# Science of Hadith

## Lesson 5

# The Journalist Analogy

- To set the stage for our discussion on how Muslim scholars tried to sift reliable from unreliable 'reports' from the Prophet, let us imagine a journalist working for a newspaper today.

- If our reporter tells their editor that they have a major story about a senior political figure, the editor will ask two main questions:

# The Journalist Analogy

- 1. Who is your source?

- 2. Is your source corroborated?

- How could the reporter reply?

- The reporter knows that certain sources are reliable for certain information.

- If the president's spokesperson announces that the president will make a visit to England, there is no need to double-check this information

# The Journalist Analogy

- Imagine, however, that the reporter has found a source who gives her rare and valuable information about an important issue but whose reliability the reporter has yet to confirm.

- The reporter is not going to stake their journalistic reputation on this one tip, but how does the reporter determine the accuracy of the source's information?

# The Journalist Analogy

- Imagine that this source tells the reporter that there has just been an earthquake in China.

- The reporter would call their contacts in China to confirm. If these contacts tell the reporter that indeed a quake had occurred, the source has been proven correct.

- If no one the reporter spoke to noticed anything, the source's story would be uncorroborated and the reporter would conclude that the source was unreliable.

# The Journalist Analogy

- Suppose that next the source tells the reporter some valuable information about the condition of the country's economy.

- Again, the reporter proceeds cautiously, and conducts thorough research and finds that the source's information was correct.

- The source provides tips on a few more stories, and after checking out the information, the reporter finds that these stories are true as well.

# The Journalist Analogy

- Eventually the reporter concludes that this source is reliable, and if the source provides a tip on a hot story in the future, the reporter will feel comfortable writing the story based on the source's testimony alone.

- Reporters understand that the reliability of a source is based on the accuracy of the information they provide

# The Journalist Analogy

- The best way to confirm the accuracy of a source is to check with other sources that have access to the same information and see if they agree.

- These two pillars of modern journalism, the reliability of a source and determining the reliability of a source or story through corroboration, are familiar to us in all in our daily lives.

# The Journalist Analogy

- Another fact is equally evident to us in our daily lives: the contents of reports we hear have a strong influence on our view of their reliability and our confidence in their transmitters.

- If our reporter met a source who swore that he had seen a herd of flying elephants downtown, the reporter would probably both disbelieve him and consider him unreliable from that point on.

# The Journalist Analogy

- Furthermore, we all have a sense of what is important information and what is not, and we treat this information accordingly.

- If our reporter hears rumors that the president is about to announce a major change in the government's economic policy, they will want to verify this information before writing the story.

# The Journalist Analogy

- If the reporter hears that the president has changed his favorite dessert from ice cream to apple pie, they will probably be content to cite this information as is.

- While modern reporters are charged with determining the veracity of stories about what is happening in the world today on the basis of contemporary sources, hadith scholars are faced with a more daunting task:

# The Journalist Analogy

- They had to establish a system of distinguishing between true and false stories about a man who had lived long before their time.

# The Problem of Hadith Forgery

- The Holy Prophet (saw) is the single most dominant figure in the Islamic religious and legal tradition.

- Because the Prophet possessed such eminent authority, early Muslims looked to his legacy to support or legitimize their different schools of thought, beliefs, or political agendas.

# The Problem of Hadith Forgery

- Forging reports about the Prophet quickly became a problem in the Muslim community.

- When civil war broke out openly between Imam Ali and Muawiya, the supporters of Muawiya fabricated the following narration and attributed it to the Holy Prophet (saw)

# The Problem of Hadith Forgery

كاد معاوية أن يبعث نبيا من حلمه وائتمانه على كلام ربي

"It is as if Muawiya were sent as a prophet because of his forbearance and his having been entrusted with God's word."

# The Problem of Hadith Forgery

- Political and sectarian conflicts were a major engine for hadith forgery.

- Many hadiths were also forged in legal and theological debates.

- A surprisingly large number of hadiths were forged and circulated by pious Muslims in an effort to motivate those around them both religiously and morally.

# The Problem of Forgery

- Hadith forgery emerged as a blatant problem when the generation of Muslims who had known the Prophet well died off.

- The late Allama al-Amini mentioned the names of 43 narrators who had fabricated 408,686 hadith some of whom had fabricated up to 100,000 hadith.

# The Problem of Forgery

- His eminence further says: "The fact that Abu Dawood narrated only 4800 Hadith from 500,000 available to him, Bukhari narrated only 2761 Hadith from among 600,000 hadith, Muslim narrated only 4000 Hadith from among 300,000 hadith, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal narrated 27,000 hadith from 750,000 hadith… shows how actively the fabricators were working at that time."

Source: al-Ghadir, v. 5, p. 291

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# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- **The formulation of the three-tiered approach**
- 1. Demanding source (isnaad)
- 2.  Evaluating the reliability of that source
- 3. Seeking corroboration for that hadith

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- **Step One: The Isnaad**

- The isnaad was the essential building-block of the hadith critical method.

- The isnaad is understood as the prime means of defending the true teachings of the Prophet against heretics as well as protection from subtle deviations that might slip into Muslims' beliefs and practice.

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- In the early Islamic period, simply demanding an isnaad for reports attributed to the Prophet was an excellent first line of defense against unauthentic material entering Muslim discourse.

- We can imagine the newly Muslim inhabitants of Kufa, still clinging to Christian or Zoroastrian lore, or even Bedouins eager to insinuate tribal Arab values into Islam, ascribing a saying to the Prophet as evidence for their ideas.

- If they provided no isnaad at all, the reports would not enter the musnad collections.

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# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- **Step Two: Rating Transmitters**

- The second tier of criticism involved identifying the individuals who constituted the isnaads, evaluating their reliability and then determining if there were any risks that someone unreliable might also have played some part in transmitting the report.

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- A hadith transmitter was evaluated according to two criteria:
  - 1. His or her character, correct belief, and level of piety were scrutinized in order to determine if he or she was upright عادل
  - 2. The transmitter's corpus of reports and narration practices were evaluated to decide if he or she was "accurate" ضابط

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- How would a hadith critic actually evaluate a transmitter?

- First, it was essential to know who this transmitter was.

- If one was presented with a hadith transmitted from 'someone', 'Ahmad', or a group of people in Medina, 'how could one evaluate the strength of its isnaad?

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- By the mid 800s it had become accepted convention among hadith critics that a person needed two well-known transmitters to identify him sufficiently, prove that he existed and narrate hadiths from him in order to qualify for rating.

- Otherwise, the transmitter would be dismissed as 'unknown' مجهول and the report automatically considered unreliable

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- Second, the critic would collect all the reports that the transmitter had narrated from various teachers and then analyze them for corroboration.

- For every hadith that the transmitter narrated from a certain teacher, the critic asks 'Did this teacher's other students narrate this report too?'

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- If the critic finds that, for all the teachers the transmitter narrates from, his fellow students corroborated him for a very high percentage of his hadiths, then he is considered to be reliable in his transmissions

- Finally, the critic would examine the transmitter's character, religious beliefs, and piety in order to determine his 'uprightness'

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- Although in the eighth and ninth centuries each hadith critic used slightly different and sometimes shifting terms to describe a transmitter's level of reliability, by the early 10th century a conventional jargon had emerged. Ibn Hatim al-Razi (d. 327 AH) lists the levels as:

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

1. **Reliable** ثقة- transmitter's hadiths can be used as legal proof in legal scholarship with no hesitation.

2. **Sincere** صدوق- transmitter's hadiths are recorded and can be taken as proof if bolstered or corroborated

3. **Venerable** شيخ- transmitter's hadiths are used for identifying corroboration depending on strength

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- 4. **Righteous** صالح
- 5. **Lenient on hadith** لينّ الحديث
- 6. **Not strong** ليس بقوي
- 7. **Weak** ضعيف
- 8. **Liar** كذّاب - the transmitter's hadiths are not used at all.

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- **Books of transmitter criticism: كتب الرجال**
- - Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 AH) الطبقات الكبرى (The Great Book of Generations)
- - al-Juzayjaani (d. 259 AH) احوال الرجال (Conditions of the Transmitters)
- al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH) ميزان الاعتدال (The Fair Scale)

# The Development of Early Sunni Hadith Criticism

- **Step 3: Finding Corroboration for the Hadith**
- Corroboration had played a central role in determining the reliability of a transmitter- if he narrated hadiths that other students of his source did not, then his reliability was questioned.
- But a forger could still simply take an isnaad of a respected transmitter and attach it to a freshly concocted hadith
- The third and final step in hadith criticism thus involved looking for corroboration of the hadith itself

# Levels of Hadith in Sunni Islam

- From the time of Malik b. Anis (d. 179 AH) to the late ninth century, hadith critics conceived of hadiths as falling between two poles in terms of the strength of their isnaads: sahih and dha'if

- In terms of their corroboration, critics described hadiths as being 'well-known' or 'unknown'

# Levels of Hadith in Sunni Islam

- A hadith that was declared sahih or mashhur, represented the authenticated words of the Prophet, while weak or munkar hadiths were those not fully established as emanating from him.

- For hadith scholars of the eighth and ninth century, any hadith that did not reach the standard of sahih was declared 'weak'.

- Thus the category of 'weak' hadith was very broad.

# Levels of Hadith in Sunni Islam

- Beginning with the work of a student of Bukhari, Al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH), hadith scholars developed a new name to describe hadiths that were not sahih but still strong enough to use as proof in Islamic law: 'hasan' or 'fair'.

- Tirmidhi describes a 'hasan' hadith as one that does not have in its isnaad someone who is accused of lying or forgery, is not anomalous, and is narrated by more than one chain of transmission

# Levels of Hadith in Sunni Islam

- All Sunnis scholars have accepted both sahih and hasan hadiths as compelling proofs in matters of law.

- In addition to the divisions of hadith into sahih/hasan/dha'if or mushhur/munkar, the Hanafi/Mu'tazilite school of legal theory elaborated a gradated system based on the level of certainty that various forms of reports conveyed

# Levels of Hadith in Sunni Islam

- Reports about the past, whether hadiths or simply historical accounts, that were so widespread that they could not have been forged by any one group were called 'mutawaatir' متواتر and yielded epistemological certainty يقين

- Any hadith that did not fulfill the requirements for a mutawaatir hadith was known as ahaad آحاد or a hadith of individual narrators.

- Unlike mutawaatir hadiths, ahaad hadiths only yielded strong probability ظن

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Shia hadith criticism began much later than its Sunni counterpart, appearing in full force only in the early eleventh century.

- While the Imams were alive, there was no need to worry about forged hadiths- any report attributed to an earlier Imam would be checked by his descendants.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- In the immediate wake of the occultation of the 12th Imam, individuals like al-Kulayni, and later, al-Saduq understood that it was now the responsibility of scholars to assure that the Shia community only acted on the reports authentically traced to the Imams and the Prophet.

- The failure of scholars to distinguish between reliable and unreliable hadiths had been the leading motivation for the writing of al-Kafi and the other 4 Shia canonical hadith collections.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Shia scholars began to look more skeptically at the contents and use of the hadith collections.

- They acknowledged that some reports in the hadith collections could have been inserted by Shia's with deviant beliefs.

- Moreover, even a pious and well-intentioned usul compiler could have made an error in including a one report instead of another.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Like the Sunni tradition, Shia hadith criticism centered on evaluating transmitters and then using this information to help decide the reliability of isnaads.

- Proper belief was the centerpiece of Shia transmitter criticism.

- There was a sense that Muslim's realization that the Ahlul Bayt was the sole religious authority was testament enough to the reliability of the transmitter.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

اعرفوا منازل الناس على قدر روايتهم عنا

"Know the status of people by the extent to which they narrate from us."- Imam al-Sadiq (a.s)

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- As the Shia scholarly tradition grew more elaborate, however, this would not suffice.

- Shaykh al-Mufid's student, Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 460 AH), began developing a system of transmitter criticism to weed out reports from unreliable people and ensure that Shias were only taking hadiths from 'the party of truth'.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Although al-Tusi seems to be the first Shia to employ a system of rating the reliability of transmitters, like the Sunnis, Shia hadith scholars had long been keeping records in order to identify the myriad of people who made up their isnaads to the Imams.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Ahmad b. U'qda (d. 332 AH) devoted a large book to identifying all the people who studied with and transmitted the teachings of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

- Ahmed b. Muhammad al-Hamdani (d. 333 AH) wrote a book titled كتاب التاريخ وذكر من روى الحديث (The Book of Dates and Those Who Narrated Hadiths)

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Later, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Jawhari (d. 401 AH) compiled a work called (The Comprehensive Book on Identifying Hadith Transmitters)

كتاب الاشتمال على معرفة الرجال

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Although these books have been lost, the earliest surviving book on Shia transmitters, that of Muhammad b. Umar al-Kashshi (d. 340 AH), a contemporary of al-Kulayni focuses on laying out the full names of transmitters, their relationships to other transmitters, and, if possible, when they lived.

- Like many early Sunni books of hadith transmitters, these books were concerned more with identifying transmitters than evaluating them.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Al-Kashshi wrote معرفة الناقلين عن الأئمة الصادقين (Knowing the narrators from the truthful Imams)

- The original copy of this is lost. However, Al-Tusi had a copy of the book. He revised the book and called it إختيار معرفة الرجال

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# Shia Hadith Criticism

- When he began his efforts to make sure no fraudulent material had crept into the usul since the occultation of the 12$^{th}$ Imam, Al-Tusi had to ensure that Shias had received material from Muslims with proper beliefs.

- Certainly, Shias needed to be on guard against hadiths forged or propagated by anti-Shia Sunnis.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- But the more immediate danger was sifting out reports from Shias who had extreme beliefs like the deification of Imam Ali and those who believed that the line of the Prophet had ended with an earlier Imam going into occultation.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Al-Tusi's famous book of transmitter criticism رجال الطوسي is thus more concerned with identifying Shia transmitters who believed that it was actually an earlier Imam, like Imam Musa al-Kadhim, who had gone into occultation.

- Al-Tusi tries to list those transmitters who collected usul from the Imams, determining whether they are 'trustworthy' or not.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- In his book he has mentioned the lives of more than 8900 transmitters

- He has classified the transmitters according to the infallibles they were contemporaries of beginning with the Prophet.

- Al-Tusi also wrote a book called الفهرست which is the most ancient Shia book in bibliography. He collected the names of more than 900 transmitters who had authored and compiled 2000 books.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Abu al-Abbas al-Najashi (d. 450 AH) followed al-Tusi in compiling an influential book of Shia transmitter criticism رجال النجاشي

- Unlike al-Tusi, however, he aimed his book at a Sunni audience.

- Tired of his opponents accusing Shias of having no tradition of hadith transmission and hadith books, he offers example after example of accomplished Shia hadith authors and the isnaads in which he found them

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Methods of authentication:
- 1. Specific authentication توثيق خاص
  - By an infallible
  - By early hadith transmitter critics like al-Tusi and Najashi
  - By consensus
- 2. General authentication توثيق عام

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Amongst all the transmitters there are 18 people who are known as أصحاب الإجماع who enjoyed the highest level of knowledge and trustworthiness and hence the scholars-by and large- accept their narrations without any verification.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Companions of Imam al-Baqir
- 1. Zurarah b. A'yan زرارة بن أعين
- 2. Ma'ruf b. Kharbudh معروف بن خربوذ
- 3. Burayd b. Muawiya بريد بن معاوية
- 4. Abu Basir al-Asadi أبو بصير الاسدي
- 5. Al-Fudhayl b. Yasaar الفضيل بن يسار
- 6. Muhammad b. Muslim محمد بن مسلم الطايفي

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Companions of Imam al-Sadiq
- 7. Jamil b. Darraj جميل ابن درّاج
- 8. Abdullah b. Miskaan عبد الله بن مسكان
- 9. Abdullah b. Bukayr عبد الله بن بكير
- 10. Hammad b. Uthman حماد بن عثمان
- 11. Hammad b. Issa حماد بن عيسى
- 12. Abaan b. Uthman أبان بن عثمان

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Companions of Imam al-Kadhim and al-Ridha
- 13. Yunus b. Abdul Rahman يونس بن عبد الرحمن
- 14. Safwan b. Yahya صفوان بن يحيى
- 15. Muhammad b. Abi Umayr محمد بن أبي عمير
- 16. Abdullah b. al-Mughira عبد الله بن المغيرة
- 17. Al-Hasan b. Mahbub الحسن بن محبوب
- 18. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Abi Nasr
  أحمد بن محمد بن أبي نصر

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Shia hadith criticism continued to draw on and in effect mirror Sunni hadith criticism.

- However, one of the main points of divergence is that content criticism would enjoy a prominent role in Shia hadith criticism than it did among Sunnis

- Just because the isnaad was reliable did not mean the report was authentic or legally compelling.

# Shia Hadith Criticism

- Al-Sharif al-Murtadha (d. 436 AH) maintained that every report attributed to the Prophet or Imams had to be authenticated by reason.

- Thus, the content of a hadith would be the final arbitrator in determining its authenticity.

# Levels of Hadith in Shia Islam

- Categorization devised by Allamah al-Hilli (d. 648 AH)

- 1. Sahih-  all the transmitters in the isnaad are named and they are all upright, Twelver Shias.

- 2. Hasan- all transmitters are good Shia- though not necessarily just- and nothing blameworthy is said about them.

# Levels of Hadith in Shia Islam

- 3. Muwathaq- full isnaad although some of its transmitters are not Twelver Shias but they are considered reliable

- 4. Dha'if- none of the conditions of Sahih, Hasan or Muwathaq are met. The transmitters are known to be unjust, possessing immoral characteristics or are known for fabricating the hadith