



HADITH I. A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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Hadith literature (often called in Western scholarship “Muslim tradition”) is understood to be the repository of the *sonna* (normative conduct; pl. *sonan*) of the Prophet, which is regarded as second in authority only to the Qur’ān as a source of Divine truth. The Hadith, in other words, is an authoritative and prescriptive body of material relating to the Prophet Moḥammad: it records what the Prophet did and said in order that Moslems may – whether through direct mimesis of the actions of the Prophet, acceptance of specific Prophetic pronouncements on points of law and doctrine, or the extrapolation of law from both Prophetic actions and utterances – live in accordance with Divine truth. The vast and detailed corpus of Hadith literature establishes a significant proportion of the specific content of Islamic law, praxis and doctrine. Unlike the Qur’ān, which is considered Divine speech, the Hadith is the Prophet’s own discourse; however, a subcategory of Hadith, known as *al-ahādīṭ al-qodsīya*, is understood as representing the Prophet’s own verbal expression of Divine inspiration (*elhām*; see below).

Given the authority of Hadith as a source for the specific content of Islam, it became important for Muslims to ascertain the authenticity of each *ḥadīṭ* as a



true and accurate (*ṣaḥih*) record of Prophetic action or speech. Each *ḥadīṭ* consists of two parts: a text (*matn*, literally “body”) appended to a chain of transmitters (*esnād*, literally “support”), typically in the following format and using terms such as these: so-and-so said (*qāla*): I heard (*sameʿto*) from so-and-so who said: so-and-so told me (*ḥaddaṭa-ni*), saying : so-and-so informed us (*aḵbara-nā*), saying: so-and-so announced to us (*anbaʿa-nā*) on the authority of (*ʿan*) so-and so, who said: the Prophet said, or did, such-and-such. The authenticity of a *ḥadīṭ* is assayed on the basis of the reputation for veracity and reliability of the individuals in the chain, which should go back to an eyewitness (see below).

While there are reports of the existence of small Hadith compilations in the first century A.H., the collection of Hadith and their systematic organization by scholars into compendia seems to have begun in earnest from the mid-2nd/8th century. For a period of about 200 years, the scholars of the Hadith movement (*ahl al-ḥadīṭ*, or *al-moḥaddetun*) traveled throughout the Islamic world collecting local knowledge about the Prophet (*al-reḥla fi ṭalab al-ʿilm*). The early scholars of the Hadith movement were also preoccupied with pressing the claim that Hadith should be the primary source of Divine truth after the Qurʾān, especially against the respective proponents of rational theology, and of customary law. That the claim of Hadith to primacy was not unchallenged is reflected in those works written expressly to defend the Hadith movement against its opponents, such as Ebn Qotayba’s (d. 276/889) *Taʿwil moḵtalef al-ḥadīṭ fiʿl-radd ʿalā aʿdāʾ ahl al-ḥadīṭ* and Ḥamd b. Moḥammad Kaṭṭābi’s (d. 383/998) *Alām al-ḥadīṭ* (see bibliography).

The Hadith compendia which were eventually compiled took two forms: the *mosnad*, in which *aḥādīṭ* are organized according to the transmitter; and the more prescription-friendly *moṣannaḥ*, in which *aḥādīṭ* are organized according to their subject matter. The most famous *mosnad* is the largest extant early Hadith work, that of Aḥmad Ebn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) of Baghdad, which contains over 30,000 *aḥādīṭ*. The earliest extant work that includes *aḥādīṭ* arranged by subject is not, strictly speaking, a Hadith collection, but rather a work of jurisprudence, namely, the *Mowaṭṭaʾ* of the Medinan scholar Mālek b. Anas (d. 179/795; see FEQH); however, the *aḥādīṭ* cited therein do not always have complete *esnāds*, and the work includes many reports about the words and legal decisions of Companions and Successors, as do the respective important published *moṣannaḥ* collections of ʿAbd-al-Razzāq Ṣanʿāni (d. 211/826), and of ʿAbd-Allāh Ebn Abi Ṣayba (d. 235/849).



The 3rd/9th century witnessed the compilation of the *moṣannaḥ* Hadith collections that would eventually acquire canonical status in Sunni Islam; these are composed exclusively of *aḥādīṭ* from the Prophet carried by sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) *esnāds*. It is noteworthy that most of this compilation activity was carried out by scholars in Iran. In the case of the two works that are universally recognized as the most authoritative, the *Jāme' al-ṣaḥīḥ* of Moḥammad b. Esmā'il Boḳāri (d. 256/870), and the *Jāme' al-ṣaḥīḥ* of Moslem b. Ḥajjāj Naysāburi (d. 261/874), the process of their being invested with authority by the Muslim community seems to have taken place within a century or so of the respective compilers' deaths – ever since then, these have been considered the two most important texts in Sunni Islam after the Qur'ān. (The Shi'ites have their own Hadith collections, on which see Section ii. below.) Of only slightly less elevated status are the respective *Sonan* of Abu Dā'ud Sejestāni (d. 275/888), Moḥammad b. 'Isā Termeḍi (d. 279/892), Ebn Māja Qazvini (d. 273/886) and Aḥmad b. Šo'ayb Nasā'i (d. 303/915) – the authority of these four works was almost universally accepted by the 6th/12th century. Supplementary to “the Sound Six (*al-ṣeḥāḥ al-setta*)” collections are the respective *Sonan* of 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Dāremi (d. 255/868), 'Ali b. 'Omar Dāraḳoṭni (d. 385/995) and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥosayn Bayhaḳi (d. 458/1065). Other widely respected Hadith collections include *al-Mo'jam al-kabir* of Solaymān b. Aḥmad Ṭabarāni (d. 360/970), the *Mostadrak* of Ḥākem Moḥammad b. 'Abd-Allāh Naysāburi (d. 403/1012), the *Maṣābiḥ al-sonna* of Ḥosayn b. Mas'ud Baḡawi (d. 516/1122), which was expanded by Wali-al-Din Kaṭīb Tebrizi (fl. 737/1337) under the title *Meškāt al-maṣābiḥ*, the popular *Riāz al-ṣāleḥin* of Yaḥyā b. Šaraf Nawawi (d. 676/1277) and the vast *Kanz al-'ommāl fī sonan al-aqwāl wa'l-afāl* of 'Ali Mottaḳi Hendi (d. 975/1567).

Over the centuries, several commentaries on “the Sound Six” were produced, some of which have acquired great fame in their own right. They include, in particular: on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Boḳāri, the *Faṭḥ al-bāri* of Aḥmad Ebn Ḥajar 'Asqālāni (d. 852/1449), the *'Omdat al-qāri* of Badr-al-Din 'Ayni (d. 855/1451) and the *Eršād al-sāri* of Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Qastallāni (d. 923/1518); on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Moslem, the *Menḥāj* of Yaḥyā b. Šaraf Nawawi; on the *Sonan* of Abu Dā'ud, the *'Awn al-ma'bud* of Šams-al-Ḥaqq 'Aẓimābādi (d. 1329/1911); on the *Sonan* of Termeḍi, the *Toḥfat al-aḥwādi* of Moḥammad 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Mobārakpuri (d. 1354/1935); on the *Sonan* of Ebn Māja, the *Šarḥ* of Moḡaltāy b. Qelej (d. 762/1361); and on the *Sonan* of Nasā'i, the *Zahr al-rabā* of Jalāl-al-Din Soyuṭi (d. 911/1505), and the *Šarḥ* of Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Hādi Sendi (d. 1038/1629).



A sense of the content and arrangement of the *moṣannaḥ* collections may be obtained from surveying the chapter headings of a representative example, such as the *Sonan* of Nasā'i: ritual purity (*al-ṭahāra*), water (*al-miāh*), menstruation (*al-ḥayḥ wa'l-esteḥāza*), bathing, and cleansing without water (*al-ḡosl wa'l-tayammom*), prayer (*al-ṣalāt*), appointed times (*al-mawāqit*), the call to prayer (*al-aḏān*), mosques (*al-masājed*), the direction of prayer (*al-qebla*), the office of Imam (*al-emāma*), the beginning of the prayer (*al-eftetāh*), the execution of the prayer (*al-taṭbiq*), forgetfulness in prayer (*al-sahw*), Friday prayer (*al-jom'a*), shortening the prayer in travel (*taqṣir al-ṣalāt fi'l-safar*), the eclipse prayer (*al-kosuf*), prayer for rain (*al-estesqā*), prayer of fear (*ṣalāt al-ḵawf*), the prayer of the two Eids (*ṣalāt al-īdayn*), staying up at night and giving up the day to pray (*qiām al-layl wa-taṭawwo' al-nahār*), funerals (*al-janā'ez*), fasting (*al-ṣiām*), alms-giving (*al-zakāt*), the rituals of the Pilgrimage (*manāsek al-ḥajj*), struggle in the cause of God (*al-jehād*), marriage (*al-nekāh*), divorce (*al-ṭalāq*), horses (*al-ḵayl*), mortmain (*al-aḥbās*), bequests (*al-waṣāyā*), gifts (*al-noḥl wa'l-heba*), conditional gifts (*al-roqbā*), lifetime gifts (*al-'omrā*), oaths and vows (*al-aymān wa'l-nodur*), sharecropping (*al-mozāra'a*), prohibition of bloodshed (*taḥrim al-dam*), the division of land that passes into the possession of the Muslim community (*qesm al-fay'*), pledging allegiance (*al-bay'a*), sacrifice for new born children (*al-'aqiqa*), sacrifice of the first born camel foal, and of a sheep in Rajab (*al-fara' wa'l-'atira*), hunting and slaughtering (*al-ṣayd wa'l-ḍaba'eḥ*), sacrificial animals (*al-ḏahāyā*), sales (*al-boyu*), compurgation (*al-qasāma*), cutting the hand of the thief (*qaṭ' al-sāreq*), faith (*al-imān*), adornment (*al-zina*), the conduct of judges (*ādāb al-qozāt*), seeking refuge in God (*al-este'āda*), and drinks (*al-aṣreba*). The foregoing list is illustrative of the important role of Hadith in establishing religious praxis and law.

The growth of the Hadith movement was accompanied by an elaboration of the Hadith sciences (*'olum al-ḥadiṭ*). The historical development of the Hadith sciences may be traced through a study of the content of the important works in this field, such as *al-Moḥaddet al-fāṣel bayna'l-rāwi wa'l-wā'i* by Ḥasan b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Rāmahormozi (d. 360/971), *al-Kefāya fi 'elm al-rewāya* by Kaṭīb Baḡdādi (d. 463/1071), *Ma'refat 'olum al-ḥadiṭ* by Ḥākem Naysāburi, the *Moqaddema* by Abu 'Amr 'Oṭmān Ebn Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), and *Fath al-Moḡiṭ* by Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Saḵāwi (d. 902/1497), which is a commentary on a 1,000-line pedagogical poem (*alfīya*) on the Hadith sciences by Zayn-al-Din 'Erāqi (d. 806/1404). The purpose of the Hadith sciences was to address the issue of how to establish the authenticity of reports; this, as noted above, was done on the basis of assaying the *esnād*. To this end, a “science of men” (*'elm*



al-rejāl, encompassing also the women who transmitted Hadith) was formalized between the 2nd/8th and 4th/10th centuries, in which biographical notices were compiled for transmitters of Hadith, noting such details as their dates, locations, teachers and students. Of particular importance was the inclusion in biographical notices of the judgements of later Hadith scholars as to the veracity and reliability of the individual subjects, which could range from *ṭeqa* (trustworthy) and *ṭabt* (strong) to *matruk* (avoided) and *kaḍḍāb* (liar). From this crucial latter function derives the technical name for this science, *al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dil*, or “the science of discrediting and accrediting.” The Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet are, as a category, regarded as being necessarily trustworthy under the principle called *ta'dil al-ṣaḥāba* (a doctrine which, for obvious reasons, is not accepted by the Shi'ites, who judge trustworthy only the *aḥādīṭ* transmitted by their own authorities). Among the most important of the early works of *al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dil* are the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabir* of Moḥammad Ebn Sa'd (d. 230/845), *Kitāb al-tāriḳ al-kabir* of Boḳāri, and *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dil* of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Ebn Abi Ḥātem Rāzi (d. 327/938). Later *rejāl* works collated data from earlier ones and thus grew increasingly lengthy: especially well-regarded are the *Mizān al-e'tedāl* of Šams-al-Din Mo-ḥammad al-Ḍahabi (d. 748/1348), the massive *Tahḍīb al-kemāl fī asmā' al-rejāl* of Yusof b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Mezzi (d. 742/1341), and the *Tahḍīb al-tahḍīb* of Ebn Ḥajar 'Asqalāni.

A complete *esnād* is called *mottaṣel*, *marfu'* or *mosnad*, and a *ḥadiṭ* supported by a complete *esnād* made up of unimpeachably *ṭeqa* transmitters is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound, authentic). One level down is the *ḥasan* (good) *ḥadiṭ*, which is also supported by a complete *esnād* made up of *ṭeqa* transmitters, but with a chain that is less strong than that of the *ṣaḥīḥ*. A *ḥadiṭ* that is not supported by a complete *esnād* is by definition *ḏa'if* (weak), and can be categorized as progressively weaker according to whether the *esnād* is, for example, *morsal* (complete until the generation of the Successors (*tābe'un*), but not originating from as far back as a Companion), *monqaṭe'* (missing a transmitter in the chain), *mo'zal* (missing two transmitters), or *modallas* (containing a false claim by one of the transmitters about having heard it from the next individual in the chain), to mention only four of several categories. A forged Hadith is called *mawzu'*. Hadith are also classified according to the number of *esnāds* by which the report is supported. The most authoritative category is the *motawāter*, which is supported by a sufficient number of *esnāds* and *ṭeqa* transmitters, making collusion on its contents seem virtually impossible. *Ḳabar al-āḥād* is the term used for a *ḥadiṭ* that is supported by *esnāds* and transmitters which,



although *teqa*, are insufficient to render it *motawāter*. *Ḳabar al-wāhed* is a *ḥadiṭ* transmitted from a single *teqa* person; the status of this category has been the subject of extensive debate among the *moḥaddetun*. (It should be noted that the terms *ḳabar* and *aṭar* (pl. *āṭār*) are sometimes used synonymously with *ḥadiṭ*, but more usually denote reports about the Companions of the Prophet; the term *ḥadiṭ* is also used more loosely to refer to any and all reports about the Prophet, including those that appear in genres other than Hadith literature, such as in the epic biographical genres, *sira* and *maḡāzi* – these are, however, more accurately denoted by the neutral term *rewāya*, or “report”). The sciences of Hadith also addressed the issue of how to account for contradictory *aḥādīṭ* on the same subject transmitted by sound *esnāds*: this was done through applying the doctrine of *nask* (abrogation) to identify only one of the *aḥādīṭ* as the chronologically final ruling on the issue in question: see, for example, Moḡammad b. Musā Ḥazemi Hama-ḡāni (d. 584/1188), *al-E'tebār fi'l-nāseḳ wa'l-mansuḳ men al-āṭār*.

According to the *'olum al-ḥadiṭ* manuals, the ideal mode of Hadith transmission is oral. This does not mean that written transmission played no role – apparently from quite early in the history of the Hadith movement, note-taking was standard practice – however, while a great *moḥaddet* would keep books, he was ideally expected to teach from memory. Hearing Hadith from a Shaikh called *samā'*, while reciting or reading Hadith back to the Shaikh for his approval is called *'arṣ*. The Shaikh's certifying the right of a student to transmit on his authority is called *ejāza* (q.v.). Transmission solely on the basis of written materials was a categorically inferior, although permissible, method, whether by *monāwala* (the handing over of written materials), *mokātaba* (correspondence) or *wejāda* (discovery of written materials). The *'olum al-ḥadiṭ* manuals also emphasize the necessity of word-for-word transmission of *ḥadiṭ* (*al-rewāya be'l-lafṣ*), while acknowledging that this ideal was not always observed in the earliest period of transmission when what was conveyed might have been the meaning (*al-rewāya be'l-ma'nā*), rather than the exact wording.

The first scholar to systematically address the place of Hadith in Islamic jurisprudence seems to have been Moḡammad b. Edris Šāfe'i (d. 204/820), the eponymous founder of the Shafi'ite legal rite, about one-quarter of whose foundational work, the *Resāla*, is dedicated to formulating a method for utilizing Hadith as a source of law. The recognition of the importance of Hadith as a source of religious praxis and law resulted in the establishment of



the study of Hadith as a primary element in the education of the Moslem jurist, as well as a fundamental subject in the curriculum of the *madrasas* (see EDUCATION iv.), following their proliferation throughout the Islamic world from the 5th/11th century onwards. Institutions dedicated to the study of Hadith, known as *dār al-ḥadīṭ*, were also established.

The history of the compilation and authenticity of Hadith literature is one of the most contested subjects in the study of Islam. Muslim orthodoxy holds that the recording of Hadith began in the lifetime of the Prophet himself, and culminated in the third century of the Hejra in the successful distinguishing of authentic from unreliable and fabricated *aḥādīṭ*; the authentic *aḥādīṭ*, which were gathered from all parts of the Islamic world, were compiled in the major collections whose canonical authority was swiftly recognized. This narrative, however, has been subject to criticism from the end of the 13th/19th century until the present day, primarily in the Western academy, but also by certain Muslim scholars. In 1898, Ignaz Goldziher pointed out the existence of many contradictory *aḥādīṭ* supported by sound *esnāds*, to argue that these could not represent authentic Prophetic discourse; he suggested that they were fabricated later, either by various political and religious factions in their efforts to legitimate themselves and discredit their rivals, or in discrete attempts to provide answers for specific religious issues that were in need of clarification. Half a century later Joseph Schacht argued that many legal *aḥādīṭ* were put into circulation only from the late 2nd century A.H. onwards, when they were furnished with wholly, or at least partially, false *esnāds*. Schacht's ideas have effectively been taken as a datum-line by a prominent school of Western historians skeptical not only of the authenticity of Hadith literature, but also, on the same methodological basis, of early Muslim historiography in general. However, the validity of Schacht's methods and conclusions has also been called into doubt, and other scholars have furnished narratives for the historical development of Hadith that tend, in different degrees, towards accepting their authenticity (see bibliography for a classified list of such studies). The questions of whether it is possible to distinguish between authentic and fabricated *aḥādīṭ* at all, and whether it is possible to date when a particular *ḥadīṭ* was put into circulation continue to be investigated, and new and more nuanced arguments about the historical development and authenticity of Hadith have begun to emerge.

The debate among Muslims in recent centuries over the authenticity of Hadith, which has included occasional reference to Western scholarship, has been



concerned with the implications of the issue for the content of Islamic law. Two broad trends may be identified: the first trend has been to re-authenticate the received authoritative corpus of Hadith, sometimes on the basis of a particularly stringent application of established Hadith methodology, and sometimes using entirely new criteria for assaying the soundness of reports. The goal of this approach is to sift out definitively any remaining weak reports. Scholars such as Moḥammad ‘Abdoh (d. 1323/1905), Rašid Reżā (d. 1354/1935), Abu’l-A’lā’ Mawdudi (d. 1399/1979) and Nāṣer-al-Din Albāni (d.1420/1999) strove, in different ways, towards such a goal. The second approach has been the categorical questioning of the actual methods of traditional Hadith criticism, and of the authenticity of the received Hadith corpus. This was first seen in the Muslim modernist project in the Indian subcontinent in the late 19th century where the historicizing arguments of Ćerāg ‘Ali (d. 1313/1895) preceded even those of Goldziher; and where those of Sir Sayyed Aḥmad Kān (d. 1316/1898), who viewed the excessive reliance on Hadith as an obstacle to reform, developed into a hostile debate between proponents of authenticity, the *ahl-e ḥadīth*, and those who argued for the exclusive authority of the Qur’ān.

In a series of articles published between 1962 and 1963, the Pakistani scholar, Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), argued that the *sonna* of the Prophet was not originally understood by the early Moslem community to be contained in the specific words and practices recorded in the Hadith (the authenticity of which cannot, in any case, be definitively ascertained), but that this putative relationship between the two was actually a concept successfully promulgated by the Hadith movement itself. Instead, Rahman asserted that the original and true meaning of *sonna* is the general spirit of the Prophet’s discourse and action as understood by the early community, and that *sonna* may therefore be identified without reference to Hadith being necessary. Rahman’s ideas provoked the hostility of the Pakistani ulema and resulted in his exile. Less radical views on the authenticity of Hadith were put forward in Egypt by Maḥmud Abu Rayya in 1958, but they also precipitated considerable controversy. In 1986, the Malaysian author, Kassim Ahmad, raised the question in South East Asia, with the result that his book was banned by the Malaysian authorities. Arguments against the authenticity of Hadith have, in general, had only limited purchase in the modern Islamic world, and the debate on the issue among Muslims seems, for the moment at least, largely to have died down.



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