# Critical Methods on Hadīth:
# Self Reflexivity in Hadīth
# Scholarship

*Recep ŞENTÜRK* [*]

**"Hadis Tenkit Metotları: Hadis İlminde Öz Eleştiri"**

**Özet:** Hadis rivayeti öz eleştiriyi kesintisiz bir şekilde kullanan bir ilim dalı olmuştur. Öz eleştiri çabasının neticesi olarak ortaya muhtelif edebî tarzlar ve literatür çıkmıştır. Bunlar arasında, Hadis Usûlü, hadis rivayet metotlarını eleştirirken, Fıkıh usûlü hadislerin hukukî yorumlarını eleştirmiş, Rical İlmi ise hadis ravilerinin eleştirel bir şekilde incelenmesi görevini üstlenmiştir. Her bir edebî tarz, hadis rivayetinin farklı bir boyutunu eleştirel bir şekilde inceleyen rasyonel bir çabanın ürünü olup, unvanı ne olursa olsun hiç bir hadis âlimi, daha sonra gelen nesiller tarafından eleştiri üstü görülmemiştir. Bu da bize hadis ilminde öz eleştirinin son derece kapsamlı bir şekilde ve objektif kriterlerle yürütüldüğü konusunda bilgi vermektedir.

Hadīth narration, I argue, remained an excessively self-critical and self-reflective activity regarding ties, identities, and networks, but not only regarding narrative texts. The Sciences of hadīth, which emerged gradually parallel to the formation of hadīth transmission network, document the way hadīth narrators examined their own network.[1] A survey of this literature below will show that narrators developed a differentiated view to hadīth, its narrators and types of their ties. Furthermore, they analyzed patterns in the transmission networks of hadīth to determine the degree of reliability. This critical activity created a system of thought through which narratives, narrators and chains were brought together to create a larger structure.

Meta-narratives[2] of hadīth can be best understood in contradistinction with each other: the Methodology of hadīth (*Usūl al-Hadīth*), Methodology of Islamic Law (*Usūl al-Fiqh*), commentaries on hadīth compilations, and the biographical dictionary literature (*rijāl, tabaqāt and tārīkh*). Each metanarrative tradition developed a rather distinguished perspective on the same narrative material, which will be introduced below.

How hadīth narrators reflected on and examined their own network and the network of others manifests itself in metanarrative. Metanarrative -with valuation as its integral part- assigns identities to narrators, narratives, their ties, and their networks. This complicated order is difficult to penetrate without considerable study and contemplation. These parts developed relationally and remain interdependent to each other. Narratives mediate ties to other identities. The intermeshing of these identities creates a metastructure of actors, narratives, and metanarratives. Employing these constructs, metanarrative ironically both warns and insures the public about the reliability of narrative. Metanarrative genres of hadīth give the impression of a bloody battlefield: identities are attacked and defended quite apart from the conflict over the interpretation of the content of narrative. The outcome, however, as Silverstein argues for metalanguage is structural coherence[3] variably achieved, perceived, and used by actors and onlookers. The historical manifestation of structural coherence is the rise of the different schools of law which made sense of hadīth and its transmission network in contradictory terms.

Metanarrative is an emergent structural property of narrative social structure. It emerges -as reflection and medium of construction- gradually parallel to the development of narrative social structure and takes various forms based on the criteria used in the self-reflection and examination of the narrators. These criteria are derived from culture and based on broader epistemological questions.

## I. Methodology of Hadīth Criticism: Usūl al-Hadīth

Parallel to the emergence of hadīth compilations in volumes, a new genre also emerged, the critique of hadīth. Scholars of hadīth referred to it as the Science(s) of hadīth (*Ulūm al-Hadīth*), the Science of the Terminology of

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[*] Associate Professor of Sociology and Islamic Studies at the Center for Islamic Studies (ISAM), Istanbul. ras13@tnn.net

[1] Robson, James, *An Introduction to the Science of Tradition Being Al-Madkhal ilā Ma'rifat al-Iklil by al-Hakim Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Naisaburi*, London, 1953.

[2] Metanarrative means narrative about narrative. Hadīth is a narrative. Therefore all disciplines whose subject is hadīth can be seen as metanarratives of hadīth.

[3] Silverstein, Micheal, "Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Fuction", *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics* (ed. Lucy, John A.), Cambridge 1993, p. 94, See also Gombert, Jean Emile, *Metalinguistic Development*, Chicago 1992. Distinct from semantic and text-bound "sense-based coherence" needed by actors who are embedded in social structures to interact meaningfully within the context.

hadīth (*'Ilm Mustalah al-Hadīth*), or the Methodology of Hadīth Criticism (*Usūl al-Hadīth*). This genre gradually developed over centuries.

Amongst the early scholars of hadīth, the rules and criteria governing their study were meticulous, but some of their terminology varied from scholar to scholar, and their principles began to be systematically written down, scattered amongst various books. One of the outstanding and path breaking works is *Al-Risālah* of al-Shafi'i (d. 204), the introduction to *the Sahīh of Muslim* (d. 261) and *the Jāmi' of al-Tirmidhī* (d. 279); many of the criteria of early scholars, for instance al-Bukhārī, were deduced by later scholars through a careful study of which reporters or *isnads* were accepted and rejected by them.

One of the earliest examples of a comprehensive work is by al-Ramahurmuzi (d. 360). The next major contribution was *Ma'rifah 'Ulūm al-hadīth* by al-Hakim (d. 405), which covered fifty classifications of hadīth, but still left some points untouched; Abu Nu'aim al-Isbahani (d. 430) completed some of the missing parts in this work. After that came *Al-Kifāyah fi 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* of al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463) and another work on the manner of teaching and studying hadīth; later scholars were considered to be greatly indebted to al-Khatib's work. After further contributions by Qadi 'Iyād al-Yahsubī (d. 544) and Abū Hafs al-Mayanji (d. 580), among others, came the work which, although modest in size, was so comprehensive in its excellent treatment of the subject that it came to be the standard reference for thousands of scholars and students of hadīth to come, over many centuries until the present day: *'Ulūm al- hadīth* of Abu 'Amr 'Uthman Ibn al-Salāh (d. 643), commonly known as *Muqaddimah of Ibn al-Salāh*, compiled while he taught in the Dār al-Hadīth of several cities in Syria.

Some of the numerous later works based on that of Ibn al-Salāh include the following: An abridgement of *Muqaddimah*, *Al-Irshād* by al- Nawawī (d. 676), which he later summarised in his *Taqrib*; *Tadrib al-Rawi*, a valuable commentary on the latter by al-Suyuti (d. 911); *Ikhtisar 'Ulūm al-hadīth* by Ibn Kathir (d. 774), *Al-Khulasah* by al-Tibi (d. 743), *Al- Minhal* by Badr al-Din b. Jama'ah (d. 733), *Al- Muqni'* by Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 802) and *Mahasin al-Istilah* by al-Balqini (d. 805), all of which are abridgements of *Muqaddimah* of Ibn al-Salāh. *Al-Nukat* of al-Zarkashi (d. 794), Al-*Taqyid wa 'l-Idah* of al-'Iraqi (d. 806) and *Al-Nukat* of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852), all of which are further notes on the points made by Ibn al- Salāh. *Alfiyyah al-hadīth* of al-'Iraqi, a rewriting of *Muqaddimah* in the form of a lengthy poem, which became the subject of several commentaries, including two (one long, one short) by the author himself, *Fath al-Mughith* of al-Sakhawi (d. 903), *Qatar al-Durar* of al-Suyuti and *Fath al-Baqi* of Shaykh Zakariyyah al-Ansari (d. 928)[4].

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4    Other notable treatises by subsequent generations include: *Al-Iqtirah* of Ibn Daqiq al-'Id (d. 702).

Hadīth criticism, as Ibn Khaldun summarized, was guided by some principles. However, these principles are scattered in the classical literature. Below I tried to codify these principles to make them easily accessible to the modern reader. These principles have their roots in our daily experience with reported speech and narrative. They developed gradually, gained considerable acceptance in the Hadīth community and constrained the narrative actions of narrators. These metastructural features combined will give us an idea about the culturally operative measures used in the hadīth literature to determine the relative reliability of hadīth and the identity of narrators.

The first criterion the hadīth critic uses concerns the number of ties in the chain of narration to the source: The fewer the number of ties in a chain, the more reliable the chain. This may be seen as the primary rule in the critique of the narrative chain. It is common sense that each addition in the narrative chain increases the possibility of distortion and reduces the level of authenticity and reliability. Hadīth scholars turned this commonly familiar rule into a guiding principle and systematically employed it in the critique of hadīth. The shortness of a chain is a relative measure and can only be determined in comparison to other chains. When the length of two chains, the one with less nodes is termed 'high' (*'ali*), while the one with relatively more number of nodes is called 'lower' (*nazil*). Particularly prior to the spread of the canonical compilations, a hadīth had been compared to each other by examining the length of their chains. Aspiring students traveled to remote lands to obtain shorter chains of narrative from prominent teachers. However, after the general acceptance of the canonical texts, the emphasis on the shortest chains increasingly lost its importance. Jurists prefer hadīth with shorter chains of narrative in the case of contradiction.

The second criterion adopted by the hadīth critic is the number of corroborative or parallel chains for a narrative. Briefly put, the more parallel chains a narrative has, the more reliable the narrative is. We may see this rule as the second major principle of hadīth critique. Again, it is common sense that the narrative with higher number of parallel chains is more assuring to the audience, compared to the one with less number of parallel chains. Hadīth critique extrapolated a general principle from this common notion and employed it in

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*Tanqih al-Anzar* of Muhammad b. Ibrahim al- Wazir (d. 840), the subject of a commentary by al-Amir al-San'ani (d. 1182). *Nukhbah al-Fikar* of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, again the subject of several commentaries, including one by the author himself, one by his son Muhammad, and those of 'Ali al-Qari (d.1014), 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1031) and Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Hadi al-Sindi (d. 1138). Among those who rephrased the Nukhbah in poetic form are al-Tufi (d. 893) and al- Amir al-San'ani. *Alfiyyah al-Hadīth* of al-Suyuti, the most comprehensive poetic work in the field. *Al-Manzumah* of al-Baiquni, which was expanded upon by, amongst others, al-Zurqani (d. 1122) and Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (d. 1307). *Qawa'id al-Tahdith* of Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (d. 1332). *Taujih al-Nazar* of Tahir al-Jaza'iri (d. 1338).

determining the relative reliability of contesting narratives. Jurists give priority to a hadīth with more number of parallel chains because it is considered more reliable.
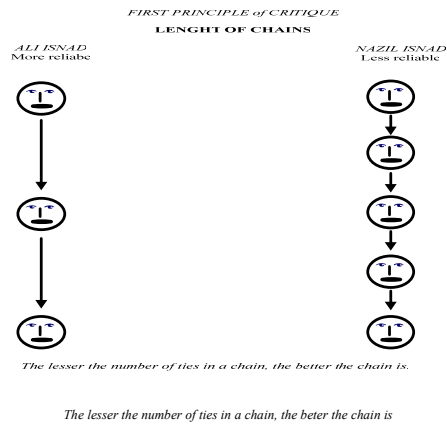
FIRST PRINCIPLE of CRITIQUE
**LENGHT OF CHAINS**

ALI ISNAD
More reliabe

NAZIL ISNAD
Less reliable

The lesser the number of ties in a chain, the better the chain is.

*The lesser the number of ties in a chain, the beter the chain is*

**Figure 1**: The First Principle of Hadith Criticism

SECOND PRINCIPLE of CRITIQUE
**NUMBER OF CHAINS**

MUTEWATIR
More than 7 chains
Most reliable

MASHHUR
More than 4 chains
Very reliable

KHABAR WAHID
Less than 4 chains
Less reliable

*The more chains a hadith has, the better the hadith is*
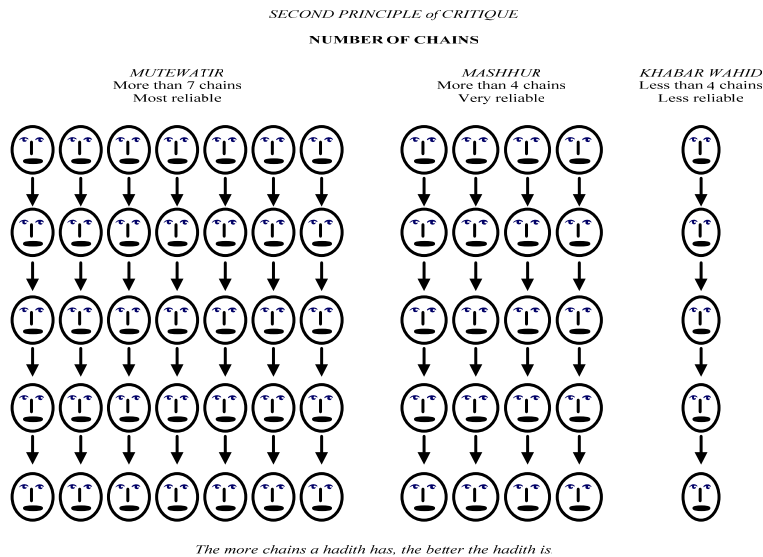
**Figure 2:** The Second Principle of Hadith Criticism

The third major criterion used by Hadīth critique can be identified as the continuity of chain: The fewer the indirect ties, the better the chain. In other words, the less broken, the better the chain, or the more completely recorded

the ties in a chain, the more reliable the chain. In a reported speech one of the first features we examine is the possibility of tracing the chain to the source without any interruption. Each node and each relationship must be verifiable. This is required to prove that the chain of narrative is reliable and the content is true. Yet, sometimes, it is not easy to determine the exact information about each node and relation. In such a case, we have to rely on what is available for us at the moment. From this perspective, each chain has a relative reliability, the unbroken being the most reliable. The resulting typology includes the following categories: *muttasil,* 'unbroken,' a continous chain; *mu'allaq,* 'suspended,' a chain which lacks the names of one or more narrators in the chain; *munqati',* 'broken,' a chain in which several narrators are unknown; and *mursal,* 'loose,' a chain in which the name of the Companion is not mentioned.
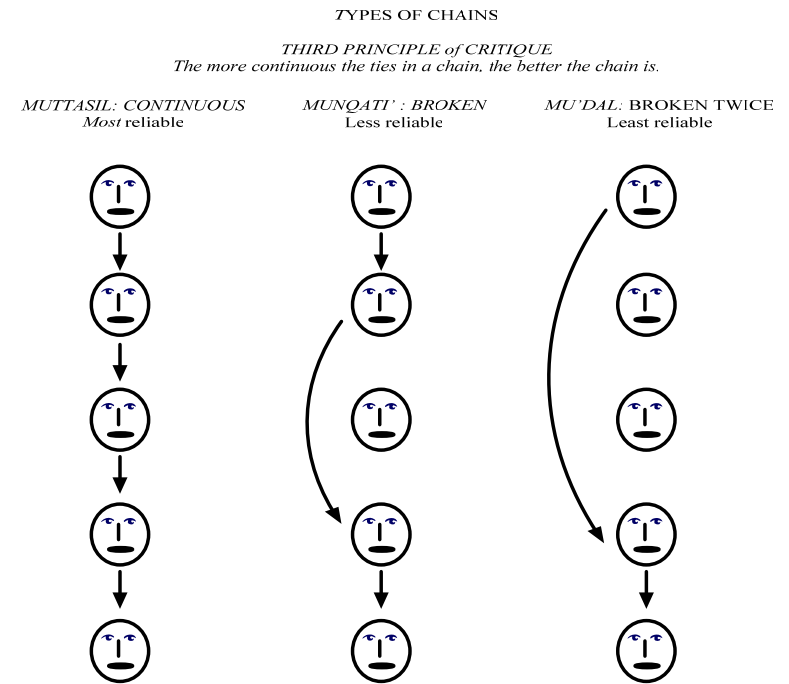
TYPES OF CHAINS

THIRD PRINCIPLE of CRITIQUE
*The more continuous the ties in a chain, the better the chain is.*

MUTTASIL: CONTINUOUS
*Most* reliable

MUNQATI' : BROKEN
Less reliable

MU'DAL: BROKEN TWICE
Least reliable

*The more continuous the ties in a chain, the better the chain is*
**Figure 3**: The Third Principle of Hadith Criticism

The forth main criterion used by hadīth critics can be identified as the reputation of narrators in the chain. Thus the fourth rule can be stipulated as follows: the more reputed the narrators in a chain, the more reliable the chain. This principle can also be traced back to our daily experience with reported speech. The report that comes with authority of respectable and well-known

narrators is usually more assuring to us. On the contrary, the unknown and obscure narrators or reporters would not possibly command equal trust and reliability. The systematic application of this rule produced three types of chain: *ma'ruf*, 'renowned,' which means a chain of narration with all well-known narrators; *shadhdh*, rare, which indicates a narrative chain with obscure figure(s) in it; and *mudallas,* intentionally corrupted, which means a suspicious chain of narration with narrators, either unmentioned or mentioned in mis-leading manner that gives the impression that they are well-known and reli-able ones, though the truth of the matter is not so.

*FOURTH PRINCIPLE of CRITIQUE*

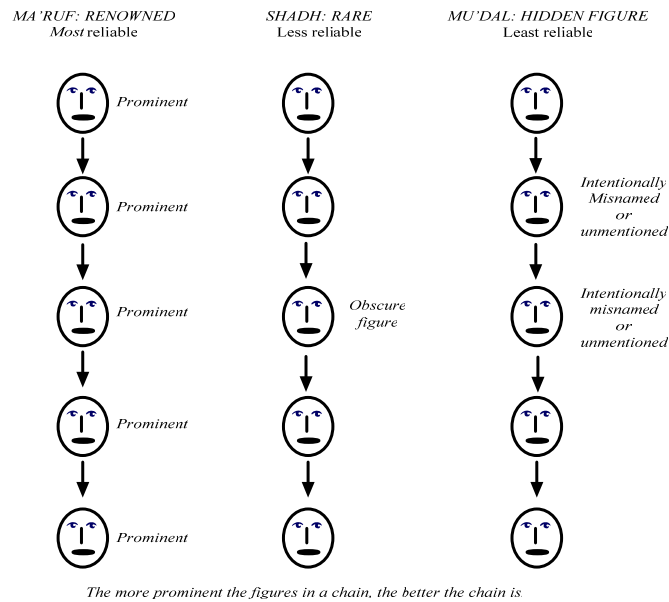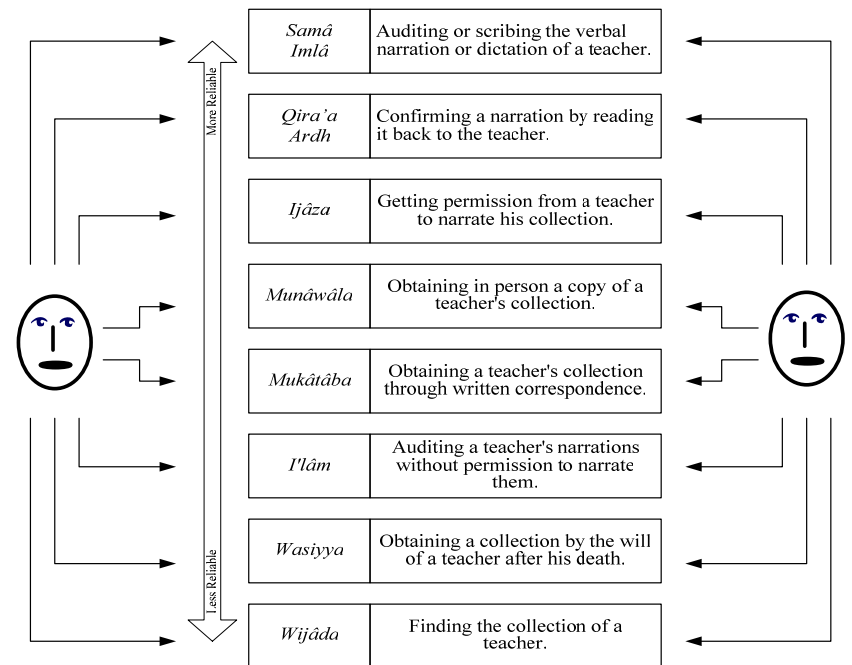**PROMINENCE OF NARRATORS IN THE CHAIN**



**Figure 4**: The Fourth Principle of Hadith Criticism

The fifth criterion concerns the type of narration, relation or the tie be-tween teacher and student. hadīth critics examine the strength of narrators' ties to each other to judge about their relative reliability, which is determined by the method of narration: the more adequate the methods of narration, the more reliable the chain. Eight types of narration are identified by hadīth narrators which also demonstrate how the teacher-student relationship is established among hadīth scholars: (1) *Sama'* and *imla*: Verbal narration with or without dictation by the mentor; (2) *Qira'a* and *'Ardh*: Student reading back

to the mentor what is initially narrated by the mentor; (3) *Ijaza*: Permission of the teacher to the student to narrate his narratives; (4) *Munawala*: Student obtaining a copy of a compilation by the mentor; (5) *Mukataba*: Student receiving the traditions of the mentor in writing through correspondence; (6) *I'lam*: Narration by a mentor to a student without granting permission of narrating to other; (7) *Wasiyya*: Student obtaining the collection of a teacher by his will; (8) *Wijada*: Student finding the collection of a mentor.

*THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE of CRITIQUE*

**TYPES OF NARRATION**



*The more adequate the methods of narration, the better the chain is.*

**Figure 5:** The Fifth Principle of Hadith Criticism

The sixth general principle of hadīth critique concentrates on the academic competence of narrators (*zabt*) which is demonstrated by the relative strength of their memories. Thus, the rule goes, the stronger the memory of the narrators, the more reliable the chain. According to this principle, the strength of the memory of each narrator in the chain is required for the reliability of narrative. Therefore, one must make sure that the following five defects do not exist in the narrators: *Sū' al-hifz*, unreliable memory; *kathrat al-ghalat*, excessive mistakes; *wahm*, persistent uncertainty; *fart al-ghafla*, absent-mindedness; *mukhalafat al-thiqat*, contradicting with the most reliable authorities. If one of these attributes is found in a narrator he/she is no longer considered reliable.

THE SIXTH PRINCIPLE *of* CRITIQUE

**TYPES OF ACADEMIC DEFECTS**
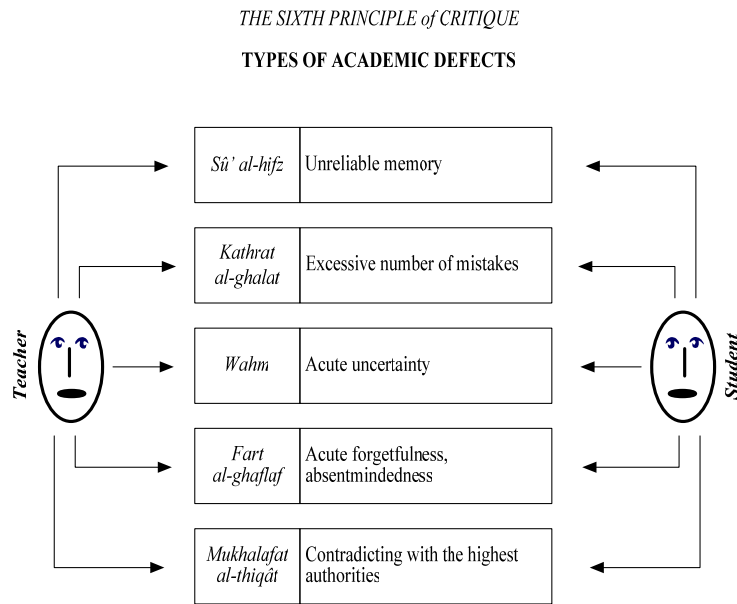


*The more competent the narrators, the more reliable the chain is.*

**Figure 6:** The Sixth Principle of Hadith Criticism

The seventh criterion on which hadīth critics focus is the character and morality (*'adl*) of narrators: The higher the character of the narrators, the more reliable the chain. This may be seen as the seventh major rule of the hadīth critique. A narrator's character is required to be free from five defects: *kidhb*, forging a hadīth; *ittiham bi al-kidhb*, lying in daily affairs; *fisq*, violating ethical

and religious principles; *bid'a*, herecy; *jahl*, obscurity. The existence of these defects in a narrator of hadīth is unacceptable and disqualifies him for the profession.

THE SEVENTH PRINCIPLE *of* CRITIQUE

**TYPES OF ETHICAL DEFECTS**
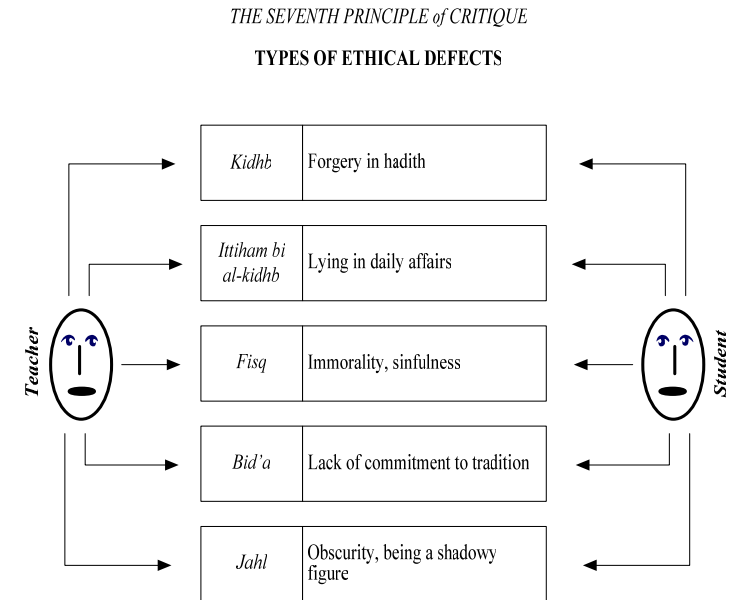


*The higher the character of the narrators, the more reliable the chain is.*

**Figure 7:** The Seventh Principle of Hadith Criticism

Operationalization of these concepts gave rise to a sophisticated, multidimensional, or multi-factor, evaluation system. Some narratives are denied the authority others enjoyed. Ahadīth are classified in accordance with authority attributed to it by the scholars as follows: (1) *Sahih*: reliable, sound; (2) *Hasan*: good, acceptable; (3) *Da'if*: weak; (3) *Mawdu'*: fabricated. This classification is not universal; one can find more refined classifications too.

The narrators' self-reflection focuses more on transmission structure rather than on the content. This orientation drew criticism from those who wanted more focus on texts. The principles of hadīth critique, which are used in coordination, appear to exhaust all aspects of the system of narration: types of chains, narrators and narration. It is generally accepted that the value of a chain is equal to its weakest link. Regarding the content, it is generally stipulated that the inconsistency with the empirically proven facts provides suffi-

cient ground to dismiss a narrative as forged. Otherwise, hadīth critique must strictly focus on the narrative process, narrators and relations.

| Criteria | Types | Brief Definitions |
|---|---|---|
| Length of the Chain | 'Ali | Continous Isnad with relatively less number of transmittes. |
| | Nazil | Continuous Isnad with relatively more number of transmitters. |
| Number of Chains | Mutawatir | Isnad with abundant number of chains that reason rejects the possibility of forgery. |
| | Mashhur | Isnad with many chains but not enough to give a perfect certainty. |
| | Ahad | At least one chain in each layer. |
| Continuity of Chain | Muttasil | Continuous |
| | Mu'allaq | Suspended: one or more names are missing in the chain. |
| | Munqati' | Broken: More than one node (other than the Companion) is missing in the chain, but not in row. |
| | Mursal | The Companion's name is missing in the chain. |
| Prominence of Transmitter | Ma'ruf | Isnad with all prominent figures. |
| | Shadhdh | Isnad with an obscure name in it. |
| | Mudallas | Isnad with an hidden or unmentioned name in it. |
| Validity of Hadīth | Sahih | Perfectly reliable |
| | Da'if | Relatively less reliable |
| | Hasan | Reliable |
| | Mawdu' | Unreliable |

**Table 1.8**: Classification of Narratives according to Five Criteria

The stratification of narrative is consequential because Islamic theology uses only the perfectly sahih hadīth (mutawatir); Islamic law uses the first two categories; some schools of law, history (seerah), and mysticism (tasawwuf) on moral lessons, use weak (Da'if) hadīth as well. A legal or theological principle can only be derived from a sound (sahih) hadīth -a concept variously defined. I can, therefore, confidently claim that each religious science (hadīth, law, theology, mysticism, and history) developed a distinctive metanarrative about hadīth for the different purposes they put it into use. Yet a detailed comparative analysis of these approaches is beyond the purpose of this study.

Below are two examples of hadīth criticism. These examples show how the above rather abstract rules and concepts are put into play within the context.

"Knowldge is only by learning/إنما العلم بالتعلم"

Al-Tabarani related it in *[al-Mu'jam] al-Kabir*. Abu Nu'aym and al-Askari also related it from Abu al-Darda' who reported it from the Prophet with the following phrases: "Knowledge comes only through learning; Insight comes only through persistent study. Only those who search for the good will be given it. Only those who want to protect themselves will be protected. Those who cast lots (or seek an oracle from the deity), see

an evil omen in (or believe that they are dispelled by) a bird that makes them give up their travel plans will not reach the high levels—and I do not say to you only in Paradise."

Muhammad bin al-Hasan al-Hamadani, one of the authorities in the chain, is a liar. Yet, al-Bayhaqi related it in *al-Madkhal* on the authority of Abu al-Darda as a *mawquf* hadīth. It is also reported in a narration from al-Tabarani. Similarly, al-Bayhaqi related it from Abu al-Darda with the addition, after his word "he is protected", "whoever has the following three qualities will not reach high levels—and I do not say to you only in Paradise: those who make prophesy, or cast lots, or gave up a journey because of an evil omen." Al-Askari also related it from Anas as a *marfu* hadīth, and also from Muawiya as a *marfu* hadīth but with the phrase of "O People! Knowledge comes only through learning; understanding comes only through persevering investigation. If God wishes good for someone gives him a comprehensive understanding in religion. Among the servants of God, only those who have knowledge really honor Him."

Likewise, al-Tabarani related it in *al-Kabir* and Ibn Abi Asim in *al-Ilm* also from Muawiya. Al-Bukhārī related it with expression that indicates certainty as he said in one of the chapter headings: "The Prophet, May God bless him and give him peace, said: If God wishes good about someone gives him a comprehensive understanding in religion. He also said, "Knowledge comes only through learning."

Al-Daraqutni narrated it in *al-Afrad,* from [the editor could not read what is in the manuscript] and al-Khatib from Abu Hurayra on the authority of Abu al-Darda with the phrase of "Knowledge comes only through learning; Insight comes only through persistent study. Only those who search for the good will be given it. Only those who wants to protect themselves will be protected."

Abu Nu'aym also related it from Shaddad bin Aws with the phrase of "A man said: O the Messenger of God! What increases knowledge? He said: 'learning.' In its chain of authorities, there is a liar. He is Umar bin Subayh.

Al-Bazzaz also related it as part of a long narrative whose chain of authorities consists of the reliable narrators on the authority of Ibn Masud as a *marfu* hadīth which stated: "He used to say: Hold on to this Qur'an because it is the counter [or dining table] of God. Whoever, among you, can take from the counter of God must do so because the knowledge comes only through learning."

Al-Bayhaqi related in *al-Madkhal,* and al-Askari related in *al-Amthal,* both from Abu al-Ahwas, that the Prophet said: "A man is not born as a scholar. Knowledge comes only through learning."

Al-Askari also narrated from Hamid al-Tawil that al-Hasan used to say: "If you are not insightful, try to become one. If you are not a scholar, study. If one tries to imitate a group, he usually becomes one of them."

Al-Askari also narrated through a different chain of authorities on the authority of Amr al-Bajili that al-Hasan said: "Pay attention! Even if you are dressed with the dress of a scholar, the one who is dressed with the dress of insight is better than you. If you did not have insight, I would not deal with you. So do your best to gain insight, for whoever tries to become like a group eventually joins them" (al-Jarrahi II: 215-216).

Here is another example of hadīth critique.

"What God created first is the Pen/أول ما خلق الله القلم"

Ahmad narrated it. Tirmidhi narrated and acknowledged its authenticity on the authority of Ubada bin al-Samit as a *marfu* hadīth with the following addition: "And He said to it: 'write.' The Pen said: "O my Lord! What should I write?" He said: "write the measures of everything."

Ibn Hajar said in *al-Fatawa al-hadīthiyya* "This hadīth reached to us and authentically reached to us through several chains."

In another narration, "God created the Throne and prevailed on it, then, He created the Pen and ordered it to draw with his permission. The Pen said: "O my Lord! What should I draw? He said: "What I am going to create and what is going to be in my Creation from rain, or plants, or the living, or the different ways of life, or the food, or the time of death." And the Pen drew what is going to be until the end of the world." Its men [i.e. narrators] are reliable except for al-Dhahhak bin Muzahim. Ibn Hibban honored him and said he did not hear from Ibn Abbas, yet, a large group of scholars considered him weak.

It reached to us on the authority of Ibn Abbas, may God bless both of them, as a *marfu* hadīth up to him, that "The first thing God created is the Pen. He ordered it to write everything." Its men are reliable.

In another narration for Ibn al-Asakir as a *marfu* hadīth that "The first thing God created is the Pen, then, He created 'nun' that is the inkpot. Afterwards, He told it "write what will happen or what will exist ...-until the end of the hadīth.

Ibn Jarir also narrated that the Prophet, May God bless him and give him peace, said: "(By the Inkpot! By the Pen and what they inscribe!) [Qur'an LXVIII:1-2 ] " He said a tablet from light and a pen from light which inscribes what will happen until the doomsday." The hadīth ended here.

In *al-Nujum,* and by al-Tirmidhi, on the authority of Abu Hurayra, it is narrated that "the first thing God created is the Pen. Afterwards, He created the *nun* which is the inkpot and said to it: 'write.' It said: 'what should I write?' He said: "write what happened and what will happen until the doomsday. This is the word of God "By the inkpot! By the Pen and what they inscribe!" [Qur'an LXVIII:1-2 ]. After that, he sealed the mouth of the Pen, as a result of which it did not speak and it will not speak until the doomsday. Then, God created the intellect, and said, "by my power and glory, I will perfect you in those I love, and I will leave you imperfect in those I anger."

Al-Laqqani said in his *Jawhara,* "the Pen is a being from light of God. He created it and ordered it to inscribe what happened and what will happen until the Last Day." He stayed away from defining its real nature. In some reports the first thing God created is the Pen and he ordered it to inscribe everything. In one narration, the first thing the Pen wrote is "I am a repenter. I repent on behalf of those who repent." The hadīth ended (al-Jarrahi II: 263-264).

The metanarrative stipulations outlined above and their historical implimentations are important for two reasons. First, they shed light on the logic of strategical investment on ties and thus social power in the hadīth transmission network. Second, they explain how their publics perceived hadīth and narrators, especially by students of hadīth and jurists. Below, I will present more examples from two other metanarrative genres, the biographical dictionary and the methodology of jurisprudence, to further illustrate the aforementioned

principles of hadīth critique with the purpose of demonstrating how various metanarratives actually work.

## II. Methodology of Law: Usūl al-Fiqh

Another genre, which illustrates the play of metanarrative, is the Methodology of Islamic Law, variably defined by different schools of law. Operating in the context of the assumptions already described and following the guidelines provided by the Methodology of Law, jurists critically examine the structure of the transmission network and the text of the hadīth before they grant a hadīth the status of legal evidence.[5]

Not only did jurists develop a distinctive metanarrative on hadīth, but also each school of law created its own metanarrative expressed in their Methodology of Law. In this connection, different metanarratives developed and a line was drawn between the 'People of hadīth' and the 'People of Opinion'--conflicts that are observable both among Sunnis and Shiites. The People of hadīth claimed to be more faithful to the legacy of the Prophet and accused the People of Opinion of limiting the role of hadīth in Islamic law. Both sides developed distinct methodologies of hadīth and law, on which, because of further differentiation, numerous schools of Islamic law were founded. Only four of these schools survived the test of time: Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki, Hanbali[6].

The debates about the hadīth on marriage without permission of one's guardian illustrate the process of extracting rulings from hadīth. Narrative has it that the Prophet said, "the marriage contract [for a minor girl] without the permission of a guardian is invalid".[7] Among the four major Sunni schools of Islamic law (the Shiites also have a different understanding of hadīth), the Hanafi jurists did not grant this hadīth the status of legal evidence. They argued that this hadīth was an '*ahad*' hadīth (lit. 'lone,' or 'unique'), a hadīth with insufficient parallel chains. Also, they argued, one of the narrators, Aisha, wife of the Prophet, went against her own narrative by allowing the marriage

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5    Coulson, N. J., *A History of Islamic Law*, Edinburgh 1964, pp. 36–73; Schacht, Joseph, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford 1965, pp. 28–36; Kamali, Muhammad Hashim, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 44–85.

6    These four schools which outlived several others were named after their founders: Abu Hanifa (AH 81–150/ CE 700–767, Iraq), Malik (AH 90–179/ CE 710–795, Medina), Shafii (AH 150–204/CE 767–820, Egypt) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (AH 164–241/CE 780–855, Baghdad). For an early statement in English translation by Shafii, see, *al-Shafii's Risala: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence* (tr. Khadduri).

7    Darimi, "Nikah" 11.

of her niece while her father was away for a business trip. This also showed that she did not think this was a binding legal rule[8].
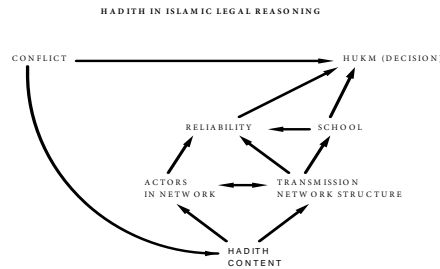


**Figure 9:** Hadith in Islamic legal reasoning

Jurists almost unanimously view the *isnad* as a source of conjectural knowledge (*dhann*) with varying degrees of certainty regarding the authenticity and denotation of the hadīth. Theirs is a task of dealing with a dual uncertainty: first, varying reliability of the sources of knowledge, and second, varying explicitness of meaning of narrative. The outcome, which is legal decision (*ijtihad*), is also conjectural and binding only on those who accept it. Thus, as Berman documented for Western legal tradition[9], Islamic legal tradition also developed out of narrative, primarily the Qur'an, and supplementary to it, the hadīth. In primary and secondary oral cultures, narrative remained the best way to store legal knowledge[10] for easy dissemination, memorization and recall. About the tenth century, in Iceland, among oral traditions, law occupied a distinct place: "The second oral tradition was the law, one third of which was recited from memory at the Parliament on each of three years by an elected … lawspeaker".[11]

### III. Commentaries on Hadīth Compilations

Every well-known hadīth compilation has at least several commentaries (*sharh* pl. *shurūh*) on it. This literature constitutes an important part of hadīth studies and helps the public in the interpretation of hadīth texts as well as the

chains of hadīth. Commentaries analyze the chain and the text of the hadīth. For instance, al-Ayni's twenty huge volumes commentary on Bukhārī's seven volume compilation, systematically discusses the significance of chapter headings, the relationship between the hadīth and the chapter heading under which it is narrated, analysis of the chain of authorities, comparison with other sources where the same narration is related, various versions of the narrative in the broader hadīth literature, explanation of the vocabulary in the text of narrative, grammatical analysis of the text, literary arts in the text -if there is any, legal analysis and consequences, and debates rising around the narrative.

### IV. Biographical Dictionaries: Science of People and their Layers

Biographical dictionaries (*tabaqāt* and *tarikh*) constitute a metanarative genre on hadīth with a particular focus on the network connections between narrators. The knowledge on the biographies, teachers and students of narrators constitute the subject matter of a particular discipline, the Science of People, *'ilm al-Rijāl*, which is also called the Science of Layers, *'ilm al-tabaqāt*.[12] In Islamic scholarship, there had developed biographical dictionary literature in all fields of scholarship from law to poetry. None of these is as rich as the one on the scholars of hadīth.

Biographical dictionary literature, as I will discuss in the following section, presents a rich variety in scope. For instance, some biographical dictionaries provide information only about the transmitters of a particular book or a city. Also, the narrators of al-Bukhārī's *hadīth* collection, *The Reliable hadīth Collection of Bukhārī* became subject for a few biographical studies. In Bukhārī's collection, there are 7275 chains and around 4000 texts with a total number of 1525 transmitters. The most renown among these is the one by the famous Kalabazi (363-398 AH) who compiled a two volumes biographical dictionary on the lives and network connections of the narrators who appeared in Bukhārī's work, titled as *The People of Bukhārī's Authentic Book (Rijāl Sahih al-Bukhārī*[13]).

Biographical dictionaries about hadīth transmitters, the primary source with which to reconstruct the network of transmitters, provide biographical information about each figure which may include the name of the person, father and grandfathers, birth date and place, death date and place, teachers, students, travels, scholarly works, and the comments of other authorities about

8    For this debate in the Methodology of Law, see, Saban, Zekiyyuddin, *Islam Hukuk Ilminin Esaslari* (tr. Ibrahim Kafi Donmez), Ankara 1990, p. 76).

9    Berman's work itself is a legal metanarrative. "This book tells the following story: that once there was a civilization called "Western"; that it developed distinctive "legal" institutions, values, and concepts; that these Western legal institutions, values, and concepts were *consciously transmitted from generation to generation over centuries, and thus came to constitute a "tradition"* (italics are mine) (Berman, Harold J., *Law and Revolution*, Cambridge 1983, p. 1).

10   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 139–155.

11   Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, New York 1966, p. 44.

12   For a detailed discussion of the meaning of layer (*tabaqa*) and the discipline entirely dedicated to it, see As'ad Salim Taym, *'Ilm Tabaqāt al-Muhadditin: Ahammiyatuh wa Fawaiduh* [Science of the Layers of Hadīth Scholars: Its Importance and Uses], Riyad 1415/1994.

13   The Complete title is as follows: al-Hidaya wa al-Irshad fi Marifah Ahl al-Thiqah wa al-Sadad allazina Akhraja lahum al-Bukhārī fir Jamiih li al-Imam Abi Nasr Ahmad bin Muhammad b. Al-Husayn al-Bukhārī al-Kalabazi (363–398 AH).

him or her. Following is a brief example of a transmitter from the fifth layer whose name was Bakr who lived between 102-174 AH.

> 215. Bakr son of Mudhirr son of Muhammad son of Hakim son of Sulaiman, the father of Muhammad, the Egyptian. He narrated from Muhammad son of Ajlan, and Yazid son of the father of Habib. Narrating from him were the son of Wahb, Qutaiba, and al-Walid son of Muslim. He was reliable, honest and pious. He was born in 102 and died in 174 on the day of *arafa,* a day before the festival of *eid* (Suyuti 108).

Dhahabi's *History of Islam* (*Tarikh al-Islam*), with only 38 volumes that could yet to be published, contains around forty thousand biographies of important figures in Islamic history from the time of Prophet Muhammad until his time. This magnificent study is the mother of several other small and more specialized biographical dictionaries, two of which are very well-known among specialists in their field: *Biographical Dictionary of Elite Hadīth Narrators* (*Tadhkirah al-Huffaz*)*,* and *Biographical Dictionary of Elite Reciters of the Qur'an.*

The following record is taken from Dhahabi's biographical dictionary of prominent narrators, *huffaz.* The way the narrator strategically built his network as a student and the criteria by which the narrator is judged are striking. I will add relevant points to the text references to the above mentioned metanarrative criteria. I will also add 'H' to indicate those who are hafiz in the network.

> 178. 25/5 [meaning 25th narrator from layer 5] A ['A' after the number of the narrators is used by Dhahabi to indicate that the narratives through his chain were accepted by the authors of the 'six most reliable collections'] **Abdurrahman son of Yazid son of Jabir.** The outstanding scholar, jurist, and prominent narrator of hadīth [Cr. 4], father of Utaybah of Azd, from Damascus and Daran. He took narrative from the father of Salam Mamtur, [H] Makhul, the father of al-Ash'ath of Sana, Abdullah son of Amir of Yahsin, and [H] Zuhri as well as from a great number of other narrators [Cr. 2]. He traveled to Mansur when he wanted to take narrative from him. He was well-respected and was from the outstanding scholars of Damascus [Cr. 4]. The son of Ma'in, and the father of Hatim confirmed his reliability [Cr. 7]. The best word of his is what Walid son of Muslim heard from him, "do not write down knowledge [narrative] from anyone except from those who truly know the quest for knowledge" [Cr. 5, 6]. He met some of the elderly Companions, and I have not come across any narrative he reported from the young Companions [Cr. 1]. During the rule of Walid, son of Abdulmalik, he underwent oppression along with his father [Cr. 7]. His narrative is accepted by the Six [most reliable] Books. Son of Mushir said, "I saw him." He passed away in 153 [after hijrah]. [H] Son of Mubarak, [H] Walid son of Muslim, [H] Muhammad son of Shu'ayb son of Shabur, Umar son of Abdulwahid, and [H] Husayn of Ja'f as well as many other narrators related from him [Cr. 2]. May God bless him.

We learn from this biographical narrative that Abdurrahman was a figure of high repute with several renowned teachers and students[14]. Having met with some of the Companions, disciples of the Prophet, increased his status, but since he did not report narrative from them his social ties are not definitive of his position. Thus, he is placed in the subsequent generation, layer 5, for the position in the network is determined only by narrative-ties but not by other kinds of social ties. He also got good reviews from the critics. Hence, there is not much controversy about his reliability and identity as a hafiz[15].

Here are the strata of hadīth scholars:

1. *Tālib:* student, apprentice;

2. *Musnid:* the one who can report a hadīth with its chain of authorities;

3. *Muhaddith:* Scholar of hadīth[16];

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[14] We see that not everyone in the network of Abdurrahman was a hafiz. The way to figure this out is to check for all figures, whether they are coded in biographical dictionaries as hafiz or not. It should also be noted that not all teachers and students are mentioned in the biographical entry. In order to avoid repetition, Dhahabi reports ties either in the entry of teachers or in the entry of students. Thus, without a complete survey of the relevant layers in the book, one can never be sure how many students and teachers a hafiz had. Such a survey shows that Abdurrahman had another hafiz-teacher, al-Qasim al-Mukhaymira from layer 4 (no: 107), and a hafiz-student from layer 7, Abdullah b. Yusuf (no: 408).

[15] While Abdurrahman belonged to layer 5, all his teachers came from layer 4. Among his students 3 of them came from layer 6, two of them from layer 7. He avoided having ties to narrators from his own layer--an indication of strategical investment in ties and intergenerational brokerage.

[16] Sakhawi wrote: "As for the Hadīth scholar (al-muhaddith), he is the one who [1] knows the masters of Hadīth in his homeland as well as other lands; [2] has a precise knowledge of their date and place of birth and death, their ranking in the Sciences, and the various types of narratives they have in their possession; [3] differentiates those with longer chains of transmission from those with shorter ones; [4] is able to spot the hadīth masters (al-huffâz) in the layers and the chains; [5] records them in writing; [6] recognizes the handwritings of the masters even if the same person's handwriting varies; [7] examines critically the narratives of the masters and extracts what he considers good from their narratives as well as his own, keeping aware of such qualities of chains as badal, muwâfaqât, musâwât, and the like (types of sound grades); [8] keeps a record of the names of his auditors even if their number is one thousand; [9] is an expert in the names of narrators, particularly those apt to be confused for one another, and obtains this discernment from the leaders in the discipline; [10] knows with precision the unusual words or names one comes across within the texts of hadīth, or at least most of them, to avoid misspelling; [11] knows enough Arabic grammar to protect himself from language mistakes in most cases; [12] masters the terminology of experts in such way as is sufficient for teaching and explanation, and [13] keeps the proper terminology with respect to this and other disciplines… The muhaddith is the one who knows the chains, their defects, the names of the narrators, the short and long chains, and, in addition, has memorized an abundant amount of the hadīth texts (as distinct from the chains), and heard (directly from a teacher) the Six Books, the Musnad of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the Sunan of al-Bayhaqi, the Mu`jam of al-Tabarani, and at least a thousand more monographs on hadīth. After he has heard what we have mentioned, and written on all the layers of the narrators, and travelled far and wide to see the masters, and lectured about hadīth defects, dates of birth and death, and chains

4. *Hafiz:* Distinguished scholar of hadīth;

5. *Imam:* the Leading scholar of hadīth;

6. *Hujjah:* Scholar whose word is accepted as evidence;

7. *Shaykh al-Islam*[17]: the leader of all Muslims in knowledge[18].

The lines that distinguish these strata are fuzzy. There has been engaging debate among the scholars for centuries about the definition of each title. Since different critics have different ideas about the merits of a scholar, scholars might be classified differently. The opinions of critics on the merits of scholars are reflected in their works, usually in the format of a biographical dictionary.

The above account helps us visualize who was a hadīth narrator, *muhaddith,* and what it took for a scholar to gain authority to get his narratives accepted. The titles mentioned in the beginning of the record, al-Hafiz, *al-Imam, al-Allamah, al-Hujjah*, are used in the community of scholars to indicate one's position in the social strata. These titles had been assigned by the consensus of the intellectual community but not by a formal institution or the state. So they are different from the titles given by the Church or the diplomas and the titles given by the universities. Acknowledging one's title and position does not make him or her immune from scholarly criticism because all hadith authorities remain subject for reflexivity and critique in hadith scholarship. No scholar has ever been raised above criticism by the subsequent generations. This may be seen as a sign for the extent of self-reflexivity in hadith scholarship.

### "Critical Methods on Hadīth: Self Reflexivity in Hadīth Scholarship"

**Abstract:** This article argues that hadith narration is characterized by self-reflexivity which is clearly reflected in the metanarrative genres which evolved around hadith narrative. Among these metanarratives are the Methodology of hadīth (*Usūl al-Hadīth*), Methodology of Islamic Law (*Usūl al-Fiqh*), commentaries on hadīth compilations, and the biographical dictionary literature (*rijāl, tabaqāt* and *tārīkh*). Each one of these metanarrative genres is distinguished by a distinct critical focus on a particular aspect of hadith. Methodology of hadīth is reflexive on chains and types of narration, Methodology of Law is reflexive on the legal interpretation of hadīth while the biographical dictionary literature is reflexive on the narrators and their networks. The article comparatively analyzes the most nascent aspects of these metanarrative genres.

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of transmission - at that time he attains to the beginning level of hadīth narrators" (al-Sakhawi, Shams al-Din Muhammad (H. 831–906), *al-Jawahir wa al-Durar fi Tarjamah Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar (al-'Asqalani)*, Cairo 1406/1986).

17  Sakhawi defined it as follows: "Shaykh al-Islam," as inferred from its use as a term among the authorities, is a title attributed to that follower of the book of Allah Most High and the example of His messenger, who possesses the knowledge of the principles of the Science (of Religion), has plunged deep into the different views of the scholars, has become able to extract the legal evidences from the texts, and has understood the rational and the transmitted proofs at a satisfactory level" (Sakhawi *al-Jawahir wa al-Durar*). Sakhawi traces the evolution of the concept and lists the very few scholars who had been given this title.

18  For a detailed discussion on the titles of hadīth scholars, see Sa'd Fahmi Ahmad Bilal, *al-Siraj al-Munir fir Alqab al-Muhaddithin*, Riyad 1417/1996. See also, Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi (831–902 H), *al-Jawahir wa al-Durar fi Tarjamat Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar (al-`Asqalani)"* (ed. Hamid Abd al-Majid and Taha al-Zayni), Cairo 1986.