THE RELIABILITY OF THE TRADITIONAL SCIENCE OF ḤADĪTH: A Critical Reconsideration

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The Abstract

hadis dan evaluasi kritis terhadap bentuk-bentuk dalam mentransmisikan hadis merupakan hal yang fundamental untuk dipertimbangkan. Walaupun demikian, bentuk-bentuk itu tidak mudah diinvestigasi karena mereka dapat digunakan secara bergantian. Begitu juga dengan ulumul hadis yang masih perlu dipertanyakan tentang keselarasannya dengan praktek pentransmisian dan kritik terhadap hadis pada masanya.

Keywords: hadīth, reability, transmission, shādīb, ‘illa.

A. Introduction

The majority of Muslims believe that hadīths are the carrier and the vehicle of the sunna of the Prophet. Indeed, they are indispensable guide to an understanding of the divine will. As one of the sources of Islamic authority, which is only second in importance after the Qur’ān, the immense corpus of hadīth continues to exercise a decisive influence. It has become a source of law and religious inspiration. Islamic scholarship has devoted tremendous efforts to gathering and classifying the hadīths and distinguishing the authentic from the false ones. While the motives of Muslim scholars to study hadīth have been decisively motivated by the central role played by hadīths as the source of their law and theological doctrine, the interests of modern Western scholars in the study of hadīth literatures have essentially been historical. Similarly, when they study Islamic law, for example, they tend to approach it as a mode of thought rather than as a body of rights, obligations and rules of procedure. In other words, they are not lawyers

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2 Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfī`ī, Kita`b al-Risāla, ed. ʿAbd al-Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1358/1940, p. 84.; Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Zāhw, al-Ḥadīth wa-ʾl-Muḥadithūn, Cairo, 1957/1378, p. 11. There is a discussion about whether the sunna should be classified as ilbām rather than wāḥy. See William A. Graham, Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special References to the Divine Saying or Ḥadīth Qudsi, The Hague, 1977, p. 35.

3 The major collections are: Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Bukhārī (d. 256 A.H.), al-Šāhīḥ, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261), al-Šaḥīḥ; Abu Dāwūd (d. 275), Kitāb al-Sunan; al-Tirmidhī (d. 279), Sunan, al-Nasāʾī (d.303), Kitāb al-Sunan; Ibn Māja (d.273), Kitāb al-Sunan; al-Dārimī (d. 225), Kitāb al-Sunan.
but students of culture.

One of the problems of Islamic ḥadīth literatures is that their texts were codified much later than the events they narrate. This fact leads to the issue of the missing link between ḥadīth literatures and the events they describe. Historical questions must be asked: To what extent does our ḥadīth literature reflect the actual events it narrates? Does ḥadīth literature provide really transmitted ḥadīths or are these ḥadīths nothing but reflections of interests, which evolved in early Islam? To put it in more technical terms: Do the matns of ḥadīths reflect the actual words of the Prophet or Companions, or do they constitute a verbalization of what, much later, came to be realized as being Prophetic sunna? Do the isnads attached in ḥadīth literature to guarantee the authenticity of the matns represent the genuine lines of transmission, or do they constitute forgeries intended to legitimize statements first circulated at a later time? Does the occurrence of a certain ḥadīth in the canonical collections prove the historicity of its ascription to the Prophet, which would make further research superfluous?

By virtue of the fact that the answer of the above questions needs or deserves more spaces than we have here, it is not possible to deal exhaustively with any of the above question. However, in the brief discussion, an effort has been made to highlight a small part of the questions, i.e., how reliable the methods for determining the authenticity of ḥadīth are.

B. Western Scholarship of Ḥadīth

Since the 19th century, questions about the authenticity, originality, authorship, provenance and the correctness of ḥadīth have appeared, and they have become of central importance to the study of Islam, especially to those concerned with Islamic law. Gustav Weil, for example, suggested that a European critic is required to reject at least half of al-Bukhārī’s sahīḥ5. The first serious challenges to the authenticity of Muslim ḥadīth literature by Western scholars began with

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Alois Sprenger, who expressed his skepticism about the reliability of hadith as a historical source. This attitude was followed by William Muir, who also maintained a critical attitude toward the authenticity of hadith. European scholarship of hadith culminated in the work of Ignaz Goldziher, whose work was unquestionably the most important critique of hadith in the nineteenth-century. Goldziher was the first scholar to subject the hadith to a systematic historical and critical study. Instead of considering hadith as reliable sources for the rise of Islam, he regard it as invaluable source for the beliefs, conflicts and concerns of the generations of Muslims who came after and put the hadith into circulation. As he himself put it:

"Das Ḥadīth wird uns nicht als Dokument für die Kindheitsgeschichte des Islam, sondern als Abdruck der in der Gemeinde hervortretenden Bestrebungen aus der Zeit seiner reiferen Entwicklungstadien dienen; es bietet uns ein unschätzbares Material von Zeugnissen für Entwicklungsgang, den der Islam während jener Zeiten durchmacht, in welchen er auseinander widerstreben den Kraften, aus mächtigen Gegensätzen sich zu systematischer Abrundung herausformt."

Goldziher’s skepticism was adopted by Leone Caetani and Henri Lammens who were of the opinion that almost all the traditions about the Prophet’s life were apocryphal. Other scholars who refused hadith as authentic materials for the historical reconstruction of the time of 

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9 Ignaz, Goldziher, Muhammedanische Studien, II, p. 5.


the Prophet and the first Islamic century are John Wansbrough and Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. Although in Western scholarship Goldziher's *Muhammedanische Studien* was considered to be the first milestone among Western efforts to depict the history of *ḥadīth*, he met with criticism from Muslim scholars. In western scholarship, Goldziher’s book, published in 1890, was not followed by similar studies and remained unrevised in any significant way until Joseph Schacht’s *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* appeared in 1950. Schacht dealt especially with legal tradition and their development. His thesis that *isnād* have a tendency to grow backwards and his “common link theory” have influenced the Western scholars who came after him. Like Goldziher, he assumed that few if any *ḥadīth* originated with the Prophet. He believed, however, that it was possible by careful study to arrive at a rough estimate of when a particular *ḥadīth* was put into circulation. Schacht’s approach has been adopted by J. van Ess and has been revived in a large scale by G. H. A. Juynboll, even though he differs from Schacht in several significant points. This is reflected in Juynboll’s method of dating a *ḥadīth* by invariably posing three questions: Where a certain *ḥadīth* originated, at what time a certain *ḥadīth* originated and who may be held responsible for bringing a certain *ḥadīth* into circulation. By posing the three questions, in his view, the problems of chronology, provenance and authorship of a certain *ḥadīth*

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17 G. H. A. Juynboll, "Some isnād analytical method illustrated on the basis of several women - demeaning sayings from Ḥadīth literature" in: *al-Qantara: Revista de estudos arabes*, 10 (1989), pp. 343-383; repr. in *Studies on the Origins...; Muslim Tradition,...*
can be assessed. Juynboll’s method of dating a certain *ḥadīth* by analysing the *isnād* of a single tradition has become a powerful tool of research. Both Schacht and Juynboll are of the opinion that the common link is the fabricator of *ḥadīth*. Schacht’s and Juynboll’s method of dating a *ḥadīth* by analysing the *isnād* has been subjected to criticism. Perhaps the most significant challenges to their conclusions may be found in Harald Motzki’s works. Unlike Schacht and Juynboll, Motzki is inclined to regard the common links not as the fabricators of *ḥadīths* as Schacht and Juynboll do, but rather as the first systematic collectors of traditions who transmitted the *ḥadīths* in regular classes of students out of which an institutionalized system of learning developed. Opposition to Schacht’s and Goldziher’s assumptions about the *ḥadīths* may also be found in the works of M. Sibā’, N. Abbott, M. M. Azami and F. Sezgin. They argue for an early and continuous practice of writing down *ḥadīth* in Islam. In their opinion the Companions of the Prophet kept written records of *ḥadīth*, and most of these *ahādīth* were transmitted in written form until the time they were compiled in the canonical collections. Motzki and Schoeler have also pointed out, what Schacht and Juynboll denied that some *ḥadīths* can be dated to

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the first century. However, whether or not they can be ascribed to the Prophet, has not been proved.\(^{23}\)

C. The Reliability of 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth

The fact that there were unreliable ḥadīths beside reliable ones was not only and first realized by Western scholars. Muslim scholars were already aware of it at the end of the first century A.H. or even earlier. It can be assumed that the corpus of ḥadīth, which developed in the first century,\(^{24}\) was a mixture of both reliable and unreliable ḥadīth. As a response to this, early Muslims created a system of evaluating the ḥadīth so that the true and the false might be distinguished.\(^{25}\) The classical science of ḥadīth criticism consisted of three branches. The first dealt with the Ṱīwāyāt, i.e. investigated the chains of transmission to establish the continuity of their constituent links. The continuity of the ḵismāds was evaluated for missing or unknown muḥaddiths or for stopping at a Companion or Successor and not going back to the Prophet. The second branch was concerned with asmā’ al-rijāl, i.e. provided biographical information on the Ṱuwaṭ (transmitters) of ḥadīth as a basis for judgments of their reliability. The attention focused on the date and place of birth, familial connections, teachers, students, journeys, moral behavior, religious beliefs, literary output, and date of death. This allowed the determination not only of their reliability but also the contemporaneity and geographical proximity of the transmitters. This helped to determine whether or not the transmitters could have

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\(^{24}\) See note 23.

\(^{25}\) The most famous of the early ones being al-Risla by al-Shīfī (204), al-Muḥaddith al-Fūṣil bayna’l-Rāwi wa-l-Wāq by al-Rāmahurmuzī (d. 360), Ma’rifah ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth by al-Ḥakim al-Naysabūrī (d. 405), al-Kifāya fi Qawānin al-Riwa’ā and al-Ṣāmi’ li’dāb al-Rāwi wa-Akhlaq al-Sāmī both by al-Kaḥib al-Baghdādi (d. 463), ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245).
come in contact with each other. The third branch of Muslim hadith criticism considered the content of a hadith i.e. whether or not it was in accordance with the Qur’an and with hadiths that were considered reliable.

The methods of the muhaddithūn, however, have been subjected to criticism. The objection to their reliability in ascertaining the authenticity of hadith came even from Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) was of the opinion that when traditionists scrutinized religious accounts, they based their judgment only on the bearer of the information. If they were trustworthy, then the information they transmitted was automatically considered to be authentic. Ibn Khaldūn, therefore, believes that the scrutiny of hadith that has been done by traditionists is restricted to the scrutiny of isnād alone. The Egyptian writer, Āḥmad Amin (d. 1373/1954) seems to agree with Ibn Khaldūn. He states that the traditionists when scrutinizing the hadith, paid more attention to the isnād than to the matn. Abū Rayya argues that the muhaddithūn were concerned only with the continuity of the transmission and the character of the transmitters, and they completely ignored the essential content of traditions and they failed to look at the historical evidence. These views of Ibn Khaldūn, Āḥmad Amin and Abū Rayya have been refuted by Muṣṭafā al-Sibā‘ī, Muḥammad Abū Shuhba and Nūr al-Dīn ‘Īṭr. They are of the opinion that the ‘ulamā of hadith did not neglect the matn at all. This can be seen in the criteria laid down by the traditionists in which it is stated that the hadith can be regarded to be authentic only if its sanad and matn are free from šādhdh (strange or isolated) and ‘illa.

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26 Biographical dictionaries contain an entry for each transmitter. One of the earlier examples of biographical dictionaries is al-Tāḥaqāt al-Kubrā of Muḥammad ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/844), which has some 4,300 entries.

27 Ibn Khaldūn, Muqaddima, p. 37.

28 Āḥmad Amin, Fajr al-Islām, p. 217-218; Ḍuḥā al-Islām, vol 2, pp. 130-134. Similar to the view of Abū Rayya is that of ‘Abd al-Mun‘īm al-Bāhī. He maintains that the scrutiny of the matn is only considered by the traditionists. This view quoted by Nūr al-Dīn ‘Īṭr in al-Madkhal īlā ‘Uṣūm al-Ḥadīth, p. 14.

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... (sickness i.e. any consideration which impairs the ṣīḥa or ‘soundness’ of any ḥadīth).

This controversy reminds us of the fact that the issue of the reliability and historicity of the ḥadīth is far from being resolved. Although al-Bukhārī’s (d. 256) and Muslim’s (d. 261) Sahīhs are regarded as the most reliable works of ḥadīth, nowhere have they directly mentioned the criteria they applied to test the authenticity of ḥadīth. Later scholars, however, have tried to infer al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s requirements for authentic ḥadīth. It was inferred that the requirements by both of them are the same to a large extent. But to some extent they are different. The conditions they have in common are as follows.

1. The chain of transmission from the first transmitter to the last one must be uninterrupted (an yakūn al-ḥadīth muttaṣīl al-insād).
2. The transmitters must be well known for their thiqa, i.e., ‘adl (righteous conduct) and ḍabṭ (high literary accuracy) from the first tier to the last one (bi-naql al-thiqa ‘an thiqa min awwalih ila muntahāhu).
3. The transmitted ḥadīth must be free from ‘illa (defect) and shudhūd (irregularness) (ṣaḥīman min al-shudhūd wa’l-‘illa). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ said that if these condition are met by a particular ḥadīth, then it would be considered authentic by the traditionists (ahl al-ḥadīth) without any disagreement.

The essential difference of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s requirements for authentic ḥadīth lies in the continuity of the chain of transmission, i.e., the necessity for establishing a meeting between two
transmitters. Al-Bukhārī held that a tradition cannot be accepted unless it is known that the transmitter encountered the man whose authority he quotes, even if they met only once (lā budda min ṭubūt al-liqā’). The proof of being contemporaries (mu‘āšara) alone is considered insufficient by al-Bukhārī. Muslim, however, did not require the proof of meeting between them. The proof of being contemporaries is, in his view, enough.³⁴ In other words, if a non-mudallis transmitter relates a ḥadīth with a word indicating direct contact (samā’), such as akhbāranā, anba’anā, samī’tu, etc, both al-Bukhārī and Muslim alike accept the ḥadīth. But in the case that a non-mudallis transmitter relates a ḥadīth from a transmitter with a word which might imply both samā’ (direct contact) and indirect transmission, such as ‘an fūlān, etc, then al-Bukhārī and Muslim hold different opinions. While al-Bukhārī requires that the transmitter encounter the informant from whom he transmitted the ḥadīth (‘an’āna) even though only once, Muslim is content with their being contemporaries and only the probability of encounter. As to the transmission of a mudallis with the term ‘an both al-Bukhārī and Muslim reject it if the mudallis’ hearing of the ḥadīth in question is not clear to them. In such a case, both al-Bukhārī and Muslim require the proof of hearing (ṭubūt al-samā’) for each ḥadīth transmitted by a mudallis. Accordingly, if they provide an isnād of ‘an’ānat mudallis they give an additional isnād in order to remove the possibility of tadlīs.³⁵ Yet the fact that there are, as will be shown, a large number of ḥadīths, found in the Sahīhs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim which were related by allegedly mudallis transmitters, and using the word ‘an, one may wonder how consistent al-Bukhārī and Muslim were in the application of their alleged method. Based on the investigation of the 194 ḥadīths transmitted by Abū al-Zubayr from Jābir found in Muslim’s Sahīh and 43 ḥadīths transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī from different companions found in the Sahīhs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, I argue that for both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the terminology of transmission used by the first

century scholars was not a decisive criterion to determine the reliability of a particular ḥadīth.

Later traditionists such as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774) Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and others have given definitions of ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ (reliable ḥadīth). Their definitions, although differently worded, essentially represent what al-Bukhārī and Muslim have allegedly adopted. They can be summarized as follows: (1) Continuity of transmission (2) all transmitters in the isnād must be ‘ādl (3) all transmitters must be ḍābit (4) isnād and the matn must be free from shudhūdh (5) isnād and matn must be free from ‘illa.36 These requirements will be critically elaborated in the following section.

1. The Continuity of Transmission

It has been stated above that the continuity of transmission is one of the principal requirements for a ḥadīth to be regarded as reliable. The continuity of the chain of transmission means that all transmitters in the chain from the first tier (compiler) to the last one (Companion) have transmitted the ḥadīth in a reliable manner in the light of tahammul wa-ada’ al-ḥadīth, i.e., each transmitter in the chain transmitted the given ḥadīth directly from the preceding transmitter, and all transmitters in the chain are thiqa, i.e., ‘ādl and ḍābit.

To know whether there is continuity of transmission, the biography of each transmitter required careful scrutiny. This scrutiny focused on the transmitter’s date and place of birth and his date and place of death. His behavior and religious belief had also to be evaluated very carefully. This information allegedly helped the critical scholars not only in their attempt to establish the thiqa (reliability) of transmitters, but also to ascertain the probability or improbability of transmitters having come in contact with their informants. With regard to the relation of respective transmitters, the examination of words

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connecting the transmitter with their preceding authority were extremely important, because the words used by the transmitters are thought to imply how the given hadith was transmitted. The words often used were sami’tu, ḥaddathani, ḥaddatanā, akbbaranī akbbaranā, ‘an, anno and so on. These words allegedly implied different meanings, which reflected the various possible relationships between the transmitter and his preceding informant.

In order to be able to grasp any information on transmitters, sources containing biographical information had to be available. One may wonder whether such sources existed when the hadiths were critically collected. Such early books as al-ʿIlal of ʿAlī al-Madīnī (d. 234/848), Kitāb al-ʿIlal wa-Maʿrījat al-Riṣāl of ʿĀhmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241) Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr by Ibn Saʿīd (d. 230/844), Tarīkh al-Kabīr of al-Bukhārī (d. 256) may answer this question. Moreover, the appearance of some early critical hadith experts like Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjaj (d. 160/777), Yahyā b. Saʿīd al-Qattān (d. 198/813), Yaḥyā Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/847), ʿĀlī Ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/848), al-Ḥusayn b. ʿĀlī al-Karābīṣī (d. 245/859), al-Juḍjānī (d. 256/870), al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870, Abū Hātim (d. 277/890), Yaʿqūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890) 40, may well suggest that the beginning of hadith criticism were made before the hadiths were collected into corpora claiming to contain only reliable traditions. Another question, which has to be answered, is whether the information on the transmitters available in the biographical dictionaries enabled collectors like al-Bukhārī and Muslim to form a clear judgment about the transmitters’ characters and qualities? As some studies have shown the information of the biographical dictionaries enables us to grasp some further information on the transmitters, and reference to it is indispensable for historical reconstruction. Some of their information, however, need to be reconstructed and must be approached critically.

37 Although this book does not specifically deal with al-jarḥ waʾl-taʿlīḥ, it is considered to be a reliable source of riḍāl al-hadīth, see Maḥmūd al-Ṭahḥān, Usūl al-Tahkīf wa-Dirāsat al-Asānīd, p. 153.
38 Ibn Ḥajar, Tāḥdīḥ, iv, p. 345; Cf. Juynboll, Muslim Tradition, p. 20.
40 For some other names see Juynboll, Muslim Tradition, Appendix IV.
In addition to the continuity of transmission, the reliability (thiqa) of a transmitter is an absolute requirement for an uninterrupted ḥadīth. To be reliable, one must first be ‘ādil, i.e. of righteous conduct. In other words, the transmitter’s character must be acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The ‘ādil transmitter must not have committed a grave sin nor have been prone to commit minor sins. The scholars of ḥadīth have further specified the requirements for those to be called ‘ādil. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī mentions five conditions i.e. fear of God (taqwā), morally well behaved (muruʿa), freedom from guilt for major sins, not performing bidʿa, not being fāsiq. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ has mentioned five conditions as well: Muslim, adult (bāligh), sane (ʿaqil), behaving morally (muruʿa), not being fāsiq. Thus, ‘adāla is a gift that always keeps someone behaving piously and invariably prevents him from having a bad character. Subsequently, it leads someone be able to tell the truth.

One may wonder, however, whether this quality of ‘adl actually prevents someone from making mistakes by the grace of God, because mistakes are not necessarily made consciously.

The transmitter must also be dābit, i.e. having high literary accuracy as transmitter. To determine the accuracy of the transmitters, the mnḥaddithūn used at least two methods: consulting the scholars’ judgments about a transmitter and comparing his transmission with other transmissions. These methods are reflected in the statements ascribed to early scholars. Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, a late successor (68-131) is reported to have said for example: ”if you wish to know the mistakes of your teacher, then you ought to study with others as well.”

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44 Ibn al-Salāḥ, Uloom al-ḥadīth, p. 4. See also, Syuhudi Ismail, Kaedah Kesahihan Sanad Hadis, p. 115.
45 Muḥammad Qāsim al-ʿUmarī, Dirāsat fi manḥaj al-naqd ʿinda l-mnḥaddithūn, Yordan 2000, p. 250.
“To reach an authentic statement concerning authenticity of tradition, one needs to compare the words of scholars with each other”\textsuperscript{46}. This method of comparing the report of a transmitter with those of others can be found in the basic handbook of classical Islamic hadith criticism, in Ibn al-Salāḥ’s \textit{Muqaddima}. He says:

“Whether or not the narrator is accurate can be ascertained by comparing his material with the narration of sound narrators (thiqāt) who are well-known for their control of their material and their thoroughness. If (1) we find his narration to be in accordance with their narration, even if only in content or (2) we find that his narrations are usually in accordance with their narrations and that he rarely differs from them, then we will know that he is in control of his material and is reliable (dābit). But if we find that he often differs from the sound narrators we will know that he is not reliable and we will not use his hadith as basis for argumentation. God knows best”.\textsuperscript{47}

By this method of comparison, the muḥaddithūn were allegedly not easily misled by seemingly sound isnāds. Al-Ḥākim (d. 405/1014) in his \textit{Ma’rifa ‘Ulum al-Ḥadīth} quoted an isnād whose men are all trustworthy, but pointed out that the hadith attached contained inaccuracies. He quoted the isnād Mālik from al-Zuhrī from ‘Urwā from ‘Ā’isha, and said it was false as far as Mālik’s tradition is concerned, although it was handed down by imāms and trustworthy persons. He argued that what is sound is known not only by its transmission, but also by understanding, learning by heart and hearing a great deal. He also argues that other hadiths with seemingly sound isnāds can be accepted as free from defect only after discussion with people who have knowledge of the subject\textsuperscript{48}. In the following an example of hadith criticism is given in which a comparison is made between the hadiths of different students of one scholar:

Ibn Mā’in (d. 233) went to ‘Affān, a pupil of the great scholar Ḥammād b. Salama, to read the books of Ḥammād to him. ‘Affān asked him whether or not he had read those books to any other students of

\textsuperscript{46} Azami, \textit{Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature}, p. 52

\textsuperscript{47} In ‘Abd Raḥim b. Husayn al-‘Iraqī’s (d. 805) \textit{al-Ṭaqyīd wa-sharḥ muqaddimah Ibn al-Salāḥ}, al-Maktaba al-salafiyya, 1996, p. 166

\textsuperscript{48} Cf. James Robson, \textit{The Isnād}, p. 25
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Upon which Ibn Maʿin replied: ‘I have read those books to seventeen students of Ḥammād before coming to you’. ‘Affān said: ‘By Allah I am not going to read these books to you’. Ibn Maʿin answered that by spending a few dirhām he would go to Baṣra and read them there to the students of Ḥammād. He went to Baṣra to Mūsā b. Ismāʿīl, another pupil of Ḥammād. Mūsā asked him ‘Have you not read these books to anybody else? He said I have read them completely to seventeen students of Ḥammād and you are the eighteenth one’. Mūsā asked him what he was going to do with all those readings. Ibn Maʿin replied: Ḥammād b. Salamah made mistakes and his students added some more mistakes to his. So I want to distinguish between the mistakes of Ḥammād and those of his students. If I find all the students of Ḥammād making the same mistake, then the source of mistake is Ḥammād. If I find the majority of Ḥammād’s students say something, and some of them say something else, then this mistake was committed by that particular student of Ḥammād. In this way I make a distinction between the mistakes of Ḥammād and those of his students.49 It is evident that by his method of comparison Ibn Maʿin could indeed discover the mistakes of, and to assess the accuracy of, both Ḥammād and his students.50

On the other hand, in practice the ḍabt of a transmitter has been mostly determined on the basis of the judgments of scholars. This procedure faces the problem that the judgments of scholars on a

49 Azami, Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology, pp. 52-53.
50 A similarly method was applied by Iftikhar Zaman. He has succeeded in showing the possibilities of reaching judgments regarding the transmitters of a certain text by scrutinising the variations of the text which are transmitted through different transmitters. To corroborate his theory he has analysed the ḥadīth regarding the Prophet’s visiting Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ while the latter was ill. After analyzing the variant versions of the ḥadīth, he argued (1) ”The significance of the mass of the textual material known as ḥadīth is best understood and explained in the light of such a science of rijāl (2) Evaluating the factual contents of ḥadīth with the use of such a science will lead to results which are much more reliable than any of the methods modern scholars have proposed for the study of ḥadīth”. See Iftikhar Zaman ”The science of Rijāl as a method in the Study of Ḥadīth” in Journal of Islamic Studies 5:1 (1994) p. 1. The same method has been used by H. Motzki in his works ”Der Fiqh des Zuhri”, ”Qua vadis”, ”The Prophet and the Cat”, ”The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuṣayqī”.

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transmitter often differ. Some scholars, in judging the transmitters, are *mutashaddid* (having a stern viewpoint), some are *mutasābil* (lenient) and some others are *mutawassit* (in the middle). These different attitudes of scholars led to different judgments. The diversity of scholars’ knowledge on a particular narrator led also to the variety of judgments.

According to some a transmitter may be *thiqā*, but according to others he may not.

Furthermore, we may wonder how early the method of comparing transmitters’ narrations to determine their accuracy was used and whether it was applied on a large scale. Are the *ḥadīth* collections the result of applying this method? Was the statement ascribed to Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181)\(^ {51}\), an early Muslim scholar of *ḥadīth*, stating “To reach an authentic statement concerning the authenticity of tradition, one needs to compare the words of scholars with other’s” always adopted in early Islam? Was it merely the opinion of a single scholar or a norm generally hold? Was the method, which was adopted by Ibn Ma‘īn, generally practiced in early Islam? These questions lead us to a problematic and controversial issue of research. It seems difficult to imagine that the *ḥadīth* literature, i.e., the classical collections, are the result of such a systematical procedure. Had scholars of *ḥadīth* applied the system consistently from the beginning, many inauthentic *ḥadīth* s had not found their way into the *ḥadīth* collections. Accordingly, it seems justified to ask whether the classical rules of ‘*uḷūm al-ḥadīth* were applied generally and consistently before this ”science” was established.

Azami is of the opinion that the method of Ibn Ma‘īn was practiced from the beginning of Islam. To corroborate his claim, Azami puts forward some examples. Abū Bakr, ‘Umar b. Khāṭṭāb, Abū Hurayrah and ‘ʾisha, according to Azami, practiced the method\(^ {52}\). It should be stated, however, that what Abū Bakr and other Companions did to compare the transmission is different from that of Ibn Ma‘īn. Ibn Ma‘īn tried to reconstruct the original text of a *muḥaddith*, which had been transmitted through the latter’s students. He did it

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\(^{52}\) Azami, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, pp. 53-55.
systematically by collating and comparing as far as possible the transmission of students, whereas Abū Bakr and other Companions tried to find out the truth of an assertion in an *ad hoc* manner. It was not a systematic procedure of *ḥadīth* criticism in the way that Ibn Ma'īn did. This might have also been done by everyone else in the same situation. This procedure to find out the truth by asking witnesses was used by the judge. So, Azmi’s claim that both methods are the same kind needs to be reconsidered. It is probably justified to assume that the practice of comparing one transmission with others was inspired very early on, but Ibn Ma'īn’s method as a systematic procedure of *ḥadīth* criticism was probably only applied in the second century of Islam. The *ḥadīth* collections do not seem to allow us to be sure, that this method was strictly and generally practiced in early Islam. Had the method been applied consistently, there would have been no forgery and contradictory transmission in *ḥadīth* literature. Whether or not the compilers of the allegedly authentic *ḥadīth* collections have applied Ibn Ma'īn’s method can only be tested by a critical investigation of the collections.

With regard to the scrutiny of the narrators’ characters and qualities a number of sources have become available. These books, however, were written later than the persons they describe. Again, we encounter an epistemological problem. To what extent can we lay credence on the information available in the biographical dictionaries (*kutub al-rija’il*)? This question has been answered in different ways. The majority of Muslim scholars regard the books as historical sources, while most Western scholars reject them or are, at best, skeptical about them. Those who reject those sources as not providing historical facts distrust the capacity of the authors of the biographical reports and their collections to judge the character of the *ḥadīth* transmitters. These biographical sources are, in their opinion, subject to weaknesses and

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53 *Al-Ṭabaqaṭ al-kubra* by Ibn Sa'd, (d. 230), *Tarīkh al-kabīr* by al-Bukhārī (d. 256), *Al-jarh wa-l-ta'dil* by Ibn Abī Hātim (d. 327), *Usd al-ghabaṭ fi ma'rifat al-sāḥāba* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630), *Tahdhib al-kamāl* by al-Mizzi (d. 742), *Tadhkirat al-huffaẓ* and *Siyar a'lam al-nubalā‘* by al-Dhahabī (d. 748), *Al-Isāba fi tamyiẓ al-sāḥāba, Tahdhib al-tahdhib* by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. ?), to name only the most important.
corruption. How is it possible to ascertain the reliability of hadīths on the basis of transmitters whose reliability is uncertain? They even argue that although the muḥaddithūn did their best to get all the relevant information, they could not be sure of what they did, for it is not easy to judge people who have been dead for a long time. Therefore ‘ilm al-rijāl, in their opinion, is only an approximate science.

2. Free from shudhūd

A shādhdh (irregular) hadīth according to al-Shāfī is a hadīth which is transmitted by a trustworthy transmitter, but contradicts the narration of the people who are regarded as more reliable than him. A hadīth transmitted by only one reliable transmitter and not confirmed by any other transmitters cannot be seen as shādhdh. In other words, the absolute singleness of transmission (fard muṭlaq) does not affect the reliability of a hadīth as long as it has been transmitted by a reliable transmitter. In the light of this definition, the well-known hadīth, “actions are (judged) according to their intentions”, is not considered shādhdh, despite the fact that it was related by only one transmitter at each stage: Yahyā b. Saʿīd from Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Taymī from ‘Alqama from ‘Umar, all of whom are trustworthy authorities. A hadīth is considered to be shādhdh when (1) all of its transmitters are reliable (thiqa), (2) it has more than one transmitter, but (3) its matn or its sanad contradicts other transmissions, which are considered more reliable.

55 Ahmad Khan, Maqālat, I, 27-28, quoted by Daniel W. Brown, Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought, p. 97.
57 If a narration that goes against another authentic hadīth is reported by a weak narrator, it is known as munkar (denounced).
59 If a particular hadīth is solely transmitted by abl Makka, or only by abl Madīna, or exclusively by abl Baṣra or Kūfah or by other centre and not transmitted by any other centres, this kind of transmission is called fard nisbī. See al-Suyūṭī, I, pp. 248-251.
60 Syuhudi Ismail, Kaedah Kesahihan Hadis, p. 123.
Al-Ḥākim is stricter in this regard. A ṣḥāḥ ḥadīth in his view is that which is reported by only one reliable transmitter, without being confirmed by any other reliable transmitters. In other words, the absolute singleness of transmitter (fard muṭlaq), no matter how reliable he is, causes a certain ḥadīth to have the status of ṣḥāḥ. Ibn al-Salāḥ, al-Nawawī and other later scholars are in agreement with al-Shāfī’. If al-Ḥākim’s view is adopted, many ḥadīths that have been considered by the majority of traditionists to be ṣaḥīḥ might turn out to be not ṣaḥīḥ, because, as Juynboll has rightly pointed out, the general feature of ḥadīth literature is that ḥadīth was generally transmitted by single persons in the generations of the Companions and Successors. It was only after these generations that ḥadīth was massively transmitted. This is not to say, however, that nowhere in ḥadīth collections can we find a ḥadīth that was transmitted on a large scale in the generation of Companion and Successors. Indeed, it is not difficult to find such a ḥadīth. Yet the fact that ḥadīth was allegedly transmitted by a large number of people belonging to the generation of the Companions does not necessarily mean that its ascriptions to the Prophet is trustworthy. It is necessary to investigate whether the ascription of transmitters from the last transmitter (collector) to the earliest one (Companion) are historical. I do not argue against the possibility that later generations mistakenly ascribed ḥadīths to certain Companions or purposely invented them. I only argue against the total rejection of the possibility that there are ḥadīths which go back to Companions. In other words, the claim of each transmitter to have received a particular ḥadīth from his informant must be investigated to establish whether or not it is true. Yet, like many scholars, I argue that if there is conclusive evidence that a particular ḥadīth goes back to two or more Companions and the latter claim to have received the ḥadīth from the Prophet, then their ascription must be regarded as trustworthy.

63 Syuhūdī Ismail, Kaadab Kesahiban Sanad Hadīth, p. 124.
If the view of al-Shāfī‘ī is preferred, we encounter the question of how much we can trust the transmission line of a single transmitter. This question is closely related to the issue of how we can assess, with some degrees of certainty, the reliability of a transmitter, which has been explained above. In Western scholarship this kind of transmission is known as "single strand," and its historical reliability is debated. Juynboll rejected the historicity of such a transmission. In his view, it is historically improbable to imagine that in early Islam a certain transmitter gave his ṣaḥīḥs to just one pupil to be copied, and the latter passed them on similarly to just one pupil to be copied and the last mentioned passed them on to another single pupil to be copied again in the same fashion, because in early Islam, according to Juynboll, ṣaḥīḥs are described as going from hand to hand, even if there was no formal master-pupil relationship between the original compiler and later transmitters. Motzki interprets the phenomenon of single strands differently. A single strand, in his view, does not necessarily mean that it was the only way, through which the ḥadīth was transmitted. Single strand exclusively means that when spreading ḥadīths, common links or collectors mentioned only one way of transmission. This difference of interpretation will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

The traditionists admitted the difficulties of detecting ṣḥadūtb ḥadīths. This is because the transmitters of an irregular ḥadīth are considered reliable by scholars of ḥadīth, and the transmission seems to be uninterrupted. It can only be discovered after research in depth by, for example, comparing many isnāds and matns of related ḥadīths. Only those who are well-trained and well-versed in the scrutinizing of ḥadīths can detect ṣḥadūtb ḥadīths.

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64 This term is coined by Juynboll.
65 The meaning of this term and how it works will be elaborated in the next chapter.
66 Harald Motzki, "Quo vadis, Ḥadīth Forschung?", pp. 45-46.
67 See the following discussion on the concept of „common link“.
3. Free from ʿIlā.

A maʿlūl ḥadīth (defective ḥadīth) is one that appears to be sound at first sight, but when studied more carefully a disqualifying factor becomes obvious. Such factors can be: (1) declaring a ḥadīth musnad when it is in fact mursal, or marjū when it is in fact mauquf; (2) that a transmitter narrated a ḥadīth from a shaykh (teacher) when in fact he did not meet the latter; or attributing a ḥadīth to a certain Companion when in fact it comes from another Companion. This defect can happen not only to the isnād but also to the matn. Only those who are well versed, having excellent memories and are expert of isnāds and matns can distinguish defective ḥadīths from reliable ones. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī (d. 194) even said that in order to be able to reveal a maʿlūl ḥadīth, one needs intuition (iḥlām). Ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234) and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463) said that a defect in the isnād can only be revealed if all isnāds of a particular ḥadīth are collated and analyzed. Being a very complicated branch of muṣtaḥāl al-ḥadīth, only a few scholars such as Ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234), Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327), al-Khallaṣ (d. 311) and Dāruqǔṭnī (d. 385) have compiled books about it. Based on the above explanation, it may be justified to say that it is not safe to judge transmitters as reliable or unreliable before checking what they transmit. The judgment, whether or not the transmitter of a particular ḥadīth is reliable, which is solely based on scholars’ judgment without checking it, leads potentially certain sound...

68 A ḥadīth which a traditionist reports from his teacher from whom he is known to have heard (ḥadīths) at a time of life suitable for learning, and similarly in turn for each shaykh (teacher), until the isnād reaches a well-known Companion, who in turn reports from the Prophet, see al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, Cairo 1937, p. 17.
69 “Hurried”, i.e., when a Successor says ”The Prophet said...”
70 A narration from the Prophet
71 A narration from a Companion only.
74 Al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, p. 113; al-Suyūṭī, Tadrīb al-rāwī, I, p. 252.
hadīths to be considered as defective hadīths when scrutinized more thoroughly or vice versa.

A hadīth that does not meet the above mentioned requirements cannot be regarded as reliable hadīth, and cannot have religious authority.76

D. Some Points to be Reconsidered

If we have a look on the criteria for determining the authenticity of hadīth coined by Muslim scholars, an intriguing question appears: On what grounds are the criteria based? Did they develop speculatively or were they based on a critical evaluation of hadīth transmission itself? According to the "science of hadīth" there were eight forms of transmitting hadīth: (1) Sama‘, i.e., the student attends the lectures of a traditionist, which may take the form of a simple narration of the traditions, or be accompanied by their dictation, either from memory or from a book. The terminology to be used in this kind of transmission was sami‘tu, ḥaddathani, akhbaranā, or anba’anā. (2) Qira‘a, i.e., the student reads to the traditionists the traditions which have been narrated or compiled by the latter. The terminology to be used were akhbaranī or qara’tu ‘alā. (3) Ijāza. That is, to obtain the permission of a scholar to narrate to others the traditions compiled by him. The terminology to be used in this case was akhbaranī or ajāzānī. (4) Munāwala. That is,

76 The final verdict on a hadīth is whether it is sāḥīḥ (reliable), ḥasan (good), ḍa‘īf (weak) or maudū‘ (fabricated, forged). Ibn al-Salāḥ classifies ḥasan hadīths in two categories: (1) One with an isnād containing a reporter who is mastur (“screened”, i.e., no prominent person reported from him) but is not totally careless in his reporting, provided that a similar text is reported through another isnād as well (2) One with an isnād containing a reporter who is known to be truthful and reliable, but is of lesser degree in his memory of hadīth in comparison to the reporters of sāḥīḥ hadīths. In both categories Ibn al-Salāḥ requires that the hadīth be free of any shudhūḍ (Ibn al-Salāḥ, ‘Ulūm al-hadīth, p. 27-28). A hadīth ḍa‘īf is one of discontinuity in the isnād, in which case the hadīth could be mursal, mu‘allaq, mudallas, munqati‘ or mu‘dal. Maudū‘ (fabricated), is a hadīth whose text goes against the established norms of Prophet’s saying, or its reporters include a liar. It can also be recognized by external evidence related to a discrepancy found in the dates or times of a particular incident. The division of hadīths into sāḥīḥ, ḥasan and ḍa‘īf was first introduced by al-Tirmidhī (d. 279). This division was not known before him. See Ibn Taymiyya, ‘Ilm al-hadīth, Beirut 1985, p. 20.
to obtain the compilation of a tradition together with the compiler’s permission to transmit its content to others. The term to be used in this case was usually *akhbarani*. (5) *Mukatiba*. That is, to receive certain written traditions from a scholar, either in person or by correspondence, with or without his permission to narrate them to others. The term used in this kind of transmission was *kataba ilayya* or *min kitab*. (6) *I‘lam al-rāwī*, that is, the declaration of a traditionist to a student that he received certain specified traditions or books from a specified authority, without giving the student permission to transmit the material. The terms used were *akhbarani* or ‘an *(7) Waṣīya*, i.e., to obtain the works of a traditionist by his will at the time of his death. The terms used were *akhbarani waṣīyyatan ‘an or waṣṣāni. (8) Wijada*, i.e., to find certain traditions in a book, perhaps after a traditionist’s death, without receiving them with any recognized authority. The terms used were *wajadtu*, ”qāla”, ”ukhbirtu”, ”huddithtu”77

Nevertheless, these terminologies and their meanings are historically problematic, because, as some investigations have pointed out,78 it seems that in early Islam there was no fixed terminology for the different forms of transmission. In other words, the terms were sometimes used interchangeably.79 This may reduce the specific meanings of the terms. This does not mean, however, that these terms do not have any historical value. These terms have to be evaluated critically in every scrutiny of a particular *ḥadīth*. Furthermore, in imparting and receiving a particular *ḥadīth*, the transmitters might have used the terminology, which was usually used for *sama‘*, although they did not receive the *ḥadīth* in that way. This might have happened when


79 See also Harald Motzki, *Die Anfänge*, p. 92-95; Kamaruddin Amin, “al-Albani…”, p. 159-161
the transmitter was not reliable.\textsuperscript{80}

On account of the occurrence in the canonical collections of unreliable \textit{hadīth} and in the light of the above-mentioned criteria, one may wonder whether the criteria of the collectors of \textit{kutub al-hadīths} were exactly the same as the criteria by which those \textit{hadīths} are assessed by later scholars. In other words, the above mentioned criteria were developed later than the time when the \textit{kutub al-hadīths} were compiled. Moreover, a strict and consistent application of ‘\textit{ulu\m al-hadīth} to \textit{hadīth} collections may uncover a large number of unreliable \textit{hadīths}, which have hitherto been regarded by Muslim scholars as authentic. This fact may lead us to wonder whether the theoretical criteria reflect the earlier practice of \textit{hadīth} transmission and criticism.

\textsuperscript{80} For example see, Syuhudi Ismail, \textit{Kaedah Kesahihan Sanad Hadis}, p. 191-194
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