



Can We Trust Hadith Literature? Understanding the Processes of Transmission and Preservation

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Author Biography

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Abstract

How has Islamic civilization maintained the rich literary heritage of *Ḥadīth* developed by early Muslim scholars? What guarantee is there that the collections of *ḥadīths* in our possession have reached us accurately and that they were compiled by their purported authors? Far from being exhaustive, this paper addresses these questions. It begins by examining the procedures scholars instituted to ensure accurate transmission of *Ḥadīth* books. It then describes the practice of oral/aural transmission (*samāʿ*) and public reading sessions and their influence in preserving the *Ḥadīth* literature. Thereafter, it builds on three arguments that Ibn al-Wazīr al-Yamānī (d. 840 AH) delineated in response to those who doubt the authorship of the major *Ḥadīth* collections. Before concluding, it sheds light on the usage of *wijādah* in transmission and practice.

*Marks of ink on one's mouth and clothes are emblems of honor.*¹

- Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. 96 AH)

Procedures for Preservation

The attention and care scholars gave to the vast literature of *Ḥadīth* to ensure that the efforts of their predecessors were not in vain is truly awe-inspiring. They were methodical in their treatment of the *Ḥadīth* literature. They laid out guidelines on issues like book authorization, auditions, and the handling of manuscripts and registers. Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's (d. 544 AH) *al-Ilmāʿ ilā Maʿrifat Uṣūl al-Riwāyah wa Taqyīd al-Samāʿ* is among the most prominent titles on the subject.² Despite being an oft-cited authority on the subject, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ was by no means the first to address this topic. In fact, he drew extensively from earlier works like al-Rāmahurmuzī's (d. 360 AH) *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil* and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *al-Kifāyah fī ʿIlm al-Riwāyah* and *al-Jāmiʿ li Akhlāq al-Rāwī wa Ādāb al-Sāmiʿ*.

¹ ʿIyāḍ, *al-Ilmāʿ*, p. 173; al-Zarkashī, *al-Nukat*, vol. 3, p. 589.

² See Ṣāqar, "Introduction," in *al-Ilmāʿ*, p. 22. In chapters 24-26 of his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ expands on the subject, and those who wrote glosses on his book further built upon his observations. See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Maʿrifat Anwāʿ ʿIlm al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 128-236.

At times, scribes devised creative techniques to prevent confusion when reading their manuscripts. For instance, Shu‘bah ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160 AH) narrated the *ḥadīth* of Abū al-Ḥawrā’ to a student who wrote the *ḥadīth* and further added the word “*ḥūr ‘īn*” (wide-eyed damsel) as a note beneath the name Abū al-Ḥawrā’. The reason for this peculiar note was the presence of a narrator by the name of Abū al-Jawzā’ in the same generation as Abū al-Ḥawrā’. To avoid confusing the two similarly named yet distinct narrators, the student diligently wrote *ḥūr* as a note to remind him of al-Hawrā’, which is the singular form of *ḥūr*.³

Muslims rightfully pride themselves on the countless volumes *Ḥadīth* scholars produced in order to detail the lives of the narrators whose names fill the chains of transmissions of *ḥadīths*. But they did not stop there. They also wrote biographical dictionaries on the lives of the narrators who transmitted the collections that contained these *ḥadīths*. A researcher can easily access the biographical details of the narrators that Abū Dāwūd (d. 275 AH), for instance, cites in his *Sunan* when transmitting a *ḥadīth*. They can also find the biographical details of those who transmitted the *Sunan* from Abū Dāwūd and of those who in turn transmitted it from them, et cetera,⁴ in works written for this purpose like Abū Bakr Ibn Nuqṭah’s (d. 629 AH) *al-Taḡyīd li Ma‘rifat Ruwāt al-Sunan wa al-Masānīd*.⁵ As such, the major *Ḥadīth* collections were transmitted by people whose lives are well documented.⁶

³ See ‘Iyāḍ, *al-Ilmā’*, p. 155. Al-Ḥasan al-Saghānī (d. 650 AH), who wrote one of the most reliable manuscripts of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, is noted for his unique style of writing. For instance, beneath the letter *sīn*, he would write a letter *sīn* in a smaller font to avoid confusing it with the letter *shīn*. On al-Saghānī’s style of writing, see Khān, “Introduction,” in *al-Murtajal*, p. 11; Abū Ghuddah, Annotations on *Taṣṣīḥ al-Kutub*, p. 28.

⁴ Many narrators transmitted the *Sunan* from Abū Dāwūd. The most prominent among them was Abū ‘Alī al-Lu‘lu‘ī (d. 333 AH), who heard the *Sunan* from its author numerous times, including the year of the author’s demise. From al-Lu‘lu‘ī, Abū ‘Umar al-Hāshimī (d. 414 AH) narrates the *Sunan*, from whom al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), Abū ‘Alī al-Tustarī (d. 479 AH), and Abū Maṣṣūr ibn Shahrāṣṭī (d. 482 AH) narrate it. See al-Sakhāwī, *Badhl al-Majhūd*, pp. 61-66.

⁵ Ibn Nuqṭah writes that it is nearly impossible for anyone to encompass all the transmitters of *Ḥadīth* books, so he only mentioned the most prominent among them. Ibn Nuqṭah, *al-Taḡyīd*, vol. 1, p. 130. Taḡī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (d. 832 AH) wrote a supplementary work on Ibn Nuqṭah’s book.

⁶ Other resources for the biographies of literature-transmitters include the *athbāt*, *fahāris*, and *ma‘ājim* catalogs, which ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī (d. 1962) describes in the following words, “*mashyakhah* is a catalog wherein a *Ḥadīth* scholar gathers the names of his teachers and his narrations from them. People later began referring to it as *mu‘jam* when they would gather the names of the teachers separately in alphabetical order; thus, the usage of *mu‘jams* gained currency alongside *mashyakhah*. The Andalusians use the term *barnāmaj*.” See al-Kattānī, *Fahras al-Fahāris*, vol. 1, p. 67; cf. ‘Awwāmah, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 2, pp. 420-21, 564; cf. vol. 4, p. 267 [for the vowelization of these terms, see *ibid.*].

The tradition of oral/aural transmission (*samāʿ*) ensured the preservation of the literature. *Ḥadīth* scholars disseminated their works by teaching them to students, who in turn taught them to their students, ensuring scholarly supervision of *Ḥadīth* books as they were being transmitted.⁷ Prior to the canonization of the *Ḥadīth* corpus,⁸ transmitting a book for which one did not have oral/aural transmission was an offense not taken lightly in *Ḥadīth* circles.⁹ Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 507 AH) impugned Abū ʿAbd Allah al-Kāmikhī because he transmitted the *Musnad* of Imām al-Shāfiʿī from a non-*samāʿ* copy.¹⁰ Abū Bakr al-Qaṭīʿī's (d. 368 AH) copy of a book was destroyed in a flood, so he rewrote it from another copy. Despite having heard the original from a teacher, he was criticized for transmitting the second copy because it lacked oral transmission.¹¹ Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH) announced that he was in possession of a copy of al-Naḍr ibn Shumayl's *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* but dutifully added that it lacked oral transmission.¹²

Failure to understand this culture of transmission led Alphonse Mingana (d. 1937 CE) to erroneously criticize the authorship of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Based on a manuscript—perhaps the earliest extant¹³—via the recension of Abū Zayd al-Marwazī (d. 371 AH) from al-Firabrī (d. 320 AH), the prime transmitter from al-Bukhārī, Mingana argues that since the chains of transmission include the name of al-Bukhārī,¹⁴ the *Ṣaḥīḥ* could not have been authored by him, but rather by a

⁷ Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 62.

⁸ As will be demonstrated shortly, the shift in scholarly attitude towards the usage of non-*samāʿ* copies was gradual and did not take effect immediately after the period of canonization.

⁹ This was carried out mainly through one of three modes: (1) hearing a narrator read/recite *ḥadīths* aloud; (2) reading a text aloud to a teacher; or (3) being present while a text was read aloud. See Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 80.

¹⁰ Ibn Nuqṭah, *Ikmāl al-Ikmāl*, vol. 3, p. 283; cf. al-Dhahabī, *al-Mughnī fī al-Ḍuʿafāʾ*, vol. 2, p. 500.

¹¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 5, p. 116; Brown, *Hadīth*, p. 43; idem, *The Canonization al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 62.

¹² Al-Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 88. On the importance *Ḥadīth* scholars gave to oral/aural transmission, see Abū Ghuddah, *Ṣafḥah Mushriqah*, pp. 99-102, 144-49; ʿAwwāmah, *Maʿālim Irshādiyyah*, p. 188 ff.

¹³ Only 52 folios of this manuscript are available, comprising the chapters of *Zakāh*, *Ṣawm*, and *Ḥajj*, in the Mingana Collection at the Cadbury Research Library. Based on the style of its script and its authorization notes (*samāʿ āt*), the manuscript can be dated either to the lifetime of al-Marwazī or the transmitter from him. See al-Sallūm, "Introduction," in al-*Mukhtaṣar al-Naṣīḥ*, pp. 76-77; cf. Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ For instance, the chain of transmission for the first *ḥadīth* in the chapter of *Zakāh* is, "Akhbarānā Abū Zayd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad qāl ḥaddathanā Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf qāl akhbarānā al-Bukhārī qāl ḥaddathanā Abū ʿĀṣim al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Makhlad ʿan Zakariyyā ibn Ishāq ʿan Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd Allah ibn Ṣayfī ʿan Abī Maʿbad ʿan Ibn ʿAbbās anna al-Nabī ṣallallāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam baʿatha Muʿadh..."

later source like al-Firabrī or al-Marwazī.¹⁵ Apart from the fact that this objection indicates a lack of awareness regarding the methodology of transmitting *Ḥadīth* books, it is problematic on several grounds. To mention one, in addition to al-Firabrī, there are multiple recensions of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* including that of Ibrāhīm ibn Ma‘qil (d. 295 AH) and Ḥammād ibn Shākir (d. 311 AH);¹⁶ likewise, besides al-Marwazī, there are other routes from al-Firabrī, such as Abū Ishāq al-Mustamlī (d. 376 AH) and Abū al-Haytham al-Kushmīhanī (d. 389 AH). Based on the chains found in the aforementioned manuscript, if it is argued that al-Firabrī or al-Marwazī authored the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, how does one account for parallel chains through the other recensions/routes from al-Bukhārī that mention the same *ḥadīths*?¹⁷

Public reading sessions of *Ḥadīth* books also helped to ensure their textual integrity. Apart from the cross-analysis of the auditioned books, details about the participants in these reading sessions were methodically documented. Based on information detailed in manuscript notes and reading certificates, a recent study restructured a micro-history of the reading sessions of Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571 AH) mammoth *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* in Damascus, determining thereby “the background of individual participants in terms of cultural milieu, social position, and status.”¹⁸ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī’s multi-volume compendium, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, is another prime example.¹⁹ Abū ‘Amr Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643 AH) dictated the entire book to a congregation of scholars in 757 sessions. The following are

¹⁵ Mingana, An Important Ms. of Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1936), p. 289.

¹⁶ Ibrāhīm ibn Ma‘qil’s recension is preserved in Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī’s (d. 388 AH) *A‘lām al-Ḥadīth*, one of the earliest commentaries on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, as the author himself explains in the introduction. While commentating, however, al-Khaṭṭābī generally does not cite the *ḥadīths* in their entirety. See Muḥammad Āl Sa‘ūd, “Introduction,” in *A‘lām al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1, p. 76. For a handful of narrations of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* via the recension of Ibrāhīm ibn Ma‘qil and Ḥammād ibn Shākir found in secondary sources, see Jumu‘ah, *Riwāyāt al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa Nusakhuhū*, pp. 145-56, 164-69. The claim that Ibrāhīm ibn Ma‘qil’s recension lacks 300 *ḥadīths* that are found in al-Firabrī’s recension is an exaggeration. Dr. Shifā’ al-Faqīh estimates that the number is 46 *ḥadīths*. See Shifā’, *Riwāyāt al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ li al-Imām al-Bukhārī*, pp. 62-65; al-Sallūm, “Introduction,” in *‘Adad Jamī‘ Ḥadīth al-Jamī‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, pp. 16-17; Mutawalli, *Ziyādāt*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Al-Sallūm, *Risālah fī Radd Shubah Minjānā*, pp. 9-10. The cited reference is an appraisal of Mingana’s criticisms in *An Important Manuscript of the Traditions of al-Bukhārī*; cf. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, pp. 384-386.

¹⁸ Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Period*, p. 32 ff.

¹⁹ From the 5th century AH, details of auditions were systematically documented. In addition to the names of the attendees, the date and venue of the audition and the state and sitting arrangements of the audience were noted. See Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 87.

some of the points that were noted after he dictated the 8th volume: the number of sessions held; personal details of the attendees (e.g., names, lineages, and honorifics); the state of the attendees (e.g., who spoke during the dictation); the date of completion; the venue; and the name of the registrar.²⁰

Considering the minutiae noted about the attendees, one gets a sense of how scrupulous *Ḥadīth* scholars were in their analyses of the books they were dictating. The fact that *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* and *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* are not from the six canonical books is significant as it demonstrates the care given to more important, and less voluminous, collections. The unparalleled audition of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in Damascus around the year 666 AH headed by the celebrated *Ḥadīth* scholar, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (d. 701 AH), and the renowned linguist, Ibn Mālik (d. 672 AH), in a gathering of scholars who utilized critically acclaimed manuscripts and recensions of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* for cross-referencing is a case in point.²¹ ‘Abd Allah ibn Sālīm al-Baṣrī (d. 1134 AH) is on record for his meticulous treatment of the six canonical books and *Musnad Aḥmad*, spending twenty years in refining and cross-referencing his personal copy of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with other manuscripts.²²

Ibn al-Wazīr’s Rejoinder

Ibn al-Wazīr al-Yamānī (d. 840 AH) responds to a skeptic by discussing at length why it is unreasonable to doubt the authorship of the major books of *Ḥadīth*. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present his entire thesis, but we will build on three of his main arguments here.

First, doubting the ascription of the major *Ḥadīth* compilations to their respective authors if carried to its logical conclusion will lead to doubting the ascription of

²⁰ A total of ninety sessions were held for the 8th volume (i.e., sessions no. 527-617), it was completed on 15/16, Jumādā al-Ūlā, 634 AH, the venue was Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyyah in Damascus, and the registrar was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī al-Dimashqī. See the addendum to the 8th volume of *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* [Hyderabad Deccan edition], pp. 346-50; cf. Abū Ghuddah, *Ṣafḥah Mushriqah*, p. 103.

²¹ See al-Qaṣṭallānī, *Irshād al-Sārī*, vol. 1, p. 40; cf. Zuhayr Nāṣir, “Introduction,” in *al-Jāmi‘ al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, pp. 36-39. Ibn Mālik’s *Shawāhid al-Tawḍīḥ wa al-Taṣḥīḥ li Mushkilāt al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, a grammatical exegesis of difficult passages in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, was an outcome of this reading session. For a study of al-Yūnīnī’s manuscript of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, see Jumu‘ah, *Riwayāt*, p. 663 ff.

²² See al-Kattānī, *Fahras al-Fahāris*, vol. 1, p. 198; ‘Awwāmah, “Introduction,” in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, pp. 99-103.

transmitted books in all other fields.²³ It becomes nearly impossible for people to function effectively if they maintain such a profound level of skepticism of written sources. Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660 AH) makes a similar argument and then states, “Whoever assumes that all these people erred in that [i.e., in transmitting these books] has in fact himself erred. Were it not for the permissibility of relying on these books, countless benefits in medicine, grammar, and language would be obstructed.”²⁴ It is disingenuous to accept the authorship of books on history and language, for example, and not the *Ḥadīth* literature when Islamic civilization has given unprecedented care to maintain the latter.²⁵

Second, the fact that these books were compiled by their respective authors is definitively known (*ma ‘lūm bi al-ḍarūrah*) to the point that there is no reason to doubt their ascription.²⁶ Two centuries earlier, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643 AH) had already noted that the major *Ḥadīth* books had circulated too widely to have been tampered with or to have had text interpolated in them,²⁷ let alone have their authorship doubted.²⁸ A brief description of the *Muwattaʿa*’s immediate transmission may help to understand this better. Muḥammad al-Zurqānī (d. 1122 AH) writes that the following number of narrators, distributed geographically, had transmitted the *Muwattaʿa*’ directly from Imām Mālik: seventeen from Madīnah, two

²³ Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Awāṣim wa al-Qawāṣim*, vol. 1, pp. 302-4. Also see Motzki, The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article, in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, pp. 242-44.

²⁴ See al-Burzulī, *Jāmi‘ Masā’il al-Ahkām*, vol. 1, p. 79.

²⁵ Al-Zarkashī explains that scholars were more meticulous in their treatment of *Ḥadīth* manuscripts than any other genre, including books of Islamic law. See al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 1, p. 572.

²⁶ Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Awāṣim wa al-Qawāṣim*, vol. 1, p. 306.

²⁷ Ibn al-Wazīr explains that a sign that the major *Ḥadīth* books have not had texts interpolated is the absence of politically or theologically motivated forgeries in an authentic compilation like *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* that would have granted them the status of authenticity. See Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Awāṣim wa al-Qawāṣim*, p. 306. In a similar vein, the fact the *Ḥadīth* compilers cited defective chains is an indication that they did not fabricate the reports they transmitted. In the case of the *Muwattaʿa*’, for instance, Harald Motzki explains, if Mālik was fabricating Prophetic *ḥadīths* to support his positions, why would he then quote the opinions of al-Zuhrī and not project them also as Prophetic reports? Furthermore, if Mālik—as well as the other compilers—forged the *ḥadīths* in the *Muwattaʿa*’, why would he cite broken chains of transmission for certain *ḥadīths* and not embellish them as continuous chains? This demonstrates that they were reliably transmitting what they heard from their informants. See Motzki, *The Jurisprudence of Ibn Shihāb az-Zuhrī: A Source-critical Study*, pp. 21-22. For an answer to a potential objection to this line of reasoning, see al-A‘zamī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, pp. 219-22.

²⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifah Anwā’ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 17. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s concerns regarding the grading of *ḥadīths* that were not graded by earlier scholars due to the unsatisfactory state of the transmitters are to be understood in reference to rare *Ḥadīth* collections (*ajzā’*) that were not adequately transmitted, not the major books of *Ḥadīth*. For more on this, see ‘Awwāmah, Annotations on *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 2, p. 539 ff.

from Makkah, ten from Egypt, twenty-seven from Iraq, thirteen from Andalusia, two from Kairouan, two from Tunis, and seven from the Levant.²⁹ More than their numbers, the staggering geographical diversity of the narrators demonstrates the point being made here. Taking *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* as a case study, the appended diagrams illustrate how widely it has been transmitted.³⁰

Finally, the fact that countless manuscripts of these *Ḥadīth* collections in various parts of the Muslim world concur on the presence of their *ḥadīths*,³¹ and that multiple commentaries,³² secondary sources, and supplementary works throughout history all converge on referencing these *ḥadīths* to their respective compilations establishes confidence in the credibility of their authorship.³³ Moreover, there are numerous cases of inter-textual and contemporaneous citations of early compilations. In *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, al-Bukhārī refers to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*;³⁴ in his *Sunan*, al-Tirmidhī also refers to the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.³⁵ According to Ockham's Razor, when provided with two competing explanations, a person should opt for the simpler one. Given the preponderance of the evidence, it is more reasonable, and a simpler

²⁹ Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Muwattaʿ*, pp. 5-6; Ḥamdān, *al-Muwattaʿ*, pp. 77-84. For a more exhaustive list of transmitters, see al-Aʿzamī, "Introduction," in *al-Muwattaʿ*, pp. 188-250.

³⁰ Al-Dhahabī does not accept the authenticity of al-Firabrī's statement, "90,000 people heard the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl, and no one besides me remains who transmits it from him." See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 15, p. 12. Shaykh ʿAwwāmah explains that his critique is unwarranted. See ʿAwwāmah, Annotation on *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 2, pp. 365-66. Ṣāliḥ Fathī writes that the words al-Dhahabī used here are "*wa lam yaṣiḥḥ* (it is inaccurate)," which is not a criticism of the chain of transmission for the statement; rather, he disagrees that Firabrī was the last to transmit the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See Ṣāliḥ Fathī, Nuskhat *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī al-Aṣliyyah wa Ashhar Riwayātihī*, *Majallat al-Turāth al-Nabawī*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2018), p. 77.

³¹ The Muʿassasat Āl al-Bayt catalog of *Ḥadīth* manuscripts lists 2327 manuscripts of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that were written in various periods of history and are located in libraries throughout the world. See *al-Fahras al-Shāmil li al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī al-Makhṭūṭ*, pp. 484-565.

³² Muḥammad ʿĪṣām al-Ḥusaynī provides the biographies of nearly 400 scholars who wrote commentaries, glosses, or related works on the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf al-Qārī bi Maʿrifat Juhūd wa Aʿmāl al-ʿUlamāʾ ʿalā Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 6.

³³ See Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-Awāṣim wa al-Qawāṣim*, vol. 1, pp. 306-7. The author's summary of these arguments can be found in *al-Rawḍ al-Bāsim*, p. 19 ff.

³⁴ Under the entry of ʿAbd Allah ibn Abī Bakr, he alludes to the incident of the migration when ʿAbd Allah would visit the Prophet and Abū Bakr in the cave of Thawr. He then writes that he explained this in "*al-Musnad*." Bearing in mind that *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* bears *al-Musnad* in its title and that the incident in reference is cited in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 3905/5807), here al-Bukhārī is referring to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. There is a possibility that he is referring to his other book entitled *al-Musnad al-Kabīr*. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, p. 2, no. 3. He also makes references to his other works. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, p. 87, no. 387/vol. 2, p. 60, no. 1683; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shāyī, *al-Aḥādīth allatī Qāl fīhā al-Imām al-Bukhārī lā Yutāba ʿalayhi fī al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, pp. 21-22.

³⁵ Al-Tirmidhī mentions in reference to a particular chain of transmission that "He [al-Bukhārī] included it in his *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ*" which is the earliest contemporaneous mention of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 70, no. 17; Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, p. 96.

proposition, to accept the ascription of the major *Ḥadīth* collections to their purported authors than to believe in a widespread collusion of false attribution.

The Usage of Non-*Samā* 'Copies

It may be useful to shed light on the concept of *wijādah*, that is, to find and then transmit *ḥadīths* from a collection for which one does not have authorization.³⁶

When studying the debate on the usage of *wijādah* as a mode of transmission,³⁷ one needs to bear in mind the bifurcation of the history of *Ḥadīth* studies into the era before the crystallization of *ḥadīths* in books and the era after it.³⁸ By the early 5th century, it was untenable for a person to exclusively transmit a narration not recorded in any earlier *Ḥadīth* work.³⁹ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH) writes that during his time if someone were to present a *ḥadīth* that was not already recorded, it would be rejected.⁴⁰ After this point, the primary function of chains of transmission and authorizations was to uphold the revered tradition of *isnād*, which “is a unique source of ennoblement,” and attain blessings by remaining connected to the Prophet ﷺ, because the main corpus of *ḥadīths* was already stabilized.⁴¹ This explains why over time scholars became relatively lenient regarding the stringent conditions that early scholars placed on the oral/aural transmission of *Ḥadīth* collections. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date when this shift

³⁶ See al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 4, p. 338.

³⁷ On the scholarly debate surrounding the usage of *wijādah*, see al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah*, pp. 352-54; al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 4, p. 344.

³⁸ Shaykh Ḥamzah al-Malibārī distinguishes between what he terms “the phase of transmission” and “the post-transmission phase.” The phase of transmission began in the era of the Companions and ended roughly at the end of the 5th century (with al-Bayhaqī [d. 458 AH]), after which the post-transmission phase commenced. He states the early scholars (*mutaqaddimūn*) are the *Ḥadīth* experts of the first phase, particularly the skilled among them, and the latter-day scholars (*muta’akhhirūn*) are those from the second phase. The most salient feature of the first phase is that *ḥadīths* were transmitted therein via direct chains of transmission whereas in the subsequent phase reliance was predominantly on earlier written works. See al-Malibārī, *Nazarāt Jadīdah fī ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 13-16; idem, *al-Muwāzanah bayn al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta’akhhirīn*, pp. 57-62.

³⁹ It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date for this phenomenon; consequently, opinions vary in this regard. Abū ‘Amr Ibn al-Murābiṭ (d. 752 AH) states, “[Prophetic] Reports have already been compiled, and narrator-criticism no longer serves its purpose. In fact, it ceased at the close of the 4th century.” See al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-Mughīth*, vol. 4, p. 445. Shaykh Ḥātim al-‘Awnī opines that all *ḥadīths* were recorded arguably by the close of the 3rd century, and unquestionably by the 4th century. See al-‘Awnī, *al-Manhaj al-Muqtarah*, pp. 52, 61.

⁴⁰ Al-Bayhaqī, *Manāqib al-Shāfi’ī*, vol. 2, p. 321; Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Ma’rifat Anwā’ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 121. For similar remarks, see Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Mawḍū‘āt*, vol. 1, p. 99; al-Zayla‘ī, *Naṣb al-Rāyah*, vol. 1, p. 335 [summary of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s treatise]; al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥsūl*, vol. 4, p. 299.

⁴¹ Al-Bayhaqī, *Manāqib al-Shāfi’ī*, vol. 2, p. 321; Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Ma’rifat Anwā’ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 17; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, pp. 28-33.

took place, an incident involving Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. 576 AH) and ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maḳḍīsī (d. 600 AH) hints at this transition.⁴²

Following the transition to transcription and *ḥadīth* composition, scholars turned their focus to verifying the authenticity of collections and authorial ascriptions.⁴³

The process of evaluating manuscripts involves much more than just relying on their chains of transmission or dating their parchment; rather, Miklos Muranyi explains, it is judged by “holistic study of structure, technique, and scribal notes in addition to comparative analysis of cross-references and collated texts.”⁴⁴

In the 8th century, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) raised the question of a person who transmits a *Ḥadīth* collection like *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from his teacher and then finds a copy of that collection, which was not cross-referenced with the teacher’s copy nor does he find an attestation of his audition on it, but he believes it to be an authentic copy—can he transmit from it? Although the majority of early *Ḥadīth* scholars prohibited such a practice, Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. 131 AH) and Muḥammad al-Bursānī (d. 203 AH) held that there was dispensation for him to transmit from it.⁴⁵

Ibn Kathīr adds that he inclines towards this position.⁴⁶ He was not alone in his inclination. Al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH) and Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795 AH) state that later scholars maintained much dispensation in this regard.⁴⁷ Accordingly, grafting early disapproval of transmitting non-source copies onto the later (post-canonization) period is anachronistic and decidedly misleading.

Apart from transmission, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ explains that it is permissible to practice what one reliably finds in *Ḥadīth* books through *wijādah*.⁴⁸ Based on scholarly acceptance of a letter the Prophet ﷺ had sent with ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm to the people of Yemen on almsgiving and indemnities, one can make a case for consensus on this issue.⁴⁹ ‘Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb abandoned his own view on indemnities based on

⁴² Ibn Nuḡṭah, *al-Taḡyīd*, vol. 1, p. 328; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, pp. 92-94.

⁴³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, vol. 2, pp. 561-63/vol. 4, p. 338.

⁴⁴ Abd-Allah, *Mālik and Medina*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah*, p. 257.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā‘ith al-Ḥathīth*, p. 140.

⁴⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-‘itidāl*, vol. 3, p. 467; idem, *Siyar*, vol. 16, p. 389; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, vol. 3, p. 320; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, p. 95.

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifat Anwā‘ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Awāṣim wa al-Qawāṣim*, vol. 1, pp. 332-35; al-‘Awnī, *al-Mursal al-Khaṭī*, pp. 880-81. Shaykh Ḥātim further explains there is no reason to distinguish between transmission and practice. See *op. cit.*, p. 882.

‘Amr ibn Ḥazm’s letter that was found in the possession of his family.⁵⁰ This was also the case with other Companions and Successors.⁵¹ As Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH) explains, scholars from all regions have unanimously relied upon the letter of ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm.⁵²

The relevance of this discussion cannot be overstated because, as Dr. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ points out, after the advent of the printing press, usage of *Ḥadīth* books normatively occurs via *wijādah*.⁵³ Early scholars were cautious about the usage of non-*samā’* copies out of fear of interpolation;⁵⁴ printing has largely assuaged this concern.⁵⁵ On this note, Shaykh Ḥatīm al-‘Awnī aptly observes, “It is ironic that critics would object to the validity of *Ḥadīth* books that are found through *wijādah* when the very books they cite concerning *wijādah* are themselves found through *wijādah*.”⁵⁶ That being said, the practice of oral/aural transmission of *Ḥadīth* books, particularly the six canonical works, has continued unabated in various institutions and seminars throughout the world until the present day.



Far from ignoring the literary heritage of their predecessors, *Ḥadīth* scholars expended considerable energy in maintaining its integrity. From the tradition of oral/aural transmission, to careful handling of manuscripts, to meticulous dictation sessions, the Islamic civilization’s unparalleled precision vis-à-vis the *Ḥadīth* literature develops confidence in its authorship within the hearts of its readers. Unwarranted skepticism of such a robust system can lead a person to doubt all transmitted knowledge. More leaps of faith are taken in doubting the ascription of *Ḥadīth* books that were transmitted from their authors by a multitude of narrators

⁵⁰ Al-Ṣan‘ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, no. 17698.

⁵¹ Al-Fasawī, *al-Ma‘rifah wa al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, p. 217.

⁵² Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr writes, “The consensus of scholars from all regions upon the dictates of ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm’s *ḥadīth* is a clear proof of its authenticity.” See Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār*, vol. 8, p. 37.

⁵³ Ṣubḥī, *‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥuh*, pp. 102; cf. Kamali, *A Text Book of Ḥadīth Studies*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Al-Dhahabī writes, “The criticism of some scholars that these [the *ḥadīths* of ‘Amr ibn Shu‘ayb—his father—his grandfather] are in the form of *ṣaḥīfah*, whose transmission is via non-oral *wijādah*, is from the perspective that interpolations can creep into *ṣaḥīfahs*, particularly in that era because there were no vowel marks or diacritics as opposed to studying directly from teachers.” See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 5, p. 174.

⁵⁵ Ṣubḥī, *‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥuh*, p. 103. On the process of verifying and preparing a manuscript for print, see ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn’s *Taḥqīq al-Nuṣūṣ wa Nashruḥā*.

⁵⁶ Personal communication, March 11, 2018.

hailing from diverse regional backgrounds and were cited by a dizzying array of sources over a millennium than in accepting them.

Appendix: Transmission of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*

A central goal of this paper is to establish that the major books of *Ḥadīth* have been transmitted so widely that it is unreasonable to doubt their authorship. Here we will take *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* as a case study to better understand this phenomenon. In his doctoral thesis,⁵⁷ Dr. Jumu‘ah ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm studies in detail the various routes and recensions of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Adapted from his study, the following diagrams demonstrate how widely the *Ṣaḥīḥ* has been transmitted. To be sure, these diagrams are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the actual transmission of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

I have chosen to outline only the chains of the Mamluk era *Ḥadīth* master, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH).⁵⁸ While mapping out his genealogy of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, he leaves out some recensions and routes. For instance, he transmits the *Ṣaḥīḥ* via multiple routes that culminate at four students of al-Bukhārī, viz. Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firabrī (d. 320 AH), Ibrāhīm ibn Ma‘qil (d. 295 AH), Ḥammād ibn Shākir (d. 311 AH), and Abū Ṭalḥah Maṣṣūr al-Bazdawī (d. 329 AH), but he does not include the transmission of Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he identifies nine routes from al-Firabrī, excluding thereby the transmissions of Muḥammad ibn Khālīd al-Firabrī, Aḥmad al-Firabrī (d. 371 AH), Abū Ḥāmid

⁵⁷ Published as “*Riwāyāt al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa Nusakhuhu: Dirāsah Nazariyyah Taḥqīqīyah*.”

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 1, pp. 5-7; idem, *Taghlīq al-Ta‘līq*, vol. 5, pp. 444-46; idem, *al-Mu‘jam al-Mufahras*, pp. 25-27.

⁵⁹ Muḥammad ibn Ṭahir al-Maqdisī (d. 507 AH) mentions the name of Ṭāhir al-Nasafī among the direct transmitters of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See Ibn Nuqṭah, *al-Taḥyīd*, p. 31. Ibn Ḥajar explains that the recension of Abū ‘Abd Allah al-Mahāmīlī (d. 320 AH) from al-Bukhārī is an error. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 1, p. 5; idem, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, vol. 5, p. 667. Aḥmad Fāris al-Sallūm mentions the names of two more transmitters, Ḥashid ibn Ismā‘īl and Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Jurjānī. See al-Sallūm, “Introduction,” in *al-Mukhtaṣar al-Naṣīḥ*, pp. 42-45. He bases the inclusion of Ḥashid on a statement of Ibn Ḥajar (*Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 10, p. 234), but in a subsequent article, he retracted this claim. See al-Sallūm, *Risālah fī Radd Shubah Minjānā*, p. 5. The inclusion of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī also seems to be an error. Al-Sallūm cites Ibn Nuqṭah’s *al-Taḥyīd* as a reference, but the passage in question states that al-Jurjānī was a transmitter from al-Firabrī, not a direct transmitter from al-Bukhārī. Ibn Nuqṭah writes, “In his book, Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir states, ‘A group of people narrated *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from al-Firabrī. Among them were Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥamawī, Abū Ishāq al-Mustamlī, Abū Sa‘īd Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rumayḥ, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Jurjānī, and Abū al-Haytham Muḥammad ibn al-Makkī al-Kushmīhanī.’” See Ibn Nuqṭah, *al-Taḥyīd*, p. 11. Given that al-Jurjānī passed away in the year 366 AH, it is far-fetched that he transmitted directly from al-Bukhārī. See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 16, p. 247.

al-Nu‘aymī (d. 386 AH), Abū Bakr al-Ishtīkhanī (d. 388 AH), et al.⁶⁰ From the wide array of routes that Ibn Ḥajar maps out, I selected only two routes for the purpose of brevity. Hence, from a pool of twelve transmitters in the third stratum of transmission, I settled on the transmissions of Abū Dharr al-Harawī (d. 434 AH) and Karīmah al-Marwaziyyah (d. 463 AH).

Figure 1 details the routes from the third stratum via al-Firabrī from al-Bukhārī. Figures 2 and 3 continue further by tracing the transmissions of Abū Dharr and Karīmah al-Marwaziyyah until Ibn Ḥajar. Figure 4 traces the transmission of three non-Firabrī recensions from al-Bukhārī. The biographical information of the transmitters cited in the diagrams is easily accessible. To avoid enlarging the diagrams, their entire names were not included.

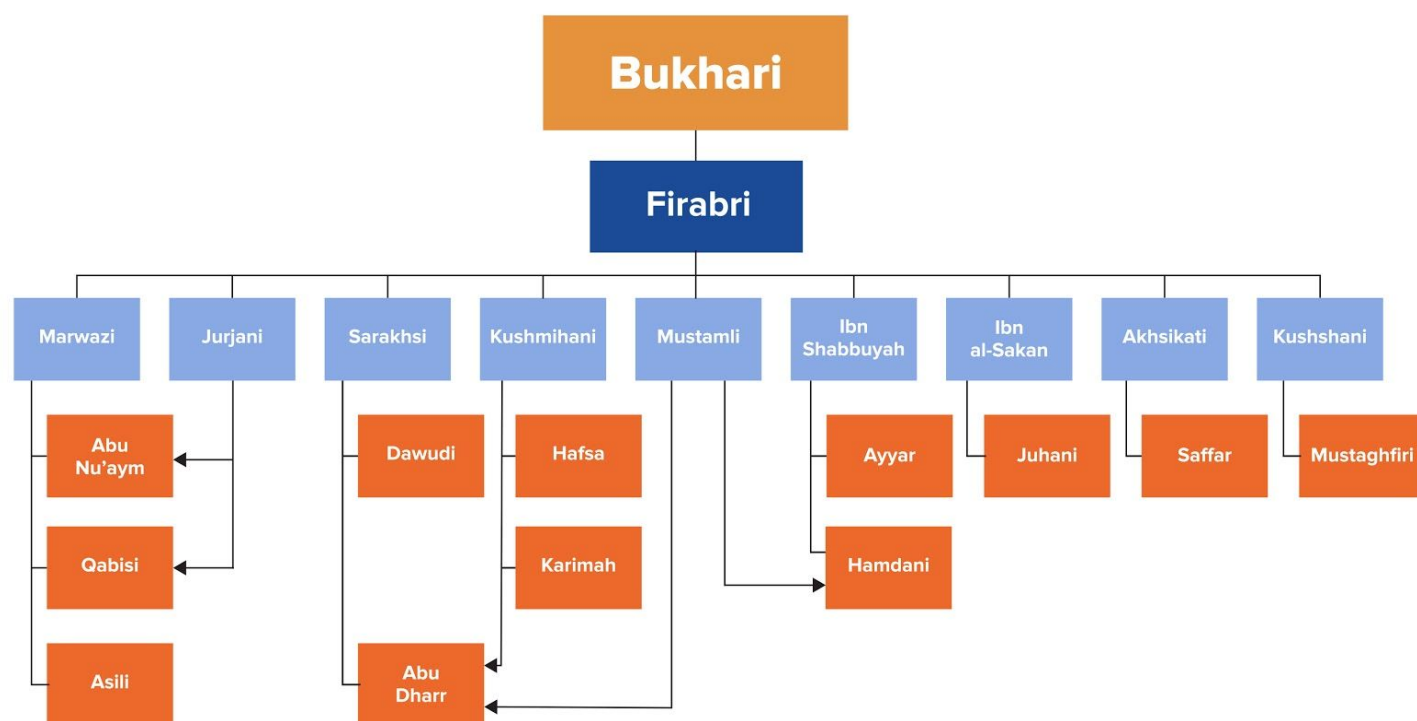


FIGURE 1

⁶⁰ Jumu‘ah, *Riwāyāt*, pp. 203-205.

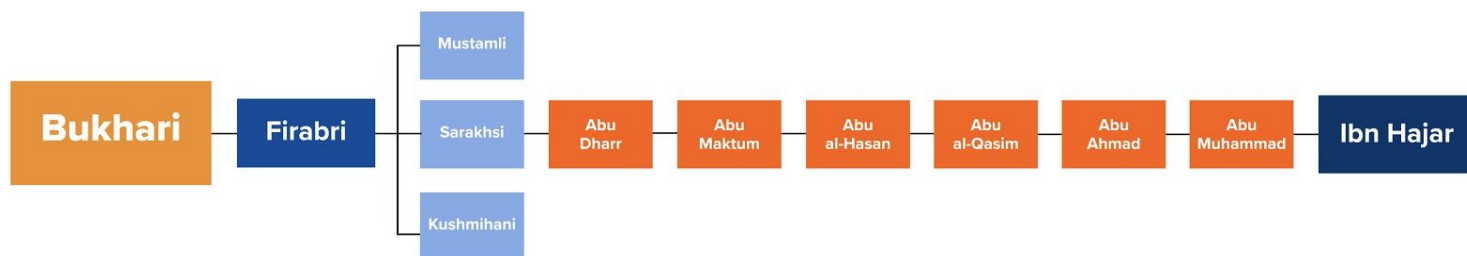


FIGURE 2

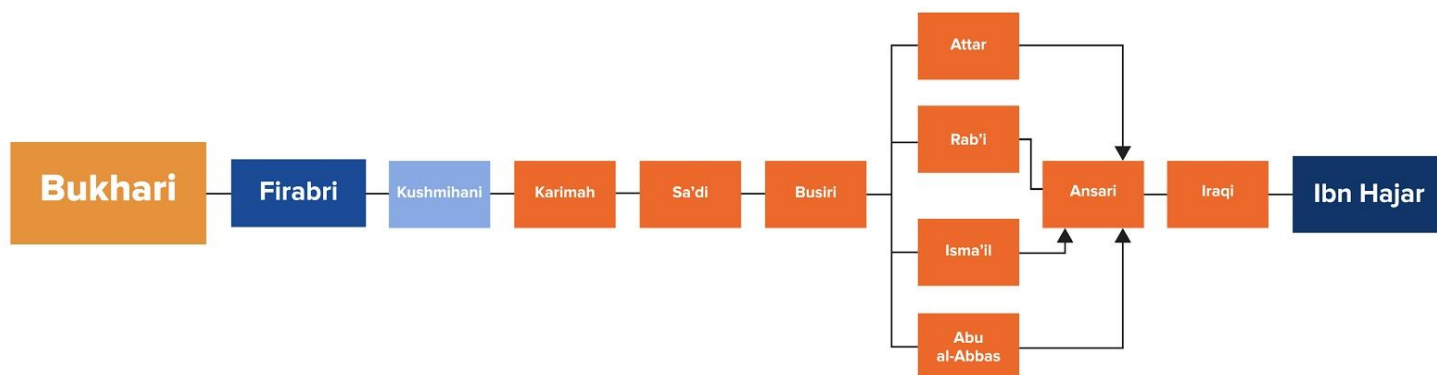


FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4