ عَلِيمُونَ” (Fatir/28).

From the perspective of righteous predecessors, science is not that it is narrated many times, but science is the fear of God and some righteous predecessors say: anyone who fears God is wise and whoever disobeys God is ignorant.

He quotes Al-Hasan: Science is of two types: 1) science that is on the tongue which is God's love for Adam's children and 2) science that is in the heart which is useful science. Again, according to righteous predecessors: Scholars are of three types: 1) a scholar who is aware of God's work; 2) a scholar who is not aware of God's work and 3) a scholar who is aware of God's work but has no knowledge of God.

He believes that a scholar with the knowledge of God and His work is the most complete scholar since he fears God and knows His orders. So, he offers arguments by resorting to science and God. Thus, he knows Him. In proving his words, he invokes Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and states his famous statement: For the top scientist, the most important thing is science and knowledge because he fears God; knowledge of God who makes him fear. He believes that science is basically affection, closeness and companionship, enthusiasm for Him and then knowledge of God's orders. This is the useful science that should be realized and if this phrase is carefully examined, it is inferred that he never talks about social and natural sciences as if he is not familiar with these sciences and appointment of these sciences is very difficult for him and it seems that these sciences (natural and social) are not helpful because they do not create humble heart, gratified soul and accepted prayer. In other words, they have no heavenly and spiritual remuneration and no punishment or reward has been determined for them as if no motivation is generated for referring to them. In fact, he reminds that if such a science with these characteristics is not obtained and is lost, it will lead to bad luck and misery and has no good ending but greed and futile request. Finally, he notes that benefit from science is gained only when it is based on the Book and the Tradition; otherwise, no benefit is obtained and it is more harmful than beneficial (ibid.: 29).

### Signs of useless science from the perspective of Ibn Rajab (795 AH)

Ibn Rajab (795 AH) disapproves departure from the determined framework of the righteous predecessors' legacy and as mentioned earlier, he considers it as the cause of controversy and conflict. Perhaps this is the influence of his age. When Islamic society is constantly in crisis and tension and different sects constantly foment diversity of opinions and fallacious reasoning that existed for a long time and deprive the society of peace, here Ibn Rajab determines a red line for scientific movement and promotion regarding new sciences and beyond that is useless science and movement in the path of futility and departure from the stages of scientific evolution. He indeed had to put such a mask on the face of the science of that age because he believed that a healthy movement and life and survival are possible in the absence of tension and challenges facing the society of that day. For this reason, he defines boundaries for useless science.

He believes that useless science is the science which is gained for satisfying selfishness, self-glorification, arrogance, supremacy-seeking and ambitiousness and competition in the world and its purpose is to glorify oneself before scholars and dispute with less knowledgeable people and attract the public attention (ibid.: 30) since such scientific demands, in the proponents of this category of science, are absurd and it is likely that they have another motivation and want to show themselves to the public and bring the scientists and rulers close together and he gives an example of this manner among Qarmatians and Batenians and points out that this way of thinking is contrary to the righteous predecessors and based on the words of Omar, such a person with the mentioned intentions is both ignorant and impious and goes to hell (ibid.: 30). He reminds that useful science and its supporters have nothing but modesty and humility. They disapprove self-conceit and self-praise and demand nothing in return for teaching knowledge. That is, science is only for God, learning and teaching. With gaining more knowledge, scientists of useful science further feel their fear and humility towards God. But again, he relies on the words of righteous predecessors and

mentions that “it is worthy for the scholar to prostrate himself before God as a sign of humility” (ibid.: 31).

### Signs of useful science

To separate sciences and specify a criterion to distinguish them, he provides some features for useful science so that useful and useless sciences are not confused. He mentions the following signs:

1. Useful science guides the scholar to escape from the world.
2. Useful science prevents the scholar from seeking fame, praise and greed.

He recommends for avoiding fame-seeking and trying to support useful science. Even if a person who has gained useful science does something without intention (inadvertently), he will be in extreme fear of the end of his work since there is the possibility of repeating his action and it gradually penetrates his existence. Then, again he connects his speech to righteous predecessors and his supporter, i.e. Ahmad bin Hanbal.

His emphasis on the ancestors’ legacy and useful science that has a root in it is endless and he continues the discussion on the signs of useful science and says: The owner of useful science does not show off his knowledge before others and does not attribute ignorance to anyone unless he is in conflict with tradition and predecessors and their followers. If someone is in conflict with tradition and predecessors, he should be treated with anger for the sake of God not for the self or one’s elevation (ibid.: 31).

The teaching of useless science will have no result but arrogance to people and consequently, such an individual attributes ignorance to other people so that in this way, he displays others as imperfect and weak and elevates himself and this is one of the ugliest features in the world. It is likely that he attributes ignorance, carelessness and negligence to the predecessors. In this state, self-love and its revelation appear and the predecessors are accused of distrust and suspicion. Scientists with useful science act exactly the opposite of the above mentioned. They put themselves liable to suspicion and have a favorable opinion of the predecessors and confess in their heart to the superiority of predecessors over themselves and also inability to reach their levels or approach them (ibid.: 32).

### Stagnation governing the conservative thoughts of Ibn Rajab (795 AH)

He constantly says in his writings that useful science should be separated and shows his concern about useless science and is afraid of any interference or agreement between these two categories of science. It is always clear in his statements that his connection to the righteous predecessors is inevitable and whenever he feels threatened, his words change and he takes a firm stand against possible attacks. Ibn Rajab’s special attention to the righteous predecessors is valuable to the extent that he says: “A person who appreciates the righteous predecessors understands the causes of their silence which were deliverance of speech and abundance of controversy and opposition and talking as much as needed not dumbness or ignorance. This is brevity which is fear of God and engagement in anything useful instead of useless affairs. He extends this issue to the principles of religion and interpretation of Quran and concludes that “followers of the righteous predecessors are guided and deviators of their path enter debate, dispute and controversy, which have no benefit and whoever claims knowledge and virtue for himself and attributes ignorance and defect to the righteous predecessors is surely misled and will suffer from irreparable damage”. He is fearful of his age and complains about it and considers it as a corrupt age and states that in any case, one should trust God. Again, he invokes the words of predecessors and says that anyone who seeks science to glorify oneself before scholars or dispute with less knowledgeable people or attract the public attention will definitely go to hell and in contrast to this statement, he quotes the predecessors that I demanded knowledge to be united with prophets not kings since scholars are united with prophets and judges are united with kings. For the last time, he undermines the useless science and in his last statement on this topic (useful and useless sciences), he asks God for useful

science and seeks refuge in God from the useless science, arrogant heart, insatiable soul and the prayer that is not heard. He considers the useless science as equivalent to the hard heart, insatiable soul and not heard prayer and elevates the position of useful science and pays special attention to it.

## Conclusion

Ibn Rajab (736-795 AH) is regarded as the pioneer of scientific stagnation in the eighth century AH. His writings suggest his special attention to the righteous predecessors. He lived in a chaotic era replete with religious fanaticism and scientific imitation and also lack of renaissance of Islamic sciences, which is one of the dark and gloomy periods of the history of science in Islamic civilization. There are a lot of conflicts between different philosophical sects, people of hadith, theologians and even Sufis. Meanwhile, the book "Faql 'Ilm al-Salaf 'alá 'Ilm al-Khalaf" is an obvious example confirming this claim. The author constantly refers to the words and knowledge of the ancestors and righteous predecessors and all his concern is about the departure from the boundary of the Book and the Tradition, which leads to blasphemy and hell. The perspective of Ibn Rajab's thought is by no means consistent with new sciences (including social and natural) and his division of sciences into useful and useless ones is the result of this view. Redundancy and prolongation have no place in his view and he strongly approves the conciseness of words. He considers the new sciences as a kind of prolongation and verbosity. In his view, when the trend of scientific movement gets away from the age of the elders of Islam and Sunni Imams, it is nothing but nonsense and distractible speech. In his age, most of the commentaries and annotations and detailed accounts of the righteous predecessors were spread and adherence to the righteous predecessors' legacy appeared in this context. Orthography which was a method associated with renaissance and creativity was abolished and the method of reading and listening and permission that embodied the imitation of the predecessors became widespread and in this way, the arrangements were made for the scientific stagnation of the Islamic world. The story of science and scholars in the Islamic world became like the spinning of a silkworm that was approaching the end of its life.

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Recebido em 21 de fevereiro de 2019.

Aceito em 22 de fevereiro de 2019.