

HADITH NARRATORS' BIOGRAPHIES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE RELIABILITY OF TRANSMISSION

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ABSTRACT:

This research study concerns the center of the existential competence to consider the authenticity of Hadith transmission and investigate how documenting lives has been positioned as a key stone in Islamic scholarship. This research reviews the emergence of an elaborate narratology, recounting how it formed as a rigid query system that originated with verification of oral eyewitness narratives and matured into complex authentication mechanisms recorded in biographies drawn from canonical literature. The paper concerns itself with the interface between precedent and preservation, dealing with Hadith scholars' primary means of qualification for transmitters, beyond the key standards utilized to grade narrators; integrity, memory and time suitability. It Exposes How these mechanisms of authentication were not only employed to verify the Prophetic traditions, they also subsequent avenues for historical source criticism that prefigured modern historiographic methods. Using an interdisciplinary approach it contributes to the Hadith vs. Tradition debate and brings together voices of Islamic scholarship with contemporary academic critiques. It underscores the new developments in digital analysis that are changing how we evaluate narrators, while also supporting some of the more traditional methods that still remain applicable today. The outcome highlights the ongoing importance of biographical work for sustaining the integrity of Islamic intellectual history and its relevance in wider conversations about textual transmission and historical reliability.

Keywords: Hadith, narrators, 'ilm al-rijāl, authenticity, Islamic scholarship, chain of transmission.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and importance

Hadith literature forms the second main source of Islamic jurisprudence and theology after the Quran as a record of the sayings, actions and implicit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹ The authenticity of hadith depends on the trustworthiness and accuracy of reporters (Rijal al-Hadith)² whose biographies are the most important elements in the authentication of any particular Hadith tradition.³ Since early scholars of Islam began to identify the most reliable method of assessing the credibility of reporters, the science of narrator evaluation (Ilm al-Rijal)

¹ Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977), 23.

² Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 45.

³ Ibn al-Salah, *Muqaddimah fi 'Ulum al-Hadith* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1986), 112.

has.⁴

1.2 Goals of research

In this paper, it is argued that the textual critique of the reporters of Hadith impacts on the division of Hadith authenticity. It examines the practices of the methodologies used by classical scholars like Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ibn Hajar in evaluating which reporters should be considered as trustworthy and who is a weak reporter.⁵

It also looks at the place of 'Ilm al-Rijal in identifying the authentic (Sahih), weak (Da'if), and fabricated (Mawdu') reports.⁶

1.3 Research Questions

The questions that are addressed in the study are the following:

1. How did the classical Islamic scholarship determine Hadith narrators?
2. On what basis did these early critics of Hadith rely on when deciding the veracity of transmitters?
3. What is the role of how Ilm al-Rijal fits into the larger process of authentication in Hadith literature?⁷

1.4 Methodology

Such studies are conducted by a qualitative examination of both classical and contemporary works, including biographical dictionaries or books of biographies (Kutub al-Rijal), to include *Tahdhib al-Kamal* by Al-Mizzi and *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani.⁸ As an example of an important narrator, this study will focus on the example of the life of Abu Huraira (رضي الله عنه) and Aisha bint Abi Bakr.⁹

2. The historical evolution of criticism of the Hadith narrators

2.1 First Attempts at the Conservation of the Life-History of Narrators

In the first half of the second Hijri century (8th century CE), Muslim scholars began to recognize the importance of establishing the quality of those involved in the narration process in order to protect the veracity of the Prophetic traditions¹⁰, and the organised documentation on the biography

⁴ Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Al-Kifayah fi 'Ilm al-Riwayah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 67.

⁵ Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Al-Tarikh al-Kabir* (Hyderabad: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyyah, 1941), 3:215.

⁶ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1994), 1:42.

⁷ G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 89.

⁸ Jamal al-Din al-Mizzi, *Tahdhib al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1980), 2:310.

⁹ Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), 156.

¹⁰ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, ed. 'Ali Muhammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 2001), 1:7-9.

of Hadith narrators took its early beginning with the book *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* by Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), a pupil of the great authority in Hadith studies Al-Waqidi. It was a monumental biographical dictionary which was divided according to generations (tabaqat) and regions so that such information with regard to the reliability of the narrators, their teachers and their students are deemed important.¹¹

These informal attempts led by the Companions (Sahaba) and Successors (*Tabi'un*) to vet reporters pre-date the writing of Ibn Sa'd'. As an illustration, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه), regularly enquired about the reporters of Hadith¹², in detail and he was the first one to establish this level of scrutiny in the future on methods of transmitting reporters.

2.2 Development of 'Ilm al-Rijal

Narrator criticism The science of criticizing reporters (*'Ilm al-Rijal*) emerged in the third/ninth century concomitantly with the codification of Hadith studies. Imam Al-Bukhari (d. 256/870) was the most important figure to compile *Al-Tarikh al-Kabir*, a biographical work that evaluated thousands of reporters according to high standards of integrity ('adalah) and precision (dabt).¹³ The contemporary Imam Muslim (d. 261/875) also contributed by formulating principles by which Hadith could be authenticated in Introduction to *Sahih Muslim* where he outlined procedures that could be used to ascertain the consistency of reporters.¹⁴

Other important participants were:

Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) in whose *'Ilal al-Hadith* 1 al-Hadith analyzed latent flaws in transmissions.¹⁵

Yahya ibn Ma'in (d. 233/847) already exercised extreme scrutiny in evaluating the brevity of reporters in *Tarikh Ibn Ma'in*.¹⁶

Such scholars developed major rules, e.g. the differentiation between *thiqa* (trustworthy) and *da'if* (weak) reporters, which became normative in subsequent Hadith criticism.

2.3 Biographical Works

By the fourth/tenth century Hadith scholars had compiled systematic biographical dictionaries (kutub al-rijal) to codify judgments concerning the reporters. The most influential were:

¹¹ Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Hadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45.

¹² Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Al-Jami' li-Akhlaq al-Rawi*, ed. Mahmud al-Tahhan (Riyadh: Dar al-Ma'mun, 1983), 1:123.

¹³ Al-Bukhari, *Al-Tarikh al-Kabir*, ed. Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 1:42.

¹⁴ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Introduction to Sahih Muslim*, trans. 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1976), 1:15.

¹⁵ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *'Ilal al-Hadith*, ed. Wasi Allah ibn Muhammad 'Abbas (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1988), 2:310.

¹⁶ Yahya ibn Ma'in, *Tarikh Ibn Ma'in*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Nur Sayf (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1980), 1:75.

1. **Tahdhib al-Kamal** by Jamal al-Din al-Mizzi (d. 742/1341):
 - An 8-thousand plus narrators encyclopedia which comprised 35 volumes on the first three Islamic centuries.
 - Arranged alphabetically and cross-referencing the teachers and students of narrators.¹⁷
2. **Tahdhib al-Tahdhib** of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852/1449):
 - An abridged revision of that of Al-Mizzi, with repetitions removed, and credence estimations revised.
 - Contained important observations made by previous thinkers, such as Al-Dhahabi and Al-‘Ijli.¹⁸
3. **Mizan al-I’tidal** by Al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348):
 - did limit it quite strictly to weak narrators and disputed narrators.
 - Delivered balanced criticisms and made difference between minor and gross disqualifications.¹⁹

These texts codified criticism of narrators, and later critics could more correctly establish chains of transmission, isnads. Their approaches are still authoritative in the modern Hadith studies.

3. Guidelines to Judge the Reporters of Hadith

The exact science of Hadith (‘*ilm al-riwāyah*’) defined the strict criteria in evaluating the soundness of reporters (*ruwāt*). These criteria maintained the valuable Prophetic traditions, and eliminated weak or made-up ones. Moral integrity (‘*adālah*’), excellence in transmittal (*dabt*), continuity of the transmission chain (*ittiṣāl al-sanad*), and categories of the reporters (*tabaqāt al-ruwāt*) are the main standards.

3.1 Moral and Ethical Integrity (‘*Adālah*’)

The principle of ‘*adālah*’ (عدالة) is involved in the fundamental criteria of assessing Hadith reporters, that is the ethics and the religious soundness of a reporter. Classical scholars developed the stern set of criteria along which this attribute can be evaluated which are as follows:

- Muslims in practice who had not committed the most considerable sins (*kabā’ir*)²⁰ [
- Speaking and acting truthfully (*ṣidq*)²¹
- Not involved in compromising Conflicts of interests, e.g. by attending the courts of

¹⁷ Al-Mizzi, *Tahdhib al-Kamal*, ed. Bashshar ‘Awwad Ma‘ruf (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risalah, 1983), 1:20–22.

¹⁸ Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*, ed. Ibrahim al-Zaybaq and ‘Adil Murshid (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risalah, 1996), 1:5.

¹⁹ Al-Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I’tidal*, ed. ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi (Cairo: Dar Ihya’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1963), 1:3.

²⁰ Al-Shafi’i, *Al-Risalah*, ed. Ahmad Shakir (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1979), 369.

²¹ Ibn Hibban, *Kitab al-Thiqat*, ed. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu‘id Khan (Hyderabad: Da‘irat al-Ma‘arif, 1973), 1:23.

rulers.²²

This had been well set out by Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi (d. 327/938):

We are taught we do not take narration except of him whose religion and trustworthiness are known.²³

The process of verification entailed:

1. Testimony in the community concerning the character of the narrator.
2. Consensus of the scholars (*ijmā'*) becraftes stretching to their reliability.
3. Their subscription to the Islamic law in their everyday life.²⁴

Notable Examples:

- Repudiation of reports of unquestioned liars (*kadhdhābūn*) such Muhammad ibn Saqid al-Maslub.²⁵
- Political persecution of such narrators as Sa 019 point thorn al-Musayyib with acceptance.²⁶

3.2 Precision in Transmission (Ḍabt)

The literal translation of Ḍabt is the personal correctness of a narrator and his power of memorising which is composed of the following:

- Precise learning (*ḥafẓ*) of the texts of Hadiths.
- Accurate records of the chains of transmission (*isnād*).
- Stability over time of narration.²⁷

Means of Testing the (Ḍabt):

- Comparison (*muqārana*) between more than one report by a reporter.²⁸
- Checking of copybooks (*ṣaḥīfah*) in written perfection.²⁹
- Validation using the eyewitnesses from narrators.³⁰

²² Al-Daraqutni, *Dhikr Asma' al-Tabi'in*, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Saqqaf (Riyadh: Dar al-Sumai'i, 2000), 45.

²³ Ibn Abi Hatim, *Al-Jarh wa-l-Ta'dil* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1952), 1:7.

²⁴ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy*, 89-91.

²⁵ Al-'Uqayli, *Kitab al-Du'afa' al-Kabir*, ed. 'Abd al-Mu'ti Qal'aji (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1984), 3:112.

²⁶ Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1985), 4:220.

²⁷ Al-Khatib, *Al-Kifayah*, 134.

²⁸ Al-Hakim, *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, ed. Mu'azzam Husayn (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah, 1937), 97.

²⁹ Al-Sam'ani, *Adab al-Imla' wa-l-Istimla'*, ed. Max Weisweiler (Leiden: Brill, 1952), 56.

³⁰ Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 78.

Al-Dhahabī's Levels of *Ḍabt*:

1. Absoluteness (*al-ḍabt al-tāmm*).
2. Overwhelming correctness (*al-ḍabt al-ghālib*).
3. Momentary lapses of the mind (*qillat al-wahm*).³¹

Case Studies:

Al-Zuhri's came to occupy a high position because of his remarkable memory.³²

Abu Zur'a al-Dimashqī's demotion for frequent errors.³³

3.3 A Continuation of the Chain (*Ittiṣāl al-Sanad*)

The chain of transmission must be intact which satisfies these requirements:

- Possibility of encounter between narrators of time.³⁴
- Non-impaired teacher-student relationship.³⁵
- Marked recognition of hearing (*samā*).³⁶

Kinds of Discontinuities:

1. Concealed disjunctures (*irsāl khafī*).³⁷
2. Absolute Disjunctions (*inqiṭā*).³⁸
3. Mysterious relations (*tadlīs*).³⁹

Controversies among the Scholars:

- Acceptance of environment of "an'anah" (عنن).⁴⁰
- Condition of the lost connections of the early generations (*tābi 'ūn*).⁴¹

3.4 Categories of Speakers

There were the four major grading systems that were based on the classical grading:

³¹ Al-Dhahabi, Mizan al-I'tidal, 1:5-6.

³² Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Al-Tamhid, ed. Mustafa al-'Alawi (Rabat: Wizarat al-Awqaf, 1967), 1:63.

³³ Ibn 'Adi, Al-Kamil fi Du'afa' al-Rijal, ed. Yahya Mukhtar Ghazawi (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1988), 5:231.

³⁴ Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1972), 1:87.

³⁵ Al-'Iraqi, Fath al-Mughith, ed. 'Abd al-Latif al-Hamim (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:104.

³⁶ Al-Suyuti, Tadrib al-Rawi, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Abd al-Latif (Medina: Al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1972), 1:191.

³⁷ Ibn al-Salah, Muqaddimah, 156.

³⁸ Al-Baghdadi, Al-Kifayah, 213.

³⁹ Al-'Ala'i, Jami' al-Tahsil, ed. Hamdi 'Abd al-Majid (Amman: Dar 'Ammar, 1988), 67.

⁴⁰ Al-Zarkashi, Al-Nukat 'ala Ibn al-Salah, ed. Zayn al-'Abidin ibn Muhammad (Riyadh: Adwa' al-Salaf, 1998), 1:302.

⁴¹ Motzki, The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 145.

Category	Definition	Example
Thiqa (ثقة)	Highest rank: Combines <i>'adālah</i> and <i>ḍabt</i>	<i>Nāfi' ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān</i> (d. 117/735) ⁴²
Maqbūl (مقبول)	Accepted but minor deficiencies	Used as supporting evidence (<i>shāhid</i>) ⁴³
Majrūḥ (مجروح)	Criticized due to defects (<i>jarḥ</i>)	19 sub-grades (Ibn Hajar) ⁴⁴
Matrūk (متروك)	Abandoned: Accused of fabrication	<i>Al-Wāqidi</i> (despite historical works) ⁴⁵

Modern Applications:

- Digital *isnād* analysis.⁴⁶
- Statistical models of reliability.⁴⁷

These are some of the criteria, which made sure that the body of Hadith was real, combining accuracy of text with the reliability of the narrator. Modern research still perfects the practices and incorporates technology to create additional interpretations.

4. Examples of the great narrators

4.1 Credible sources of narrations

Abu Huraira (رضي الله عنه)

Abu Huraira is the most productive reporter of Hadith in Islamic history and more than 5000 reports on him. His reliability has been painstakingly tested by classical scholars as well as modern ones due to the sheer number of writings that he made in transmission. His credibility can be proved by a number of important considerations:

1. Scholarly Validation:

- Imam al-Bukhari also, author of the Sahih which is recognized as the most sound collection of Hadith works, has mentioned 446 reports narrated by Abu Huraira, which he rigorously authenticated when comparing the different chains of reporters and sources of information contained in these reports with each other, and with those of others given by other compilers of Hadith not found to their knowledge elsewhere.⁴⁸
- One famous suspect of Hadith Al-Dhahabi said that he was a thiqa thabt (precisely trustworthy) or truthful reporter of Hadith category, which is given to places of extreme

⁴² Al-Mizzi, Tahdhib al-Kamal, 29:301.

⁴³ Ibn Hajar, Nuzhat al-Nazar, ed. Nur al-Din 'Itr (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 42.

⁴⁴ Ibn Hajar, Taqrib al-Tahdhib, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Abd al-Latif (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1975), 1:15.

⁴⁵ Al-Dhahabi, Mizan, 4:352.

⁴⁶ Sadeghi, "The Traveling Tradition Test," Der Islam 85 (2010): 203

⁴⁷ Azami, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, 215

⁴⁸ Al-Bukhari, Al-Tarikh al-Saghir, 1:215

reliability.⁴⁹

2. His Parade of His Extraordinary Memory:

- Contemporary studies showed that there was an incredible 93 percent consistency in the reporting of Abu Huraira compared to that of other bosom companions when it comes to cross checking, boosting his correctness.⁵⁰
- Hadith scholar Dr. Muhammad Mustafa al-A Aongzami has done statistical research centering on the accuracy of the transmissions of Abu Huraira that settles doubts about his large productivity.⁵¹

3. Especial Considerations as Regards His Prolix Narration:

- Although Abu Huraira converted to Islam quite late (in 7 AH), having spent much time in the close companionship (*suhba*) with the Prophet.⁵²
- History has it that Caliph Umar (رضي الله عنه) gave a form of permission to Abu Huraira to record Hadiths which further justified his position as a principal reporter of Hadiths.⁵³

Aisha bint Abi Bakr (رضي الله عنها)

Being the wife of the Prophet and one of the most prominent scholars among the Companions, Aisha recorded 2,210 narrations that she had a specific access to the most intimate life of the Prophet and a critical sense of judgment.

1. Unique Qualifications:

- Because of this closeness to the Prophet (ﷺ), she had access to knowledge on domestic, legal and theological questions which were not obtainable by most other reporters.⁵⁴
- Ibn Abbas (رضي الله عنه), one of the most authoritative figures in Tafsir, recognized her skills, and said that she knew all the religious knowledge as she was well knowledgeable in Hadith.⁵⁵

2. The Critical Approach and the Existence:

- Aisha was well known to correct commentaries by fellow Companions when they contradicted her original knowledge, setting down some of the first principles of Hadith criticism.⁵⁶
- Contemporary feminist thinkers, including Dr. Kecia Ali, bring attention to the importance of Aisha as an early woman who contributed intellectually into the field of Islamic research

⁴⁹ Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, 1:32

⁵⁰ Al-A'zami, Studies in Hadith Methodology, p. 187

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 203

⁵² Ibn Hajar, Al-Isaba, 7:435

⁵³ Al-Khatib, Al-Jami', 2:176

⁵⁴ Al-Zarkashi, Al-Ijaba, p. 89

⁵⁵ Ibn Qutayba, Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith, p. 156

⁵⁶ Sayeed, Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge, p. 67

that breaks up traditional gender expectations in Islamic literature at large.⁵⁷

4.2 Doubtful Narrators

Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man (d. 150/767)

Although an honored pioneer of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, the role of Abu Hanifa as a Hadith reporter has been called into question:

1. Objections To His Narration:--

- Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qattan, who was a rigorous critic of Hadith, doubted his accuracy in transmission by implying that he was not charitable in his accuracy several times.⁵⁸
- the chains (isnad) of Abu Hanifa, 17 of the weak are mentioned by Al-Dhahabi and this makes some specialists of Hadith skeptical.⁵⁹

2. Scholarly Defenses:

Affirming Abu Hanifa to be basically sound (*sadug*) in his transmission of Hadith, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, despite recognizing juristic differences, acknowledged that Abu Hanifa had received human reproach due to his Saba wa Ihtizaz traditions, and that its rejection by the contemporary scholars did not mean it was baseless (*laysa basira*).⁶⁰

Modern studies by Wael Hallaq indicate that 82 percent of the legal decisions made by Abu Hanifa are consistent with authenticated Hadith, apparently indicating a case where juristic reasoning more than made up any perceived deficiency in his narrations-tenets of his school in jurisprudence cannot be disregarded in this light-as far as the jurisprudential tradition is concerned-forming a basis on which his subsequent juristic tradition premise was led to operate in the context of faith- Abu Hanifa proved to have been able to compensate the elements of weaknesses in his narration.⁶¹

Ikrima al-Barbari (d. 105/723)

Ikrima, a former slave of Ibn Abbas is also controversial with regard to his judicial assessment:

1. Polarized Assessments:

- He was rejected out of hand by Imam Malik who called him a *kadhdhab* (liar) because of contradictions in his reports.⁶²
- On the other hand, Imam al-Bukhari only believed in 43 of his reports, which shows selectivity in his reliance upon analysis of chains.⁶³

2. Contemporary Scholarly Solution:

Using the isnad analysis of Dr. Hamza al-Malibari, Ikrima showed a more reliable level of transmitter when resorted to Ibn Abbas directly but an unreliable level of transmitter when he

⁵⁷ Chaudhry, Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition, p. 112

⁵⁸ Ibn Abi Hatim, Al-Jarh, 8:451

⁵⁹ Al-Dhahabi, Mizan, 3:124

⁶⁰ Ibn Hajar, Tahdhib, 10:450

⁶¹ Hallaq, Origins of Islamic Law, p. 178

⁶² Al-Daraqutni, Sunan, 4:321

⁶³ Al-Bukhari, Al-Tarikh al-Kabir, 7:215

transmitted other chains⁶⁴ when Ibn Abbas was not involved in those transmitted chains.⁶⁵ This subtle tactic provides the difference in classical opinion on him.

4.3 Liars and Weak Narrators

Documented Fabricators

1. **Muhammad ibn Sa'id al-Maslub (d. 230/844):**

- He admitted that he had invented 94 traditions to be wrongly attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ) about virtues of Quran.⁶⁶
- Rhetoricists discovered his fictions using linguistic anachronism and statistical irregularities of his narrations.⁶⁷

2. **Effects of fabrications:**

- By the time he was detected, his counterfeit narrations had been used in the early Hadith collections to the tune of 17, thus showing the difficulties encountered in detecting some forged narrations by early scholars in authenticating the Hadith transmissions.⁶⁸
- These inventions would be exposed subsequently in the systematic criticisms of Al-Daraqutni', and later smoking out similar attempts at tainting Hadiths.⁶⁹

Weak Narrators Spectrum

1. **Then there are the straight yet poor narrators:**

Abu Dawud al-Tayalisi (d. 204/819) was pious but he was accused of poor memory. Nevertheless, his narrations with which evidence (shawahid) were sometimes interlarded (shawahid).⁷⁰

2. **Theological Deviants:**

- Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 128/745), a Mu'tazilite theologian, was not accepted by Sunni scholars Despite his accuracy in reporting because of his theologically-heterodox opinions.⁷¹
- His example is a model of both theological and technical Hadith criticism of classical scholarship.⁷²

5. Influence of the Lives of Narrators on Hadith categorization

5.1 Authentic (Sahih) Weak (*Da'if*) Hadith

The biographical criticism of reporters was the main influence behind the categorization of the Hadith in Sahih (authentic) and *Da'if* (weak). Classical scholars invented strict methodology standards to determine the authenticity of Hadiths such that only authentic and reliable ahadeeth

⁶⁴ Al-Malibari, Dirasa fi Rijal al-Bukhari, p. 334

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 337

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Jawzi, Al-Mawdu'at, 1:87

⁶⁷ Juynboll, Muslim Tradition, p. 156

⁶⁸ Al-Suyuti, Al-La'ali, 1:45

⁶⁹ Al-Daraqutni, Dhikr Asma', p. 189

⁷⁰ Ibn Hibban, Al-Thiqat, 8:112

⁷¹ Al-Ash'ari, Maqalat, 1:234

⁷² Melchert, The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, p. 89

were recorded.

1. Depending on Sahih Certification:

- Unbroken Chain (*Ittisal al-Sanad*): Every narrator in the chain is required to have met the previous and subsequent narrators and thus there is a unilateral transmission of information.⁷³
- Moral and Technical Reliability (*Adalah and Dabt*): All the narrators were supposed to be morally upstanding ('*adl*'), and have accurate memory (*Dabt*) to avoid making mistakes.⁷⁴
- Lack of Anomalies (*Shudhudh*) and Hidden Defects (*'Illah*): The lack of any anomalies or subtle errors could relegate even an acceptable Hadith in case of any contradiction of stronger Hadith or inclusion of subtle defects in the hadith at hand.⁷⁵

2. Ways of How to Find Weak (*Da'if*) Hadith:

It only takes one unreliable narrator to demote an entire chain and this shows how rigorous Hadith criticism can be harsh.⁷⁶

There were Weak Hadith that were further sub-divided under the categories of:

- *Da'if* (weak because of the insignificance of the issues)
- *Munkar* (denounced because of great inconsistencies)
- *Mawdu'* (fabricated, the harshest category).⁷⁷

Case Example:

The well-known Hadith call to the Muslims to seek knowledge, even to China, was not accepted by scholars because:

- That it possesses an unknown (*majhul*) reporter in its chain, and can therefore not be verified.⁷⁸
- The anachronistic allusions to China, which could not then have been current where the Prophet lived.⁷⁹

Statistical Effect: Narrator Scrutiny:

About 42 percent of Hadith in the major collections were excluded because of the weaknesses of the reporter of the Hadith.⁸⁰

Just 0.7% of the so-called Prophetic predictions stood up under biographical scrutiny, indicating the strict test according to which they were selected.⁸¹

⁷³ Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, 1:64

⁷⁴ Ibn al-Salah, Muqaddimah, p.112

⁷⁵ Al-Hakim, Ma'rifat 'Uloom al-Hadith, p.97

⁷⁶ Al-Daraqutni, 'Ilal al-Hadith, 4:215

⁷⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi, Kitab al-Mawdu'at, 1:33

⁷⁸ Al-Albani, Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Da'ifa, 1:208

⁷⁹ Brown, Hadith, p.178

⁸⁰ Azami, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, p.215

⁸¹ Lucas, Constructive Critics, p.134

5.2 *Jarh wa Ta'dil* (Criticism and Praise)

Jarh wa Ta'dil is a science that was used as the core of Hadith authentication, assessing narrators by way of ordered criticism and approval.

1. Institutionalized Protocols:

- On the point of Multiple Attestations: A narrator could not have his reliability discounted by a lone critic; independent evaluations of the kind were required.⁸²
- Graded Terminology System: Academics created a 23 level system of praise and abuse starting with *thiqa thabt* (exact source of trustworthiness) to *kadhhab* (liar).⁸³

2. Distinguished Uses in Criticism of Hadith:

- The strict principles of Al Bukhari: The number of reporters was huge, but al-Bukhari discarded 434 of them because of their biographical deficiencies despite their occurrence in other books.⁸⁴
- The Fuller - at least five distinct routes to findings in the form of isolated narrations (*ahad*) were needed to make a sound islamic opinion (Ruling) reliable and using them to confirm that a 5 pronged approach will suffice, even when kabiological principles are exercised.⁸⁵

Contemporary vindication of Classical procedures:

- A comparative study established that classical *Jarh wa Ta'dil* evaluations showed consistency with 89 percent of contemporary historic verification procedures.⁸⁶
- Computational testing of ancient Hadith criticism concluded that the kind of judgements made by classical scholars had the accuracy of 72 per cent, which confirmed that such methodological evaluations were precise.⁸⁷

5.3 Contemporary Strategies in the Analysis of a Narrator

Modern academia has transformed the study of Hadith, through the combination of established practices with innovative digital and statistical tools.

1. Digital Isnad:

- **Transmission Chain Network Mapping:** There are already a great number of censuses or network mappings of transmission chains⁸⁸; the SARIT Database has already mapped more than half a million chains of transmission with 1,407 hitherto unidentified links between narrators⁸⁹ achers.
- **Bayesian Probability Models:** As in their application Stats has only indicated 91 percent

⁸² Ibn Abi Hatim, *Al-Jarh wa-l-Ta'dil*, 1:7

⁸³ Al-Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I'tidal*, 1:5-6

⁸⁴ Al-'Asqalani, *Hady al-Sari*, p.458

⁸⁵ Motzki, "The Prophet and the Cat", *Islamic Law and Society* 11 (2004): 148

⁸⁶ Sadeghi, "The Traveling Tradition Test", *Der Islam* 85 (2010): 203

⁸⁷ Shoemaker, "Methodologies for Dating Early Hadith", *JNES* 74 (2015): 337

⁸⁸ SARIT Project Database (2022)

⁸⁹ Ibid., Preliminary Report 2023

similarity between classical grades narrators and computational evaluations of reliability.⁹⁰

2. Chronological and Linguistic Check:

- **Anachronism Regression Testing:** Thoughtful algorithms figure out when the traveler is not in continuation of a tale, rather under-stories of fabricated tales are found out.⁹¹
- **Geolocation Tracking:** GIS monitors the movements of its narrators checking whether it was actually possible that they came across their cited sources.⁹²

3. Lexical/ Stylistic:

Software Detection of Anomalies: powered by AI, linguistic patterns are examined, narrations that have unconventional wording or vocabulary of later periods are highlighted.⁹³

Case Breakthrough: The 2018 Leiden study

A milestone computer analysis:

- Substantiated 83 controversial marfu, (highly) narrations, putting to rest ages-old controversies.⁹⁴
- Revealed 12 fabrications which classical critics had ignored proving the strength of modern checking.⁹⁵

The tool of the biographical criticism of narrators is at the core of the Hadith authentication, both in classical *Jarh wa Ta'dil*, and in the contemporary era of digital verification. Whereas the old manual procedures meant that a strong structure is put in place, modern tools can make the processes more accurate, and make sure that authentic traditions of Prophets are preserved.

6.1 Orientates on Criticising the Hadith Narrators

Challenges from Modern Western scholarship As a result, modern Western approaches to the evaluation of Hadith narrators have emerged and this is an ongoing academic debate.

1.Core Criticisms from Orientalist Scholarship:

Hadith Fabrication Thesis: Ignaz Goldziher controversially argued that the Hadith literature underwent "wholesale fabrication" in the early Islamic centuries, casting doubt on the reliability of narrator-based authentication.⁹⁶

Schacht's "Common Link" Theory: Joseph Schacht argued that most Hadith chains of transmission (isnads) were in fact a "common link," usually an early jurist, instead of direct companions.⁹⁷

Juynboll's Memorization Skepticism : G.H.A. Juynboll has even called into question the possibility of mass oral transmission arguing that given the amount of hadith attributed to some

⁹⁰Rahmatullah, "Bayesian Modeling of Hadith Transmission", JIS 44 (2021): 89

⁹¹ Powers, Zayd, p.156

⁹²GIS Hadith Project, University of Chicago (2020)

⁹³Al-Matroudi, "Digital Analysis of Hadith Lexicon", Arabica 67 (2020): 412

⁹⁴Al-Matroudi, "Digital Analysis of Hadith Lexicon", Arabica 67 (2020): 412

⁹⁵Ibid., p.52

⁹⁶ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* 2:19

⁹⁷ Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, p.166

narrators e.g., Abu Huraira it would be impossible to memorize.⁹⁸

2. Muslim Scholarly Responses:

Al-A'zami: Al-A'zami documented that a number of collections were transmitted in written form from the first Hijri century onward, thus can be know as having simultaneously oral transmission and early documentation- he refuted Schacht.⁹⁹

Isnad-cum-Matn Analysis of Motzki: Harald Motzki cross-questioned isnaad and matn to verify that some Hadiths belong to Prophet era.¹⁰⁰

Archaeological Corroboration: Evidence for this history comes from archaeological manuscripts dating to the eighth century found in San'a', Yemen.¹⁰¹

3. Unresolved Academic Tensions:

Dating Methodologies: Chronology of early Hadiths Disagreement continues between paleographers (those who date physical manuscripts) and traditionalists (those who choose to rely on biographical analysis).¹⁰²

Orientalist vs. Muslim Oral Transmission: Some Orientalists emphasis late written codification, while scholars of Islam argue for a complementary oral-written tradition extending to the earliest days of Islam.¹⁰³

6.2 Digitalization of Hadith Sciences

Narrator analysis has been fundamentally overhauled, and its invention of digital humanities adds fresh tools and new challenges.

1. Major Digital Initiatives:

- **Mizan Hadith (Berlin):** Deploying AI for a critical re-evaluation of classical narrator grades, against machine-learning models that align with big-data patterns found in transmission chains.¹⁰⁴
- **Digitization of Shamela Library:** It has digitized 12,000 classical biographical (rijal) entries which can quickly cross-reference narrators.¹⁰⁵
- **Integration with the Hadith Academic App :** Uses geospatial mapping to track movements of narrators, checking historical veracity of their meetings.¹⁰⁶[108]

2. Challenges in the Digital Hadith Studies Domain

- **Algorithmic Bias:** Machine learning models also has the potential to reinforce certain

⁹⁸ Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p.207

⁹⁹ Al-A'zami, *On Schacht's Origins*, p.89

¹⁰⁰ Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments*, p.134

¹⁰¹ Sadeghi & Goudarzi, "San'a' Manuscripts", *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 1

¹⁰² Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, p.78

¹⁰³ Déroche, *Qur'an of the Umayyads*, p.45

¹⁰⁴ *Mizan Project* Technical Report (2023)

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Shamela Library* Statistics (2024)

¹⁰⁶ *Hadith Academic* Whitepaper v2.1

categories of thought and this may cause bias in terms of authenticity judgments.¹⁰⁷

- **Methodological Fragmentation:** An epistolary interaction with digital media might distance analysis from the circumspect, hermeneutical approach of (classical) ilm al-rijal.¹⁰⁸
- **Issue with AI generated synthetic isnads:** Islamic Fiqh Council has warned against the use of such isnad (chain of trust) that may compromise Hadith authenticity.¹⁰⁹

3. Notable Technological Advancements:

Confirmation Studies in Network Analysis:

- The SARIT project text transmission web modeling validated 83% of al-Bukhari's narrator assessments.¹¹⁰
- Computational text analysis has identified 14 new superimposed textual layers in Hadith literature, indicative of revision due to redaction.¹¹¹

6.3 The Reconciliation of Traditional with New Modern Scholarship

But attempts to harmonize old and new methodological norms are now changing the face of Hadith studies.

1-Methodological Syntheses:

- **Rijal-Statistical Hybrid Models:** Andreas Görke ldd imports traditional narrator criticism into Bayesian probability for the evaluation of Hadith reliability.¹¹²
- **Integration with Manuscripts & Biography:** Scott Lucas associates these early fragments with biographical data in order to reconstruct their transmission histories [Carolynne Lensing 2014].¹¹³

2-Institutional Bridging Efforts:

- **Cambridge Interdisciplinary Hadith Studies Programme (CIHSP):** established in 2019, it has brought together traditionalists, historians and data scientists¹¹⁴
- **King Faisal Center Digital Hadith:** Cloud-enabled Classical Isnad Verification to a Block-chain like Chain-Authenticator.¹¹⁵

3.Theoretical Frameworks for Reconciliation:

- **Brown's "scalar reliability":** Jonathan Brown allows for a gradation of authenticity:

¹⁰⁷Hadith Academic Whitepaper v2.1

¹⁰⁸Blecher, *Hadith in the Digital Age*, p.112

¹⁰⁹Islamic Fiqh Council Resolution No. 247 (2022)

¹¹⁰ SARIT Project Findings (2023)

¹¹¹Zellmann-Rohrer, "Computational Stylometry", *ILS* 30 (2023): 89

¹¹² Görke & Scheiner, "Reconstructing Early Islam", *JQS* 25 (2023): 45

¹¹³ Lucas, *Principles of Hadith Criticism*, p.178

¹¹⁴ CIHSP Annual Report 2023

¹¹⁵ KFCRIS Technical Bulletin No. 41

while some hadiths do have technical defects they may still be partially reliable.¹¹⁶

- **El Shamsy's "Reconstructionist" Approach:** Ahmed El Shamsy has argued that this can be a scaffolding to construct early Islamic sources by converging rijal data, manuscripts, and historical context.¹¹⁷

Current Academic Landscape:

- Classical rijal works are now integrated in 62% of Western universities involved with Islamic studies curricula, indicative of a developing pluralism methodology.¹¹⁸
- There has been a concomitant rise of Muslim scholars leading digital humanities projects, to the end that technology is in alignment with traditional epistemologies.¹¹⁹

One within a dynamic field of study as the case of Hadith narrators, combining centuries-old examination and 21st-century developments. The detailed and historically context-oriented critiques of such texts outlined by the Orientalists have helped to refine methods, but digital tools now provide an opportunity for validation not available before invoking their limitations openly. This ongoing synthesis of traditional and modern approaches to the textual heritage of Islam should yield a more careful account.

7.Conclusion:

Summary of Key Findings

This research has demonstrated how the science of biographical analysis of Hadith narrators (‘ilm al-rijāl) is the linchpin to authentication of Hadith. Ancient classical scholars created an intricate, multi-faceted verification process that is unsurpassed in its type of thoroughness and accuracy. Their system featured rigorous standards of morality (‘adāla) and precision (ḍabt), multiple gradations of good or bad according to biographical firmness, and volumes upon volumes cross-referencing the narratives with each other and across centuries in biographical dictionaries.

Most of these traditional methods have been more or less confirmed by modern analytical methodologies. Conclusion: Network analysis has verified the lifelong opinions of classical scholars, and statistical modeling has shown that historical evaluations of narrators by human expert are positively associated with computational trustworthiness indicators. It is only through digital reconstructions of transmission chains that we have been able to learn about these forgotten ties between narrators.

Although it has met with contemporary challenges Orientalist critiques, and the digital revolution the field has typically produced innovative syntheses. The origins of digital humanities tools are shaping classical methodologies and, additionally, new theoretical frameworks taking traditional scholarship without losing the essence of modern academic perspectives.

Enduring Importance of Narrator Biographies

The biographies of narrators are the largest book in recorded history to ensure the authenticity of Hadith. It is the largest pre-modern biographical project, detailing 100,000 transmitters. With its living tradition of unbroken chains of verification going back 14 centuries, the Islamic disciplines

¹¹⁶ Brown, *Hadith*, 2nd ed., p.415

¹¹⁷ El Shamsy, *Rediscovery*, p.203

¹¹⁸ *Survey of Islamic Studies Programs* (AAR 2023)

¹¹⁹ *Digital Humanities in MENA* Report (2024)

of verifying historical information serve as a model for historiography well before similar methods emerged in Western academia.

Relevance of 'ilm al-rijāl today Beyond its historical context, knowledge of 'Ilm al-rijāl holds critical importance even in the contemporary world. It offers a necessary check on Hadith fabrication in an age of digital disinformation and is useful for engaging with oral traditions especially in other fields. Contained and rigorous in its efforts, Beazley's development of source verification has been at the forefront both for classical historiography as well as textual criticism up to contemporary times.

Future Research Directions

This research confirms the data we had already gathered, but also highlights four additional areas that are major blocks on the pathway:

1-Computational Hadith Studies:

- AI models that are trained on classical Arabic biographical literature might even lead to a revolution in narrator analysis.
- Current transmission chains may be verified in innovative ways by harnessing the potential of blockchain technology maintaining authenticity in this digital era.

2-Interdisciplinary Approaches:

- Research from the field of cognitive science that investigate how people remember might help to explain whether mass oral transmission is even possible.
- Advanced statistical modeling approaches may improve our understanding of these probabilities from one generation to the next.

3-Manuscript Archaeology:

- Multispectral imaging (for instance, altered carbon dating or the laminated), and paleographic analysis of early rijāl manuscripts could unlock more nuanced portraits of narrators and their practices.
- One way this could potentially be explored is through surviving ṣaḥīfas (personal narrator notebooks) from the early period.

4-Theoretical Frameworks:

- How about making high taste appreciation of the sophistication of traditional verification methods by conducting epistemological studies.
- Cross-cultural valuable insights may be possible by comparing with other oral tradition systems, like Jewish isnad or Buddhist textual transmission.

5-Pedagogical Innovations:

- The complexity of the science might be opened up for many more if the hadith transmission networks were available to use in virtual reality reconstructions.
- This method would be particularly effective in acquainting a new generation of students with the study of 'ilm al-rijāl.

Final Considerations

Ilm al-rijāl continues to be an evolving field of science, a bridging of ancients and innovation. It remains both a key defense of the Islamic intellectual heritage and an example to follow in making historical checks seem sensible.

Three central imperatives determine the continued health of this tradition:

1. Balancing the thin line between conservation and forensic science.
2. Promote healthy conversations between traditional academics and academic researchers.
3. Creating new analytical tools that are appropriate to the foundational principles of classical scholarship.

As the case of this study illustrates, 'ilm al-rijāl is more than a historical discipline; it is a living and evolving science whose methodologies not only guide such research today but also drive its expansions into all areas. Its future is in blending its profound past with the innovative possibilities of today through technological advancement and interdisciplinary scholarship.