

THE RELIABILITY OF THE TRADITIONAL SCIENCE OF *HADĪTH*: A Critical Reconsideration

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المخلص

من بين الإشكاليات في دراسة الحديث هي وجود الحقيقة بأن تدوين الحديث حدث في فترة بعيدة عن الوقائع التي يضمنها الحديث. ويركز هذا البحث على الطرق التي استخدمت في تعيين أصالة الحديث وبهذا يمكن أن يستخدم هذا البحث للنظر في وضع مكانة الحديث في الدراسات الإسلامية.

ويستخدم هذا البحث طريقة الإسناد التي يدعمها طريقة المقارنة بين الغرب و الشرق كما يدعمها المؤلفات و المراجع من أهل الحديث شرقا وغربا. وفي الأخير يؤكد هذا البحث بأن المواصفات الأساسية في تعيين أصالة الحديث والتقييم النقدي للصيغ المعبرة عن الحديث شئ مهم للنظر في الإعتبار. ومهما يكن من أمر فإن تحقيق ذلك ليس أمرا سهلا وهكذا عما يتعلق بعلوم الحديث التي مازال هناك تساؤلات حول مناسبتها مع عملية الصياغة و النقد للأحاديث في العصر نفسه.

Abstrak

Satu hal yang begitu krusial dalam studi hadis adalah adanya fakta bahwa kodifikasi hadis dilakukan pada waktu yang cukup jauh dari peristiwa-peristiwa yang dinarasikannya. Untuk itu, tulisan ini memfokuskan pada metode-metode yang digunakan untuk menentukan keotentikan hadis. Dengan demikian, riset ini dapat menjadi pertimbangan untuk menempatkan hadis dalam studi Islam. Riset ini menggunakan pendekatan isnad yang didukung dengan metode komparatif, pendekatan Barat dan Timur. Metode ini diperkuat dengan karya-karya dan literatur-literatur para ahli hadis Barat dan Timur. Tulisan ini akhirnya menegaskan bahwa dasar-dasar kriteria dalam menentukan keotentikan

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: *ḥadīth*, reability, transmission, *shādh*, *‘illa*.

A. Introduction

The majority of Muslims believe that *ḥadīths* are the carrier and the vehicle of the *sunna* of the Prophet.¹ Indeed, they are indispensable guide to an understanding of the divine will.² As one of the sources of Islamic authority, which is only second in importance after the Qur’ān, the immense corpus of *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīths* and distinguishing the authentic from the false ones³. While the motives of Muslim scholars to study *ḥadīth* have been decisively motivated by the central role played by *ḥadīths* as the source of their law and theological doctrine, the interests of modern Western scholars in the study of *ḥadīth* 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

¹ H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, Oxford, 1949, pp. 74-5; Ahmad Hasan, "The *Sunna*, its Early Concept and Development", in *Islamic Studies*, (vol. 7, 1968), p. 48.

² Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1358/1940, p. 84; Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Zahw, *al-Ḥadīth wa’l-Muḥaddithūn*, Cairo, 1957/1378, p. 11. There is a discussion about whether the *sunna* should be classified as *ilhām* rather than *naby*. 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. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bukhārī (d. 256 A.H.), *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261), *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*; Abu Dāwūd (d. 275), *Kitāb al-Sunan*; al-Tirmidhī (d. 279), *Sunan*, al-Nasā‘ī (d.303), *Kitāb al-Sunan*; Ibn Māja (d.273), *Kitāb al-Sunan*; al-Dārimī (d. 225), *Kitāb al-Sunan*.

but students of culture⁴.

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 *isnāds* 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 *ṣaḥīḥ*⁵. The first serious challenges to the authenticity of Muslim *ḥadīth* literature by Western scholars began with

⁴ R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, Princeton, 1991, p. 209.

⁵ Gustav Weil, *Geschichte der Chalifen*, vol. 2. p. 291.

Alois Sprenger,⁶ who expressed his skepticism about the reliability of *ḥadīth* as a historical source. This attitude was followed by William Muir, who also maintained a critical attitude toward the authenticity of *ḥadīth*⁷. European scholarship of *ḥadīth* culminated in the work of Ignaz Goldziher, whose work was unquestionably the most important critique of *ḥadīth* in the nineteenth-century. Goldziher was the first scholar to subject the *ḥadīth* to a systematic historical and critical study⁸. Instead of considering *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth* 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 Entwicklungsstadien dienen; es bietet uns ein unschätzbares Material von Zeugnissen für Entwicklungsgang, den der Islam während jener Zeiten durchmacht, in welchen er auseinander widerstrebenden Kräften, aus mächtigen Gegensätzen sich zu systematischer Abrundung herausformt”*⁹

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 apocryphal¹⁰. Other scholars who refused *ḥadīth* as authentic materials for the historical reconstruction of the time of

⁶ Alois Sprenger, ”On the Origin and Progress of Writing Down Historical facts among the Musulmans,” *Journal and Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 25 (1856), pp. 303-329, 375-381; ”Die Sunna” in Alois Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, lxxvii-civ. Berlin, 1861-1865.

⁷ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and the History of Islam to the Era of Hegira*, 4 vols. London, 1861; reprint. Osnabruck, 1988. First serialised in *Calcutta Review* 19 (January-June, 1853).

⁸ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 2 vols. Leiden, 1889-1890. Trans. S. M. Stern as *Muslim Studies*, 2 vols. London, 1967.

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

¹⁰ L. Caetani, *Annali dell’Islam*, vol. 1, Milan, 1905, pp. 28-58, 121-43, 192-215 and passim; H. Lammens, ”Qoran et tradition. Comment fut composée la vie de Mahomet”, in: *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 1 (1910), pp. 27-51, quoted by Harald Motzki, *The Biography of Muḥammad: the Issue of the Sources*, Brill, 2000, p. xii.

¹¹ J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu, Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978.

the Prophet and the first Islamic century are John Wansbrough¹¹ and Patricia Crone and Michael Cook¹². 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 scholars¹³. 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.¹⁴ His thesis that *isnāds* 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 Ess¹⁵ and has been revived in a large scale by G. H. A. Juynboll, even though he differs from Schacht in several significant points¹⁶. 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 circulation¹⁷. By posing the three questions, in his view, the problems of chronology, provenance and authorship of a certain ḥadīth

¹² P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977.

¹³ Muṣṭafā. M. Azami, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature with a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts*, Beirut 1968. This book has been translated into Arabic with the title *Dirāsāt fī'l-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī wa'l-Tārīkh Tadwīnīh*, Beirut, 1968; Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, *al-Sunna wa-Makānatuhā fī'l-Tasbrī' al-Islāmī*, Cairo, 1961, pp. 365-420.

¹⁴ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, 1950.

¹⁵ Joseph van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatianischer berlieferung*, Berlin/New York, 1975.

¹⁶ G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth*, Cambridge, 1983; *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Ḥadīth*, 1996.

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 estudios 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*¹⁸. Schacht's and Juynboll's method of dating a *ḥadīth* by analysing the *isnād* has been subjected to criticism¹⁹. Perhaps the most significant challenges to their conclusions may be found in Harald Motzki's works²⁰. 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 developed²¹. Opposition to Schacht's and Goldziher's assumptions about the *ḥadīths* may also be found in the works of M. Sibā'ī, 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 *aḥādīth* were transmitted in written form until the time they were compiled in the canonical collections²². Motzki and Schoeler have also pointed out, what Schacht and Juynboll denied that some *ḥadīths* can be dated to

¹⁸ Schacht, *Origins*, pp. 171-172. Juynboll, "Some-*isnād* analytical methods"

¹⁹ Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma. A Source Critical Study*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 109-111 and "Eschatology and Dating of Traditions", in: *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* I (1992), pp. 23-47.

²⁰ Harald Motzki, "Quo vadis, *Ḥadīth* Forschung? Eine kritische Untersuchung von G. H. A. Juynboll: "Nafi", the *mawla* of Ibn 'Umar, and his Position in Muslim *ḥadīth* Literature" in: *Der Islam* 73 (1996) 40-80 und 193-229; "The *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-San'āni as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H. in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50/1 (1991), pp. 1-21 ; *Die Anfänge der Islamischen Jurisprudenz. Ihre Entwicklung in Mekka bis zur Mitte des 2./8 Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1991; 'Der Fiqh des Zuhri: die Quellenproblematik' in *Der Islam* 68 (1991), p. 1-44.

²¹ Motzki, "Quo vadis", p. 45; "Der Prophet und die Schuldner. Eine *ḥadīth* - Untersuchung auf dem Prüfstand" in: *Der Islam* 77 (2000), p. 9. "Methoden Zur Datierung von islamischen Überlieferungen", Nijmegen 2001, pp. 10-12.

²² Nabia, Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1976; M. M. Azami, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts*. 1968. 3rd ed. Indianapolis 1992; Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Band I: Qur'ānwissenschaften, Ḥadīth, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik bis ca. 430 H.*, Leiden, 1967.

the first century. However, whether or not they can be ascribed to the Prophet, has not been proved²³.

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 distinguished²⁵. The classical science of *ḥadīth* criticism consisted of three branches. The first dealt with the *riwāyāt*, i.e. investigated the chains of transmission to establish the continuity of their constituent links. The continuity of the *isnāds* 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 *ruwāt* (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

²³ For traditions dated in the first century cf. Harald Motzki, "The Prophet and the Cat: On Dating Mālik's *Muwatta'* and Legal Traditions" in *JSAT* 22 (1998) p. 18-83; *Die Anfänge*; "Der Fiqh des Zuhri, p. 1-44"; "The Muṣannaf, p. 1-21"; "The Prophet und die Schuldner"; Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der Muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Muhammad*, Berlin, 1996.

²⁴ See note 23.

²⁵ The most famous of the early ones being al-Risla by al-Shfi' (204), *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāsil bayna'l-Rāwī wa'l-Wā'ī* by al-Rāmahurmuẓī (d. 360), *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* by al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī (d. 405), *al-Kifāya fī Qanānīn al-Riwāya* and *al-Jāmi' li-ādāb al-Rāwī wa-Akblāq al-Sām'* both by al-Khaḥīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463), *'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245).

come in contact with each other²⁶. The third branch of Muslim *ḥadīth* criticism considered the content of a *ḥadīth* i.e. whether or not it was in accordance with the *Qur'ān* and with *ḥadīths* that were considered reliable.

The methods of the *muḥaddithūn*, however, have been subjected to criticism. The objection to their reliability in ascertaining the authenticity of *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth* that has been done by traditionists is restricted to the scrutiny of *isnād* alone²⁷. The Egyptian writer, Aḥmad Amīn (d. 1373/1954) seems to agree with Ibn Khaldūn. He states that the traditionists when scrutinizing the *ḥadīth*, paid more attention to the *isnād* than to the *matn*²⁸. Abū Rayya argues that the *muḥaddithūn* 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 evidence²⁹. These views of Ibn Khaldūn, Aḥmad Amīn and Abū Rayya have been refuted by Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, Muḥammad Abū Shuhba and Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr. They are of the opinion that the *'ulamā* of *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth* can be regarded to be authentic only if its *sanad* and *matn* are free from *shādhdb* (strange or isolated) and *'illa*

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

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, p. 37.

²⁸ Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islām*, p. 217-218; *Ḍuḥā al-Islām*, vol 2, pp. 130-134. Similar to the view of Abu Rayya is that of 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Bāhī. He maintains that the scrutiny of the *matn* is only considered by the traditionists. This view quoted by Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr in *al-Madkhal ilā 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 14.

²⁹ Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, *Aḍwā' alāl-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya*, p. 4-6; Ahmad Khan, *Maqālāt*, I, 27-28 quoted by Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge 1996 p. 97

(sickness i.e. any consideration which impairs the *ṣiḥḥa* or ‘soundness’ of any *ḥadīth*).³⁰

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) *Ṣaḥīḥs* are regarded as the most reliable works of *ḥadīth*,³¹ 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*.³² 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 muttaṣil al-isnād*). (2) The transmitters must be well known for their *thiqa*, i.e., ‘*adl* (righteous conduct) and *dabt* (high literary accuracy) from the first tier to the last one (*bi-naql al-thiqa ‘an thiqa min anwalih ilā muntabāhu*). (3) The transmitted *ḥadīth* must be free from ‘*illa* (defect) and *shudhūdh* (irregularness) (*sālīman min al-shudhūdh wa’-‘illa*). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ said that if these condition are met by a particular *ḥadīth*, then it would be considered authentic by the traditionists (*abl al-ḥadīth*) without any disagreement.³³

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

³⁰ Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, *al-Madkhal ilā ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 15-17; Introduction to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ in *‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth li ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, pp. 13-14; al-Sibā‘ī, *al-Sunna wa-Makānatuhā*, pp. 296-303.

³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā‘ith al-Ḥathūth*, Cairo n.d., p. 25; al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sarī li-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Bagdad, 1304, pp. 19-20.

³² Al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Irshād*, p. 19-20; Maḥmūd al-Ṭāḥḥān, *Taysīr Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, Beirut, 1399/1979, p. 45; M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedab Kesabihan Sanad Hadis: Telaah Kritis dan Tinjauan dengan Pendekatan Ilmu Sejarah*, Jakarta, 1988, p. 107; Muḥammad Zubayr Sidḍīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 56; Ibrāhīm b. al-Siddīq, *Maqālāt wa-Muḥāḍarāt fī l-Ḥadīth al-Sharīf wa-‘Ulūmih*, Beirut; Dār al-Bashā‘ir al-Islāmiyya, 2002/1423, pp. 7-33.

³³ Quoted by al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, Beirut, n.d., vol. 1, p.15.

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 thubūt al-liqā'*). The proof of being contemporaries (*mu'āṣara*) 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 *akhbaranā*, *amba'anā*, *sami'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 fulān*, 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'ana*) 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 (*thubūt al-samā'*) for each *ḥadīth* transmitted by a *mudallis*. Accordingly, if they provide an *isnād* of *'an'ana 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 *Ṣaḥīḥs* 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 *Ṣaḥīḥ* and 43 *ḥadīths* transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī from different companions found in the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, I argue that for both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the terminology of transmission used by the first

³⁴ Badr al-Dīn Abī Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ibn Aḥmad al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-Qārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut, n.d., vol. 1, p. 5; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā'ith al-Ḥathīb Sharḥ Ikhṭisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth li'l-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr*, n.d., p. 25; al-Ḥāfiẓ al-'Irāqī, *Sharḥ al-Fīyāt al-'Irāqī*, p. 40; al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Irsbād*, p. 20.

³⁵ Ibrāhīm b. al-Ṣaddīq, *Maqālat wa-Muḥāḍarāt fī al-Ḥadīth al-Sharīf*, pp. 17-8.

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-Suyūfī (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 ‘*adl* (3) all transmitters must be *dābiṭ* (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 *taḥammul wa-adā’ 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., ‘*adl* and *dābiṭ*

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

³⁶ al-Shahrazūrī, *‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, Madinah, n.d., p. 10; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī*, ed ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, Madinah, 1972/1392, p. 63; Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr, *Sharḥ Alfīyyat al-Suyūfī fī ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, Beirut, n.d., p. 3; Al-Ḥāfiḍ al-‘Irāqī, *Sharḥ Alfīyyat al-‘Irāqī al-Musammā bi’l-Tabṣira wa’l-Tadhkīra*, vol. 1, p. 12; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā‘ith al-Ḥathīth*, p. 21.

connecting the transmitter with their preceding authority were extremely important, because the words used by the transmitters are thought to imply how the given *ḥadīth* was transmitted. The words often used were *sami‘tu*, *ḥaddathani*, *ḥaddathana*, *akḥbarani* *akḥbarana*, *‘an*, *anna* 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 *ḥadīths* were critically collected. Such early books as *al-‘Ilal* of Aḥmad b. Maḍīnī (d. 234/848), *Kitāb al-‘Ilal wa-Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241) *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* by Ibn Sa‘d³⁷ (d. 230/844), *Tarīkh al-Kabīr* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256) may answer this question. Moreover, the appearance of some early critical *ḥadīth* experts like Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj³⁸ (d. 160/777), Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān³⁹ (d. 198/813), Yaḥyā Ibn Ma‘īn (d. 233/847), ‘Alī Ibn al-Maḍīnī (d. 234/848), al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Karābīsī (d. 245/859), al-Jūzjānī (d. 256/870), al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Abū Ḥātim (d. 277/890), Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890)⁴⁰, may well suggest that the beginning of *ḥadīth* criticism were made before the *ḥadīths* 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 shown⁴¹ 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 wa’l-ta’dīl*, it is considered to be a reliable source of *rijāl al-ḥadīth*, see Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, *Uṣūl al-Ṭabakrīj wa-Dirāsāt al-Asānīd*, p. 153.

³⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Tabdhīb*, iv, p. 345; Cf. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 20.

³⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān*, I. p. 5, al-Dhahabī, *al-Kāshif*, I. p. 25. 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.⁴² The scholars of ḥadīth have further specified the requirements for those to be called *'ādil*. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī mentions five conditions⁴³ i.e. fear of God (*taqwā*), morally well behaved (*murūʿa*), 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 (*'āqil*), behaving morally (*murūʿa*), not being *fāsiq*.⁴⁴ Thus, *'adāla* is a gift that always keeps someone behaving piously and invariably prevents him from having a bad character.⁴⁵ 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 *ḍābiṭ*, i.e. having high literary accuracy as transmitter. To determine the accuracy of the transmitters, the *muḥaddithūn* 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."

⁴¹ See Kamaruddin Amin, *The Reliability of Hadith Transmission. A Reexamination of Hadith Critical Methods* (Ph. D Dissertation), Bonn 2005; Harald Motzki, *Die Anfaenge der islamischen Jurisprudence*. Stuttgart 1991.

⁴² Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmiʿ al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, n.d., vol. 1, p. 74.

⁴³ Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuḥbat al-Naẓar*. p. 13. For other scholars who have proposed requirements for being called *'adl* see, al-Ḥakīm al-Naysabūrī, *Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 53; Ibn al-Salāḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 94; al-Nawawī, *al-Taqrīb*, p. 12; , Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, *Manhaj al-naqd fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 79-80.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Salah, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 4. See also, Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedab Kesabihan Sanad Hadis*, p. 115.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad Qāsim al-ʿUmārī, *Dirāsāt fī manhaj al-naqd ʿinda l-muḥaddithīn*, Yordan 2000, p. 250.

“To reach an authentic statement concerning authenticity of tradition, one needs to compare the words of scholars with each other”⁴⁶. This method of comparing the report of a transmitter with those of others can be found in the basic handbook of classical Islamic *ḥadīth* criticism, in Ibn al-Salāḥ’s *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 (*dābiṭ*). 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 *ḥadīth* as basis for argumentation. God knows best”⁴⁷.

By this method of comparison, the *muḥaddithūn* were allegedly not easily misled by seemingly sound *isnāds*. Al-Ḥākim (d. 405/1014) in his *Maʿrifat Ḥadīth al-Ḥadīth* quoted an *isnād* whose men are all trustworthy, but pointed out that the *ḥadīth* attached contained inaccuracies. He quoted the *isnād* Mālik from al-Zuhri from ‘Urwa 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 *ḥadīths* with seemingly sound *isnāds* can be accepted as free from defect only after discussion with people who have knowledge of the subject⁴⁸. In the following an example of *ḥadīth* criticism is given in which a comparison is made between the *ḥadīths* of different students of one scholar:

Ibn Maʿīn (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

⁴⁶ Azami, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, p. 52

⁴⁷ In ‘Abd Raḥīm b. Ḥusayn al-‘Irāqī’s (d. 805) *al-Taḥqīq wa-sharḥ muqaddimat Ibn al-Salāḥ*, al-Maktaba al-salafiyya, 1996, p. 166

⁴⁸ Cf. James Robson, *The Isnād*, p. 25

Ḥammād. Upon which Ibn Maʿīn 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 Maʿīn 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 Maʿīn 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 Maʿīn 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 *dabt* 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 Abi l-Ḥuqayq”.

transmitter often differ. Some scholars, in judging the transmitters, are *mutashaddid* (having a stern viewpoint), some are *mutasābil* (lenient) and some others are *mutawassif* (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 *thiqa*, 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 Maʿīn, 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 *ḥadīths* had not found their way into the *ḥadīth* collections. Accordingly, it seems justified to ask whether the classical rules of '*ulūm al-ḥadīth* were applied generally and consistently before this "science" was established.

Azami is of the opinion that the method of Ibn Maʿīn was practiced from the beginning of Islam. To corroborate his claim, Azami puts forward some examples. Abū Bakr, ʿUmar b. Khaṭṭāb, Abū Hurayrah and ʿĀʾisha, according to Azami, practiced the method⁵². It should be stated, however, that what Abū Bakr and other Companions did to compare the transmission is different from that of Ibn Maʿīn. Ibn Maʿīn tried to reconstruct the original text of a *muḥaddith*, which had been transmitted through the latter's students. He did it

⁵¹ Khaṭīb, *Jāmi'*, 5a, quoted by Azami, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology*, p. 52.

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 Maʿīn 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 Maʿīn'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 Maʿīn'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 available⁵³. 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 (*ḥadīth al-rijāl*)? 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

⁵³ *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* by Ibn Saʿd, (d. 230), *Tarīkh al-kabīr* by al-Bukhārī (d. 256), *Al-jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl* by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327), *Usd al-ghābat fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630), *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* by al-Mizzī (d. 742), *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ* and *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* by al-Dhahabī (d. 748), *Al-Isāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852) *Al-istīʾāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb* by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. ?), to name only the most important.

corruption. How is it possible to ascertain the reliability of *ḥadīth*s on the basis of transmitters whose reliability is uncertain?⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ Therefore *‘ilm al-rjāl*, in their opinion, is only an approximate science.⁵⁶

2. Free from *shudhūdh*

A *shādbdh* (irregular) *ḥadīth* according to al-Shāfi‘ī is a *ḥadīth* which is transmitted by a trustworthy transmitter, but contradicts the narration of the people who are regarded as more reliable than him⁵⁷. A *ḥadīth* transmitted by only one reliable transmitter and not confirmed by any other transmitters cannot be seen as *shādbdh*.⁵⁸ In other words, the absolute singleness of transmission (*fard muṭlaq*)⁵⁹ does not affect the reliability of a *ḥadīth* as long as it has been transmitted by a reliable transmitter. In the light of this definition, the well-known *ḥadīth*, ”actions are (judged) according to their intentions”, is not considered *shādbdh*, despite the fact that it was related by only one transmitter at each stage: Yahyā b. Sa‘īd from Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Taymī from ‘Alqama from ‘Umar, all of whom are trustworthy authorities. A *ḥadīth* is considered to be *shādbdh* 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.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Sidqī, ”*Kalimāt fī al-naskh*,” in *al-Manār* 11 (1908): 693.

⁵⁵ Ahmad Khan, *Maqālat*, I, 27-28, quoted by Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, p. 97

⁵⁶ Cf. Wael B Hallaq, ””The Authenticity of Prophetic *ḥadīth*: a Pseudo Problem” in *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), p. 75-90.

⁵⁷ If a narration that goes against another authentic *ḥadīth* is reported by a weak narrator, it is known as *munkar* (denounced).

⁵⁸ Al-Shāfi‘ī’s statement is transmitted by Ibn al-Salāh in his *‘Ulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 68 and al-Hākim in his *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 148; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā‘ith al-ḥathīb*, p. 56; al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, I, p. 232.

⁵⁹ If a particular *ḥadīth* is solely transmitted by *abl Makka*, or only by *abl Madīna*, or exclusively by *abl Baṣra* or Kūfa or by other centre and not transmitted by any other centres, this kind of transmission is called *fard nisbī*. See al-Suyūfī., I, pp. 248-251.

⁶⁰ Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedah Kesahiban Hadis*, p. 123.

Al-Ḥākim is stricter in this regard. A *shābdhb ḥadīth* in his view is that which is reported by only one reliable transmitter, without being confirmed by any other reliable transmitters⁶¹. 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 *shābdhb*. Ibn al-Salāḥ, al-Nawawī and other later scholars are in agreement with al-Shāfiʿī.⁶²

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*,⁶³ 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.

⁶¹ Al-Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 119; al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, p. 233.

⁶² Ibn al-Salāḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, pp. 68-70; al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, I, pp. 232-238; Subḥī al-Sāliḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth wa-muṣṭalahūhu*, Dimashq 1973, p. 196-203.

⁶³ Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedah Kesabihan Sanad Hadis*, p. 124.

If the view of al-Shāfiʿī 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",⁶⁴ 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 *ṣahīfah* 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, *ṣahīfah* 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 links⁶⁵ or collectors mentioned only one way of transmission.⁶⁶ This difference of interpretation will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.⁶⁷

The traditionists admitted the difficulties of detecting *shādhdb 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 *shādhdb ḥadīths*.

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 ʿIlla.

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*⁶⁸ when it is in fact *mursal*,⁶⁹ or *marfūʿ*⁷⁰ when it is in fact *mauqūf*⁷¹; (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.⁷² This defect can happen not only to the *isnād* but also to the *matn*.⁷³ Only those who are well versed, having excellent memories and are expert of *isnāds* and *matns* can distinguish defective *ḥadīths* from reliable ones. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī (d. 194) even said that in order to be able to reveal a *maʿlūl ḥadīth*, one needs intuition (*ilbām*).⁷⁴ Ibn al-Maḍīnī (d. 234) and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdaḍī (d. 463) said that a defect in the *isnād* can only be revealed if all *isnāds* of a particular *ḥadīth* are collated and analyzed⁷⁵. Being a very complicated branch of *muṣṭalah al-ḥadīth*, only a few scholars such as Ibn al-Maḍīnī (d. 234), Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327), al-Khallāl (d. 311) and Dāruqṭnī (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.

⁷² Ibn al-Salāḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, pp. 81-82; al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, p. 252; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bāʿith al-ḥathīb*, p. 65.

⁷³ For examples of defective *ḥadīths* see Ibn al-Salāḥ, *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 83; al-Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, pp. 112-118; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bāʿith al-ḥathīb*, pp. 67-71.

⁷⁴ Al-Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 113; al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, I, p. 252.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Salāḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 82; al-Suyūfī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, I, p. 253; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bāʿith al-ḥathīb*, pp. 65.

*ḥadīth*s to be considered as defective *ḥadīth*s when scrutinized more thoroughly or vice versa.

A *ḥadīth* that does not meet the above mentioned requirements cannot be regarded as reliable *ḥadīth*, 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 *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth* transmission itself? According to the "science of *ḥadīth*" there were eight forms of transmitting *ḥadīth*: (1) *Samā'*, 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*, *akhbbaranā*, or *anba'anā*. (2) *Qirā'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 *akhbbarani* 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 *akhbbarani* or *ajāzani* (4) *Munāwala*. That is,

⁷⁶ The final verdict on a *ḥadīth* is whether it is *ṣaḥīḥ* (reliable), *ḥasan* (good), *Ḍa'īf* (weak) or *maḍḍū'* (fabricated, forged). Ibn al-Salāḥ classifies *Ḥasan ḥadīth*s in two categories: (1) One with an *isnād* containing a reporter who is *mastūr* ("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 *ḥadīth* in comparison to the reporters of *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*s. In both categories Ibn al-Salāḥ requires that the *ḥadīth* be free of any *shudhūdh* (Ibn al-Salāḥ, 'Ulum al-ḥadīth, p. 27-28). A *ḥadīth ḍa'īf* is one of discontinuity in the *isnād*, in which case the *ḥadīth* could be *mursal*, *mu'allaq*, *mudallas*, *munqaṭi'* or *mu'ḍal*. *Maḍḍū'* (fabricated), is a *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth*s into *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan* and *ḍa'īf* was first introduced by al-Tirmidhī (d. 279). This division was not known before him. See Ibn Taymiyya, 'Ilm al-ḥadīth, 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 *akhbārānī*. (5) *Mukātaba*. 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 kitāb*. (6) *I'lām 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 *akhbārānī* or 'an (7) *Waṣīyya*, i.e., to obtain the works of a traditionist by his will at the time of his death. The terms used were *akhbārānī waṣīyyatan 'an* or *waṣṣānī*. (8) *Wijāda*, 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 "wajadtū", "qālad", "ukhbirtū", "ḥuddithū"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 *samā'*, although they did not receive the *ḥadīth* in that way. This might have happened when

⁷⁷ For more detail see Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, Cairo 1966, pp. 4-92; Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1, Leiden 1967, p. 58-60; Siddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature*, p. 86. James Robson, "Standarts Applied by Muslim Traditionists" in: *The John Rylands Library* 43, Manchester, 1960-61, pp. 470-474; Sabrī al-Mutawallī, *ʿIlm al-ḥadīth al-nabawī*, Cairo 2003, pp. 86-96.

⁷⁸ Kamaruddin Amin, "Nasiruddin al-Albani on Muslim Sahih. A Critical Study on his Methods". in *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 11, Brill 2004, pp. 149-176; Motzki, *Die Anfänge*, pp. 92-5.

⁷⁹ See also Harald Motzki, *Die Anfänge*, p. 92-95; Kamaruddin Amin, "al-Albani...", p. 159-161

the transmitter was not reliable.⁸⁰

On account of the occurrence in the canonical collections of unreliable *ḥadīth* and in the light of the above-mentioned criteria, one may wonder whether the criteria of the collectors of *ketub al-ḥadīths* were exactly the same as the criteria by which those *ḥadīths* are assessed by later scholars. In other words, the above mentioned criteria were developed later than the time when the *ketub al-ḥadīths* were compiled. Moreover, a strict and consistent application of '*ulūm al-ḥadīth*' to *ḥadīth* collections may uncover a large number of unreliable *ḥadīths*, 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 *ḥadīth* transmission and criticism.

⁸⁰ For example see, Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedab Kesahiban Sanad Hadis*, p. 191-194

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