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THE CLASSIFICATION OF HADITH ACCORDING TO THE SCHOLARS OF THE MADHHABS AND THE MUHADDITHUN

Abstract. *This article explores how scholars of the Islamic legal schools (madhhabs) and the muhaddithun classified hadith, analyzing the conceptual foundations and criteria that underpinned their respective systems of classification. It examines key categories such as mutawatir and ahad reports, as well as the gradations of authenticity sahih, hasan, and da'if highlighting the methodological nuances in their evaluation. The study further investigates the distinctive approaches adopted by jurists (fuqaha') and hadith specialists in utilizing hadith as a source of legal and doctrinal authority, with particular attention to the acceptance of solitary reports, the role of contextual indicators (qara'in), and the reconciliation of apparently conflicting narrations. By offering a comparative analysis, the article demonstrates both the areas of convergence and divergence between these scholarly traditions, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of hadith epistemology and its application in Islamic legal theory.*

Keywords: Companion (Sahabi), Tabi'un, Taba'al-Tabi'in, Mutawatir, Ahad, narrator (rawi), madhhab, jurist (faqih), accepted (maqbul), rejected (mardud), sahih, hasan, muttasil, shadhdh, da'if.

INTRODUCTION

The science of hadith occupies a central place within the Islamic intellectual tradition, as it preserves and transmits the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet ﷺ, serving as a fundamental source for understanding Islamic law and doctrine. Over time, scholars developed rigorous methodologies to evaluate and classify hadith reports based on both their chains of transmission (isnad) and textual content (matn).

From the perspective of acceptance and rejection, the muhaddithun classify reports into two main categories: maqbul (accepted) and mardud (rejected). Maqbul reports

are further divided into two types: sahih and hasan. Each of these may be categorized as sahih li-dhatihi or sahih li-ghayrihi, and hasan li-dhatihi or hasan li-ghayrihi. These classifications and their specific characteristics are discussed in detail below.

Mardud refers to rejected reports, namely weak (da'if) hadith. Weak hadith have numerous subcategories; some are designated with specific technical terms, while others remain under the general classification of weakness. This article examines these classifications and their underlying methodological principles.

MAIN BODY

Sahih Hadith

Scholars have defined sahih hadith as follows. Linguistically, the word sahih means "sound" or "authentic." In technical terminology, it refers to a narration with an uninterrupted (muttasil) chain of transmission, reported by a just ('adil) and precise (dabit) narrator, free from any hidden defect ('illah) and irregularity (shadhdh). Here, shadhdh refers to a narration in which a reliable narrator contradicts someone who is more reliable than him (Abduqodirov, 2021:68).

Sahih hadith is also divided into two types: sahih li-dhatihi and sahih li-ghayrihi. Sahih li-dhatihi is a hadith that fulfills all the conditions of authenticity in its original form. Sahih li-ghayrihi refers to a narration whose individual chain may not reach the highest level of precision, but whose minor weakness is compensated by supporting chains of transmission. For such strengthening to occur, at least two supporting routes are required. As a result, a hadith that was originally at the level of hasan li-dhatihi is elevated to sahih li-ghayrihi due to corroborating evidence.

An example of this category is the hadith narrated by Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi through Muhammad ibn 'Amr, from Abu Salamah, from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Prophet ﷺ said: "Were it not that I would impose a burden on my ummah, I would have commanded them to use the siwak at every prayer" (al-Tirmidhi, 2021:205). Muhammad ibn 'Amr is counted among the well-known reliable narrators, but his precision was not at the highest level; some hadith scholars even considered him weak due to poor memory. This narration is therefore classified as hasan li-dhatihi on its own. However, when supported by another chain from al-A'raj, from Abu Hurayrah it is elevated to the level of sahih li-ghayrihi.

Hasan Hadith

As for hasan, scholars define it as follows. Linguistically, "hasan" is the opposite of "ugly" and refers to something toward which hearts are naturally inclined. In technical usage, it is a hadith narrated by a narrator who is just ('adil) but has a slightly weaker level of precision (dabt), transmitted through an uninterrupted chain, and free from shadhdh and hidden defects. In terms of legal authority, a hasan hadith is lower in strength than sahih, but is still accepted as evidence just like sahih hadith.

An example of a hasan hadith is narrated by Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi from Bundar, from Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Qaṭṭan, from Bahz ibn Hakim, from his father, from his grandfather, that a man asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: "O Messenger of Allah, to whom should I show the greatest kindness?" He replied: "Your mother." The man asked: "Then who?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked again: "Then who?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked: "Then who?" He said: "Then your father and your close relatives." Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi commented: "This hadith is hasan due to what Shu'bah said regarding Bahz ibn Hakim. However, hadith scholars considered him trustworthy (thiqah)" (al-Tirmidhi, 2021:205).

Hasan hadith is also divided into two types: (1) hasan li-dhatihi the hasan hadith as described above in its original form; and (2) hasan li-ghayrihi a narration that is initially weak due to issues such as slight weakness in memory, tadlis, or minor unreliability in transmission, but is later strengthened through supporting chains. Because of this external support, it is called hasan li-ghayrihi hasan by virtue of external factors (Abduqodirov, 2021:59).

Da'if (Weak) Hadith

As for da'if (weak) hadith, linguistically the term means "weak" or "lacking strength." In technical terms, it refers to a narration that does not meet the conditions of acceptance not because of fabrication or the narrator's moral corruption, but due to factors such as weak memory or frequent mistakes in transmission.

Weak hadith is generally divided into three levels. The first level is "mild weakness," comprising all weak hadith except fabricated (mawdu') and extremely weak narrations. Hadith in this category may be strengthened through supporting chains. Scholars approached the issue of acting upon weak hadith with great caution: they did not reject weak hadiths entirely but stated that they may be used under specific conditions particularly in matters related to virtuous deeds (fada'il al-a'mal), encouragement, and

discouragement. However, weak hadiths are not used as primary evidence in deriving legal rulings (ahkam).

Scholars considered the application of weak hadith permissible only when the previously mentioned conditions are fulfilled. Furthermore, hadith scholars emphasized responsibility in transmitting weak narrations: they should not be reported as decisive prophetic statements for legal rulings, but must be narrated with a clear indication of their weakness. This ensures academic honesty and preserves the reliability of transmission. Consequently, although weak hadith remains part of the hadith heritage, its scope of application is limited and governed by strict methodological principles.

CONCLUSION

Since the principal focus of this study is the discussion of sahih hadith, it is also necessary to address its opposite category weak (da'if) hadith and to present some related observations. In contemporary discourse, some groups criticize the Hanafi school by labeling the hadiths upon which it relies as weak, while also influencing the general public to adopt their perspective. This raises an important question: are the hadiths they claim to be weak truly weak? And even if they were assumed to be weak, why did the Hanafi school the most widely followed legal school accept and employ them as legal evidence?

Zafar Ahmad al-'Uthmani al-Thawawi, in his work *I'la' al-Sunan*, provides a refined explanation to resolve this issue. He clarifies that when scholars of the madhhabs use a "weak" hadith as evidence, their intention is not the weak category in its absolute technical sense, but rather a hadith that is lower than sahih but still acceptable which corresponds to the category of hasan in hadith terminology. He also mentions that he himself initially wondered how such eminent scholars could rely on weak hadiths, until he later arrived at this clarification (al-'Uthmani al-Thawawi, 2022).

A detailed explanation of this issue is also found in *Tuhfat al-Mardiyya* by Shaykh Husayn ibn Muhsin al-Ansari al-Yamani. There, it is mentioned that scholars such as Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal permitted acting upon weak hadith when no stronger evidence was available, and considered it preferable to purely rational opinion (ra'y). Ibn 'Allan explains that the term "weak" in this context refers to what is weaker than sahih in the classification of hadith scholars, and includes hasan reports as well. It does not refer to

the extremely weak narrations that fail to meet the conditions of acceptance in hadith terminology (al-Juzajani, 2021:64).

Al-Bahr al-Zarkashi also transmits similar explanations, stating that Hanafi scholars agree that a "weak" hadith understood in this broader scholarly sense is preferred over pure analogical reasoning (qiyas). What is meant by "weak" in these discussions is thus not fabricated or severely unreliable reports, but rather narrations that still possess a level of acceptability within the framework of hadith methodology. Consequently, it becomes clear that the apparent contradiction arises from differences in terminology and classification, rather than from the actual misuse of unreliable reports.

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