



## Early Transmission of *Ḥadīth*: Incentives and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

*Ḥadīth* forms a controversial topic for Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars. Generally, both groups believe that a great number of *ḥadīths*, having been mainly written in the 3rd/9th century, were doctored or totally fabricated in later times to serve political or sectarian agendas. This article underlines the recent shift in modern scholarship à propos the reception of *Ḥadīth*. It also explains the reasons behind such a shift. However, the article's main theme is giving an insight into how *Ḥadīth* was transmitted from the earliest years of Islam down to the 3rd/9th century. The main finding of this survey is that none of the dominant radical perspectives, whether dismissive or receptive, fits the case. *Ḥadīth* was not systematically documented from the very beginning, but there is evidence that the compilations we possess today are the upshot of an early organic phase where oral traditions concurred with, and then evolved into, written ones. **Keywords:** *Ḥadīth*, early, transmission, oral, written, *isnād*.

### Introduction

*Ḥadīth* forms a controversial topic for Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars. In the main, both groups believe that a great number of *ḥadīths*, having been primarily written in the 3rd/9th century (Ibn al-*Ṣalāh*, 1986; Robson, 1986; Juynboll, 2007; Brown, 2007), were falsified in later times to serve political or sectarian agendas. The main difference between the two teams is that the criteria used by Muslim scholars to judge the authenticity of a certain *ḥadīth* are in some cases different to those employed by western scholars. Generally, Muslim scholars highly appreciate what are traditionally known as the six canonical books of *Ḥadīth*: *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870); *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (d. 261/875); *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah (d. 273/886); *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/888); *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and *Sunan* of al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/916). They take these collections on the trust, mainly because both their *matn*, 'text', and

*sanad* or *isnād*, ‘chain of transmitters’, were repeatedly examined by careful scholars who subjected them to what is conventionally agreed to be a high degree of scrutiny. There are cases, however, where modern Muslim scholars adopt different opinions to those developed by early *Ḥadīth* scholars regarding the authenticity of quite a number of *ḥadīths*. The vanguards of western scholars, on the other hand, were deeply suspicious of *Ḥadīth* regarding much of it, including those in the canonical collections, as later forgeries and thus could not be safe as historical sources.

Ignaz Goldziher’s *Muhammedanische Studien* (completed in 1890) has been regarded as the basis for *Ḥadīth* studies in the west. Goldziher developed a generally sceptical attitude towards *Ḥadīth*. According to him, the fabrication of *ḥadīths* and attributing them to the Prophet was the most effective way of legitimatizing the views of conflicting parties. Goldziher’s theory exempted neither rulers nor pious jurists. According to him, they all fabricated *ḥadīths* to reinforce their legal views or to validate already-existing practices.

Similar views were held by David Samuel Margoliouth (1930, 1972), Henri Lammens (1929), and Leone Caetani (1905-26). The sweeping views of Goldziher were further developed some fifty years later by Joseph Schacht. Schacht’s *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950, repr. 1975) assimilated Goldziher’s overall thesis and applied it to legal issues with more criticism of *Ḥadīth*. Schacht’s epilogue was that *isnād* (*infra*), which had knowingly been regarded and utilized as a weapon of debate, was spurious.

For decades, it proved very difficult to find a middle ground between these views and the traditional Islamic perspective. One of the first to react against the absolutism of Goldziher and his exponents was Nabia Abbott (1957-72) who, relying on a range of evidence including Umayyad papyri fragments, champions a theory of early continuous written tradition. Fuat Sezgin (1991) also made a remarkable contribution through the cataloguing of early texts. Sezgin further argued a scheme for the restoration of the earlier written sources on which the 3rd/9th collections were based.

With the exception of the works of John Wansbrough (1978) and his two disciples, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (1977; 1982), the tone of sheer skepticism waned in

subsequent research. One of those who did respond to Goldziher–Schacht’s theory was John Burton. In spite of praising Goldziher’s insight and critical method, Burton (1994) explains, *ut infra*, why a number of western academics began to deal reticently with the former’s non-exempting hypothesis:

Unease remains about acquiescing wholeheartedly in the suggestion that devout and pious men, conscious of the sacred nature of the source materials with which they worked, would engage in a policy of widespread deception and fraud on behalf of their own opinions while themselves sadly pointing out the approach adopted by the less scrupulous among them.

For this, and other reasons, a growing number of modern scholars (Madelung, 1997; repr. 2001; Donner, 1998; Motzki, 2000; 2004; Schoeler, 2006; 2009) have come to believe that it is imprudent to assume that Arabic *akhbār*, ‘reports or annals’ and traditions lack any genuine core. Further, some academics (e.g. Dickinson, 2001), having examined certain texts, conclude that *Ḥadīth* was indeed subjected to a high degree of scrutiny and criticism very early in Islamic history.

Also, the methods and source-critical standards of Goldziher, Schacht and their advocates have also been reassessed by a number of modern Muslim revisionists (Abū Shuhbah, 1989; al-Marṣafī, 1990; al-A‘zamī, 1992; 1996; Maloush, 2000). As Juynboll (1983) puts it, today’s scholarship is influenced by the two extremes – represented in Goldziher-Schacht’s theory on one side and the modern Muslim scholars’ on another.

Meanwhile, new discoveries have been substantial. Khalidi (1994) states, ‘within the last half century or so, a lot of early *Ḥadīth* texts have come to light, often necessitating modification or rejection of existing theories or views.’ In addition to the above contributions of Abbott and Sezgin, M. A‘zamī (1980) declares that he has identified original copies for twelve *Ḥadīth* manuscripts dated to the second century AH. He has edited and published the smallest of these, namely, the *Ṣaḥīfah* of Suhayl b. Abī Ṣāliḥ (d. 138/755).

Another example of early writing of *Ḥadīth* is the *Ṣaḥīfah*, ‘*Script*’, of Hammām b. Munabbih (d. 101/719), a disciple of the Companion, Abū Hurayrah (d. 58/677) (see Hamidullah, 2003; al-Baghdādī, 2008). Manuscripts are extant in the libraries of Berlin,

Beirut and Damascus (Ḥamīdullāh, 1979; Speight, 2010a). While 98 of the *Ṣaḥīfah's* 138 *ḥadīths* are found in the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, 136 of these *ḥadīths* are included in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad. This means that canonical books of *Ḥadīth* only digested what was regarded as authentic according to the standards of their compilers. The fact that not all of the *Ṣaḥīfah's* *ḥadīths*, in spite of their authenticity, were selected by al-Bukhārī and Muslim implies that both subjected the *ḥadīths* they collected to a high degree of examination. Having compared the *ḥadīths* of the *Ṣaḥīfah* with the 1500 variant readings of the same *ḥadīths* in the 3rd/9th century compilations (including those of Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī and Muslim), Speight (2010a) concludes that the common texts are nearly identical. Thus, this *ṣaḥīfah*, which is believed to have been written around the mid-first/seventh century, evidences the early writing of *Ḥadīth* (*Arabic Literature*, 1983).

Another example of early *Ḥadīth* writing is the *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī which has been carefully studied by Harald Motzki (1991), who concludes:

While studying the *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzaq, I came to the conclusion that the theory championed by Goldziher, Schacht, and in their footsteps, many others - myself included - which in general, reject hadith literature as a historically reliable sources for the first century AH, deprives the historical study of early Islam of an important and a useful type of source.

With such momentous inputs, a great deal of the earlier dubiety has been moderated or reversed (A'zamī, 1980). The dominant tendencies now are neither dismissive nor gullible, but seek to harness *Ḥadīth*, or aspects of it, to good historical effect (Juynboll, 1983; Berg, 2000; Schoeler, 2009). The fact that most of the *Ḥadīth* compilations that we possess today were written in the third/ninth century does not necessarily mean that *Ḥadīth* was not committed to writing at an earlier date. In this article, we will try to give insight into how this patrimony could have evolved from oral to written transmission.

## **Definition**

The word '*ḥadīth*' refers to all that is new. It also means *khbar*, 'news [that is reported]' (al-Azharī, 2001; Ibn Manzūr, 1981). Traditionally, *Ḥadīth* is defined as the traditions relating to the

words and deeds of Prophet Muḥammad of Islam. According to jurists, there are three sorts of *Ḥadīth*: what the Prophet said (or what was said about him), what he did and what he approved.

A related term is *sunnah* which primarily means the [straight] route or method (Ibn Manzūr, 1981). *Sunnah* is traditionally defined as the Muslim orthodox way of life based on the actions and teachings of the Prophet. According to *Ḥadīth* scholars, *Sunnah*, ‘beaten track’, is the sayings, deeds, approval or physical features which are attributed to the Prophet. In this sense, *Sunnah* is equivalent to *Ḥadīth* (Juynboll, 1983; ‘Ajjāj, 1988; 1996). Yet, a remarkable difference between the two in early Islam, particularly in Madīnah in the time of Mālīk, is that *Sunnah* designated the ‘*amal*, ‘practice’, and thus had an authoritative character, while *ḥadīth* designated texts and thus had an illustrative character (Dutton, 2002).

For some, the term ‘*sunnah*’ specifies all that is proved by legitimate evidence whether from the *Qur’ān*, the reports of the Prophet, or what the *ṣaḥābīs* consented such as the collection of the *Qur’ān* and the adoption of the *dawāwīn*. Hence, *Sunnah* is taken to be the opposite of *bid’ah*, ‘heresy’ (al- Sibā’ī, 2000; ‘Abd al-Khāliq, 1992). A group of early scholars used the term ‘*sunnah*’ to signify the life approaches of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar as well as the narratives of the ancients. As a result of *ahl al-ḥadīth* successful campaign, the concept of the *Sunnah* was later narrowed to exclusively designate the deeds and sayings of the Prophet alone whether or not these had any bearing on legislation. According to jurists (*uṣūliyyūn*), the sayings and acts of the Prophet are divided into two main types: what he said and did as a messenger and what he said and did as an ordinary human (‘Abd al-Khāliq, 1992).

The ancient schools of law including the Medinian, the Syrian and the Iraqian were using the term ‘*sunnah*’ to refer to the community ideal way of living, which was already mirrored in the official doctrine of the school. While Schacht (1950) assumes that *sunnah* was used in such an early time to designate the broad meaning of a past practice, evidence from literature suggests that the notion of continuity of practice – which must be attributable to the Prophet – was usually subsumed. For instance, such a concept is evidently clear in Malik’s letters to al-Layth Ibn Sa’d and Abū Yūsuf about the authoritativeness of ‘*amal ahl al-Madīna*. Although the Iraqians were the first to assign to the term ‘*sunnah*’ the authority

of the Prophet, labeling it as ‘the *Sunnah* of the Prophet’, it was not until the time of al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/819) that *Sunnah* was used to refer exclusively to [the content of] the Prophet’s traditions (Schacht, 1950). The relatively slow development of ancient schools doctrine when compared to that of the traditions – particularly those related to the Prophet – paved the way for al-Shāfi‘ī’s effective movement to particularize the *Sunnah* to the Prophet and thus secure for it a higher legislative authority.

*Sīrah* is another branch of knowledge related to the life and sayings of the Prophet. It is distinguished from *Ḥadīth* literature in that it consists of much broader corpus of material which was amassed by the early prophetic biographers. However, the most notable difference between *Ḥadīth* and *Sīrah* lies in the way in which each was collected. Although many of its early reports were accompanied by *isnād*, the *Sīrah* literature is known not to have been subjected to the same degree of authentication, as was *Ḥadīth*. This could be attributed to the fact that the content of the latter was much more crucial for Islamic law.

Type of <i>Ḥadīth</i>	Definition
<i>Musnad</i> (subjective)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> whose unbroken strand of transmission goes back to the Prophet
<i>Ṣaḥīḥ</i> (sound)	A <i>musnad ḥadīth</i> , neither <i>shādh</i> , ‘unique’ nor <i>mu‘allal</i> ‘faulty’, with unbroken chain of reliable narrators
<i>Ḥasan</i> (fair)	A <i>musnad ḥadīth</i> narrated by a reliable chain, but of lesser grade than <i>ṣaḥīḥ</i>
<i>Da‘īf</i> (weak)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> that does not qualify for the standards of being <i>ṣaḥīḥ</i> or <i>ḥasan</i> and, hence, cannot be taken as a foundation of a religious judgment
<i>Gharīb</i> (strange)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> , whether <i>ṣaḥīḥ</i> or <i>da‘īf</i> , which differs in context with another <i>ḥadīth</i> of a more reliable strand
<i>Majhūl</i> (unknown)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> whose strand includes an unknown person
<i>Maqtū‘</i> (disconnected)	It could be a <i>ḥadīth</i> terminating with a <i>tābi‘ī</i> , a <i>ḥadīth</i> with incomplete strand, or a saying of a <i>ṣaḥābī</i> that begins: ‘we used to do [...]’
<i>Marfū‘</i> (traceable)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> attributed to the Prophet. It could be <i>muttaṣīl</i> (connected), <i>munqaṭi‘</i> (interrupted) or <i>mursal</i> (not referred to)

<i>Mauqūf</i> (untraceable)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> (also known as <i>athar</i> ) of, or about, a <i>ṣaḥābī</i>
<i>Muḍṭarīb</i> (confounding)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> whose different narrations, which are equally reliable, disagree on the strand or in the text. It is regarded as a kind of <i>ḥadīth ḍa'īf</i>
<i>Munqaṭi'</i> (disconnected)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> with an incomplete strand or a strand that include an anonymous transmitter
<i>Mursal</i> (not referred to)	A <i>ḥadīth</i> in which a <i>tābi'ī</i> , 'Follower' attributes a saying to the Prophet without referring of the Companion from whom he took the <i>ḥadīth</i> .

**Table 1: Main categories of *Ḥadīth* based on authenticity**

## History of *Ḥadīth* transmission

### (a) During the Prophet's life

According to traditions, it was during the Prophet's life that a conscientious and scrupulous process of *Ḥadīth* collection materialized. The ardency he showed in teaching his disciples stimulated them to learn and disseminate his instructions (*Qur'ān*, XXXV. 28; III. 18; XXXIX. 9; Ibn Ḥanbal, *ḥadīths* no. 374-5; Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīth* no. 3641). The Prophet used a number of successful strategies to proselytize, including: repeating speech (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 94-6), teaching women (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 101, 102), and educating the *ahl al-ṣuffah* (Ibn al-Najjār, 1981; al-Diyārbakrī, 1885; al-Barzanjī, 1914). Other factors for the propagation of *Ḥadīth* may well include the roles of the Prophet's wives, the Prophet's delegates to other places, and that of the Arab convoys who came to Madīnah to acknowledge Islam and then returned to their people to disseminate it (Abū Zahwu, 1958; 'Ajjāj, 1988; Juynboll, 1983).

According to many *ḥadīths* (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 87, 99; Ibn Māja, *ḥadīths* no. 230-6; al-Tirmidhī, *ḥadīths* no. 2656-8), the Prophet advised his Companions to transmit the knowledge they took from him to later generations, and permitted some of them to put it in writing (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths* no. 500-28; al-Baghdādī, 2008). He is even reported to have commanded some of his Companions, such as 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, to write down *Ḥadīth* (al-Tirmidhī, *ḥadīths* no. 2666-8; al-Jawziyya, 1991). Some of the Prophet's *ḥadīths* are reportedly written in his lifetime by a number of Companions like Sa'd b. 'Ubāda (d.

15/636) and Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 87/706). Sprenger (1856) argued what still seems to be good evidence that some *ḥadīths* were committed to writing as early as the lifetime of the Prophet.

### **(b) Under the Rāshidūn Caliphs**

According to tradition, the Companions did respond to the Prophet’s above summons; their interest in learning *Ḥadīth* began as early as his time (Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīths* no. 3646-50; Schoeler, 2009). They believed that being adherent to the *Sunnah* of the master was the only route to salvation. Among the strategies they used to learn *Ḥadīth* were accompanying the Prophet at the mosque, having turns in escorting him (Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīths*), exchanging knowledge between one other (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 103, 104 ,105 ,116, 117), attending teaching circles, and travelling in search of knowledge (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 78, 88; al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths* no. 581-91; ; al-Haythamī, 1991). Yet, the most instrumental way of preserving *Ḥadīth* was writing (al-‘Umarī, 1984; Abbott, 1957-72).

Islamic teachings are primarily based upon two sources: *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth*. As early as the dawn of Islamic history, followers of the new religion were gauging the soundness of their deeds according to these two origins and maintained a number of strategies to keep aware of such knowledge. In the absence of a definitive text that integrated these two codes, dispute sometimes arose regarding the exact wording of a verse or a *ḥadīth*. Within the lifetime of the Prophet, this problem was not especially taxing (Muslim, *ḥadīth* no. 6776; Ibn Ḥanbal, *ḥadīths* no. 158, 277; Guillaume, 1924; al-Zahrānī, 2005). After his departure, the need for a documented form of, and relationship between, *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* became more pressing. The rise of doctrinal and political disputes made it unavoidable. Such problems began as early as the death of the Prophet. The first caliph, Abū Bakr, was faced by a series of frantic revolts and riots by the enemies of the burgeoning Islamic empire.

The following *ḥadīth*, however, has raised controversy since early Islam concerning the legality of documenting *Ḥadīth*. On the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, the Prophet said: ‘Do not write down [anything] of me. Whoever writes other than the *Qur’ān* should delete it [...]’ (Muslim, *ḥadīth* no. 7510; Abū Ya‘lā, *ḥadīth* no. 1288). While reflecting a real debate on writing, this, and other *ḥadīths* (see al-Haythamī, *ḥadīths* no. 675-8; al-Baghdādī,



2008; ‘Ajjāj, 1988), is regarded by many scholars to have been particular to the time of the Prophet when the *Qur’ān* was being revealed. According to these academics, such a command was issued by the Prophet, lest *Ḥadīth* should have been confused with the *Qur’ān* (al-Baghdādī, 2008; al-‘Umarī, 1984; ‘Ajjāj, 1988; Abū Zahwu, 1958; al-A‘zamī, 1980). Once the revelation was completed and it was assured that no more verses were going to be revealed, it was permissible and even essential to write down *Ḥadīth* to preserve the Prophet’s teachings. Other ‘provisional’ reasons were argued for the aversion of writing down *Ḥadīth*. These included the persistence to avoid, according to Muslims, the devastating mistake committed by the Jews and the Christians who abided themselves by books other than the divine revelation alone. The early Muslims were afraid that documents of *Ḥadīth* could distract people from the *Qur’ān* (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths* no. 485, 487, 493-7; al-Baghdādī, 2008; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, 1994). This is in addition to their concern that the collectors of *Ḥadīth* would rely heavily on writing and thus neglect the need to memorize it by heart (al-Baghdādī, 2008; Schoeler, 2006). Further, early traditionists were anxious about the possibility that written *Ḥadīth* would fall into the hand of dishonest people who would misuse it (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths* no. 481, 483). Some of them were even reported to have asked their heirs to destroy the documents they wrote after they would die (al-Baghdādī, 2008; Schoeler, 2006). Another reason was the limited number of those who knew writing. It was thought that they should assign priority to writing the *Qur’ān*. It is, however, said that when the number of writers multiplied during the time of the Prophet, he asked some of them to write *Ḥadīth* (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīth* no. 500). It was also argued that the Prophet prevented the *ṣahābīs* from writing down *Ḥadīth* because many of them did not manage to write properly, and thus there was the risk of making a lot of mistakes (Ibn Qutayba, 1999).

The contradictory reports on writing may well be attributed to later discourses. Our earliest relevant *ḥadīth* dates to the early 3rd/9th century, a period that witnessed heated discussions on the historicity and authoritativeness of *Ḥadīth* as a source of Islamic law. However, the preservation of *Ḥadīth* was a basic requirement for the Muslims who are commanded according to the *Qur’ān* to follow the Prophet’s ideal (*Qur’ān*, III. 32, 132; IV. 59; V. 92, VIII. 1, 20, 46; XXIV. 54, 56; XLVII. 33). According to one *ḥadīth*, ‘he who is

asked for knowledge (*‘ilm*) but did not pass it (*fakata mahū*) will be bridled, by God, with a curb of fire on the Last Day’ (Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīth* no. 3658; Ibn Mājah, *ḥadīths* no. 261-6). The fact that there were restrictions on writing *Ḥadīth*, particularly in the time of the Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb did not arguably retard the process of its documentation. Indeed, ‘Umar himself is reported to have said: ‘Bind knowledge with writing’ (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīth* no. 514).

In any case, while restrictive procedures could have affected the amount of *Ḥadīth* being transmitted negatively, they should have alerted those who narrated it to take extra care (al-Qaṭṭān, 1981). Putting restrictions on the transmission of *Ḥadīth* was apparently one of ways used to preserve the true teachings of the Prophet, which were *in illo tempore* mainly kept in the memories of the Companions. In the first generation after the Prophet, it was feared that if *Ḥadīth* was freely transmitted, its original text would become more vulnerable to deformation either intentionally (by the enemies) or unintentionally (by the pious) through forgetfulness, accident and the like (al-Nawawī, 1929). Therefore, a number of strategies were used by the Companions to scrutinize the oral transmission of *Ḥadīth*. In addition to asking the transmitter for other witnesses and an oath (Ibn Sa‘d, 2001; al-Hindī, 2005; al-Samhūdī, 1955; Abū Zahwu, 1958), they compared the reported *ḥadīths* to the supreme authority – the *Qur’ān*. Generally, two types of *ḥadīths* were known in this early phase: *ḥadīth mutawātir* and *khabar al-wāḥid* (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīths* no. 7246-67; Juynboll, 2007; 1997).

Fifty of the Prophet’s Companions are said to have either written *Ḥadīth* or assigned others to write on their behalf – mainly because of their ignorance of writing. Examples are the *ṣuḥuf* of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. 50/670), Samurah b. Jundub (d. 60/680) and Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 78/697) (see A‘zamī, 1980; Robson, 1986). Seven Companions, however, narrated the major part of it. These are: Abū Hurayrah (5374 *ḥadīths*), ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar (2630), Anas b. Mālīk (2286), ‘Āa’isha (2210), ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (1660), Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (1540), and Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (1100) (see Ibn al-Ṣalāh, 1986). Companions are said to not only have studied *Ḥadīth* together, but also advised the *tābi‘īs* to learn it (al-Baghdādī, 1969; ‘Ajāj, 1988). Centres of *Ḥadīth* were reportedly established as early as the time of conquests in places including: Madīnah, Mecca, Kūfah, Baṣrah, Syria and Egypt (Juynboll,

1983; 'Ajjāj, 1988).

**(c) Under the Umayyads (41-132/661-750)**

After the time of the Rāshidūn, a number of reasons led to the favouring of written over oral transmission (al-Ṣan'ānī, *ḥadīths* no. 20484-9). Among them was the fact that the chains of narrators were getting longer, that many Companions had died, the emergence of antagonistic movements, and that the rise of writing in general had weakened people's dependency on their memories. Against this background, the reasons for maintaining restrictions on writing *Ḥadīth* no longer existed. The *tābi'īs*' activities resulted in the writing of a large number of *ṣuḥuf* (al-Zahrānī, 2005). Some of these, or rather recensions of which, have reached us (Sezgin, 1991).

Under the Umayyads, the activities of collecting, assessing and cataloguing of *Ḥadīth* developed on a large scale. Two of the most zealous individuals in this respect were the Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (ruled from 99/717 to 101/720) and imam Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (50-124/670-741) (Ibn Sa'd, 2001; al-Dhahabī, 2004; Duri, 1983; Fārūqī, 1979; Horowitz, 1928; Lecker, 2002). According to al-Bukhārī *et alii*, 'Umar commanded *Ḥadīth* to be written down by trustworthy scholars, lest it should have been mislaid (al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīth* no. 100). He is also said to have dispatched these records of *Ḥadīth* to the territories under his caliphate so that they would serve as the supreme reference (Abū Na'im, 1938). Al-Zuhrī, on the other hand, was one of those to whom this task was assigned and he was by far the most vigorous. Some of the *Ḥadīth* records of al-Zuhrī, which are now missing, were still preserved in the Umayyad period (Ibn 'Asākir, 1995-2000; Motzki, 1991; 2002; 2004). In addition to al-Zuhrī, 'Umar entrusted the task of documenting *Ḥadīth* with scholars such as Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Ḥazm (d. 120/737). 'Umar said to him: 'Consider what has been [extant] of the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet or the *Sunnah* of the past and write them down; I have been afraid that knowledge would vanish and its people would pass away' (Al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths*, no. 504-5).

The efforts to collect *Ḥadīth* were confronted by the emergence of religious sects such as the Shī'īs and the Khārijīs. Both denominations influenced, in a way, the development of *Ḥadīth* transmission (Wellhausen, 1958; Ibn Hazm, 1996; Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī, 1970; Walī, 1996). This is in addition to other factors such as: the rise of

theological, philosophical and legal disputes and the inevitable polemics that arose in such circles; the appearance of the *zindīqs*, ‘heretics’, and the *qaṣṣāṣūn*, ‘story-tellers’; tribal and sectarian fanaticism; the desire to urge people to do good deeds; and the habit of flattering rulers (al-Ḥākim, 1953; al-‘Umarī, 1984).

In response to these threats, the early *tābi ‘īs* implemented what they believed to be workable measures to preserve *Ḥadīth*. Writing was presumably their foremost strategy. A number of *ṣaḥīfas* or *ṣuḥuf* were written by scholars such as: Ibrāhīm al-Nakh‘ī (d. 96/715), Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Rajā’ b. Ḥaywah (d. 112/730), ‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr, his son Hishām (d. 146/763) and al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) (see al-‘Umarī, 1984). Many leafs of the 3rd/9th century recensions of such early *ṣuḥuf* and *kutub* are preserved in the library of Shahid Ali in Turkey and the Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyyah in Damascus (Sezgin, 1991).

The aftermath of such early efforts was a flurry of *Ḥadīth* compilation and its writing down in what became traditionally known as *muṣannaḥāt* (Robson, 1986; Juynboll, 1993). *Muṣannaḥāt*, the plural of *Muṣannaḥ*, ‘assorted’, were compilations arranged in chapters based on subjects of Islamic jurisprudence. Other early collections, whose materials were mainly based on the earlier *ṣuḥuf*, had titles such as: *Sunan*, ‘traditions’, *Muwatta’a*, ‘well-trodden or readable’, and *Jāmi*, ‘compiler’. The manuscripts of some of which have been found, edited and published. Here, *ḥadīths* were set side by side with *addenda* of sayings of *ṣaḥābīs* and *fatāwā*, ‘religious judgements’, of early *tābi ‘īs* (Khalidi, 1994, repr. 1995 and 1996).

According to some scholars it was also in the Umayyad period that *isnād*, ‘a careful examination of the chain of transmitters’, was established to protect *Ḥadīth* from the above threats (al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, 1953; Robson, 1991; 1997; Speight, 2010b). Caetani (1905-1926) maintains that the technique of *isnād* was first developed by al-Zuhrī, and that it was later elaborated by some of the latter’s disciples such as Mūsā b. ‘Uqbah (d. 141/757) and Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/678). According to Horovitz (1917), however, *isnād* appeared and was authorized as early as 75/694. In spite of the set of evidence adduced by Horovitz to enhance his theory, it was challenged by Schacht (1950) who – quoting Ibn Sirīn’s statement about

the institution of *isnād* – argued that it was not until the beginning of the 2nd/8th century that *isnād* was required and applied. Ibn Sirīn said: ‘People used not to ask about *isnāds*, but when the civil war (*fiṭnah*) occurred, they began to say: “Name your narrators!”’ (See Muslim’s introduction to the *bāb bayān anna al-isnād min al dīn*, ‘the chapter of indicating that *isnād* is a religion-related matter’). Based on the date of Ibn Sirīn’s death, which is 110/728, and the date of the civil war, which was instigated by the murder of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd in 126/744, Schacht concluded that the above statement is misattributed to Ibn Sirīn. Robson (1961), on the other hand, suggested another interpretation of the word *fiṭnah* which would best refer to the arbitrary which took place in the aftermath of the struggle between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah in 36-7/657-8. Robson (1965) accordingly opined that *isnād* would have appeared, albeit in a primitive form, as early as the mid-first century. This hypothesis of Robson was later adopted by Abbott (1957-72) who further enhanced it by a plethora of recently discovered material evidence (see also Şiddīqī, 1993, repr. 2008).

Bushayr b. Sa‘d is reported to have narrated *ḥadīths* before Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687) who asked him to repeat the first *ḥadīth*. Bushayr, then, wondered: ‘I am not certain whether you recognized all my *ḥadīths* and denied this one, or recognized this one and denied all my *ḥadīths*.’ Ibn ‘Abbās replied: ‘We used to [freely] report the Prophet’s *ḥadīths* as no one was attributing lies to him. Nonetheless, when the people became careless about sayings and deeds (*falamma rakiba al-nāsu al-ṣa‘abata wal dhalūl*), we abandoned the practice of reporting his *ḥadīths*’ (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīth* no. 440). Such tone of skepticism on the part of Ibn ‘Abbās and others led to that, by passage of time, *isnād* developed into the only accepted currency in the circles of *Ḥadīth* scholars. Ibn Sirīn is reported to have said: ‘This information, one is collecting, is religion. Hence, consider from whom you take your religion’ (Muslim’s introduction to the *bāb bayān anna al-isnād min al dīn*, ‘the chapter of indicating that *isnād* is a religion-related matter’, as transl. by Burton, 1994). Similar statements are also attributed to Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān (d. 106/724) (al-Dārimī, *ḥadīths* no. 428, 439), and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) who said: ‘*Isnād* is [a matter] of religion; unless there was *isnād*, whosoever would say whatsoever.’ (al-Baghdādī, 1969; al-Nawawī,

1929). Sufyān al-Thawrī, (d. 161/778) is also reported to have said: ‘*Isnād* is the weapon [namely evidence] of a believer. If he has no weapon, with what will he fight?’ (al-Baghdādī, 1969).

**(d) Under the ‘Abbāsids (132-656/750-1258)**

Although the Umayyad period witnessed an early phase of documentation, the legacy of the Prophet was by and large passed down orally for more than a century after his death in 11/632 (Robinson, 2003). The majority of the *Ḥadīth* compilations which we possess today were written down at the beginning of the ‘Abbāsīd period.

The past dependency on oral transmission, along with other already mentioned factors, had resulted in a massive corpus of *Ḥadīth* where many were falsified. Thus, the technique of *isnād*, whose importance had already been conceived in the Umayyad period, was heavily utilized by the ‘Abbāsīd compilers who found themselves in charge of sifting such an imperative heritage. Generally, a *ḥadīth* was not to be accepted unless it was equipped with a reliable *isnād* that could be traced back to the Prophet or at least a Companion. A number of criteria were, and still are, used by *Ḥadīth* scholars to decide whether a certain *isnād* is trustable. One of these was to assure that transmitters were of reliable knowledge, reputation and memory. Two consecutive transmitters in a strand must have lived in the same time and place or at least been known to have met. Like *isnād*, the *matn*, ‘text’ of an alleged *ḥadīth* was also to be scrutinized. For example, it must be logically convincing and linguistically flawless and, more decisively, not contradicting any of the *Qur’ān* verses. Any report which failed to meet these, and other conditions set by each compiler, was rejected (Guillaume, 1924).

After the fashion of the collections that were compiled in the late Umayyad period, the entries of the ‘Abbāsīd *Ḥadīth* books were arranged according to the *masānīd*, namely the groups of *ḥadīths* narrated by each *ṣaḥābī*, even if these covered different subjects. Examples are the published: *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 240/854), *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/850) and *Musnad* of al-Dārimī (d. 255/869). After naming 37 of these collections, al-‘Umarī (1984) argued that one could not say that these are the only *masānīd* (or *musnads*) to exist today, for thousands of manuscripts are found in the libraries of Constantinople,

Morocco and other libraries in different parts of the world.

Name and date	Place
‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150/767)	Mecca
Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 151/768)	Madīnah
Mu‘ammar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770)	Yemen
Sa‘īd b. Abī ‘Arūbah (d. 156/773)	Baṣrah
Abū ‘Amr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Awzā‘ī (d. 156/773)	Shām
Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Dhi‘b (d. 158/775)	Madīnah
Rabī‘ b. Ṣabīḥ (d. 160/777)	Baṣrah
Shu‘bah b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/777)	Baṣrah
Abū ‘Abd Allāh Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778)	Kūfah
Al-Layth b. Sa‘d (d. 175/791)	Egypt
Ḥammād b. Salamah b. Dinār (d. 176/792)	Baṣrah
Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), the writer of <i>Al-Muwatta‘</i>	Madīnah
‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797)	Khurasān
Hishām b. Bashīr (d. 188/804)	Wāsit
Jarīr b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḍhabī (d. 188/804)	Ray
‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813)	Egypt
Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah (d. 197/813)	Mecca
Wakī‘ b. al-Jarrāḥ al-Rū‘āsī (d. 197/813)	Iraq
‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/826), the writer of <i>Al-Muṣannaf</i>	Yemen
Sa‘īd b. Mansūr (d. 227/842), the writer of <i>Al-Sunan</i>	Khurasān and Mecca
Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849), the writer of <i>Al-Muṣannaf</i>	Kūfah

**Table 2: Early *Ḥadīth* compilers**

The fact that such collections included both ‘sound’ and ‘weak’ *ḥadīths* might have

made it difficult for ‘laymen’ to use them; in a given case most readers did not have the knowledge to judge the degree of authenticity. This, in addition to their awkward arrangement, might have been the direct reason for Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) to write his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which he restricted to sound *ḥadīths*. Al-Bukhārī organized the chapters of his book according to the subjects of *fiqh*, ‘jurisprudence’. The same method was adopted by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875) in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. These two collections were, and still are, considered by the majority of Muslim scholars to include the most authentic *ḥadīths*. The models of al-Bukhārī and Muslim were followed by the like of Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/888), Ibn Mājah (d. 273/886), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and al-Nasā‘ī (d. 303/916).

Nonetheless, while the 3rd/9th century saw the zenith of *Ḥadīth* collecting activities, it took nearly a century for such collections to be widely accepted and circulated. As already hinted, it was also in the 3rd/9th century that *Ḥadīth* collections were exclusively dedicated to the sayings and deeds of the Prophet. Such a movement was highly influenced by the efforts of al-Shāfi‘ī to secure for *Ḥadīth* a legislative authority beside the *Qur’ān*. In contrast to the more inclusive content of earlier collections such as *muṣannaḥāt*, collections after to the time of al-Shāfi‘ī, and whose compilers were mainly Shāfi‘īs, were restricted to the reports on the Prophet.

In later centuries *Ḥadīth* scholars contented themselves with commenting on and explaining *Ḥadīth* compilations, or critiquing the chains of narrators. Afterwards, *Ḥadīth* materialized as a distinct discipline of Islamic lore with branches such as: *uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, ‘principles of *ḥadīth*’, *muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, ‘terminology (and classification) of *Ḥadīth*’, and *‘ilm al-jarḥ wal ta’dīl*, or *‘ilm al-rijāl*, ‘the knowledge of evaluating the reliability of *Ḥadīth* transmitters’.

## Conclusion

This research indicates that neither of the radical perspectives, whether dismissive or susceptible, fits the case. *Ḥadīth* was not systematically documented from the very beginning, but there is enough evidence to say that the compilations we possess today are the upshot of an early organic phase where oral traditions coincided, and then exclusively



evolved into, written ones. *Ḥadīth* and other early Arabic writings can, if appropriately handled, provide a historically valuable source for the study of early Islam. This is not to say that doing so is easy or safe, but the other option – that is of wholesale dismissal – would deprive us of an important and near-unique source for the study of the period. In such a quest, the vista should be extended to take into consideration how the memory of the Prophet was formulated and disseminated. The way in which his legacy is memorised, and the nature of the later related polemics and debates, could tell us a lot about the social and political trends of the later generations, and their approaches of constructing, organizing and deploying such a memory in the different periods. The source itself, being historical evidence, could provide a reliable medium to conceive how the memory was shaped by an array of changing circumstances. How was it to be approached, selected, emendated, or invented? How could the variations and contradictions in the sources be approached? Should such inquiries be dealt with successfully, they would be of great help for us in dealing with the thorny question of evaluating and sifting *Ḥadīth* and early Arabic narratives.

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