

# CHOSEN THOUGHTS on the Nomenclature of Ḥadīth Specialists

(*Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Mustalah Ahl al-Athar*)

by the Commander of the Believers in  
Ḥadīth, Shaykh al-Islam, Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī  
ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, known as  
**Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī**  
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Translation by **Musa Furber**  
revised by **Gibril Fouad Haddad**  
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## Introduction

Praise to Allah who never ceases being knowing, able. May Allah bless our liegelord Muḥammad, whom He sent to mankind as a bearer of good tidings and a warner, and upon his folk, Companions, and many salutations.

To commence: The books of the nomenclature of ḥadīth specialists are many and were expanded and condensed. One of my brothers asked that I summarize for them what is important. I responded to his request seeking to be counted among those who trod the [scholarly] paths. So I say:

### Reports and Their Paths

The paths of a report (*khābar*) are either:

- (1) without specific number
- (2) more than two paths
- (3) two paths
- (4) one path

- The first is the mass-transmitted report (*mutawātir*), and conveys sure knowledge (‘*ilm yaqīnī*) when its conditions are met.
- The second is the well-known report (*mashhūr*) and it is also called the well-circulated report (*mustafīḍ*) according to one opinion.
- The third is the rare report (‘*azīz*). It is not the [minimal] condition for authenticity, contrary to whoever claimed it.
- The fourth is the singular report (*gharīb*).

All of them except for the first are solitary reports (*āḥād*). They [=these reports] encompass the accepted and the rejected since using them as evidence hinges on investigating the status of the reporters, contrary to the first category. Yet they might contain what conveys inductive knowledge (‘*ilm nazārī*) with external indicators, according to the preferred opinion.

Then the singularity (*gharāba*) is either:

- (1) in the chain itself
- (2) or not.

- The first is the absolutely-unique report (*fard muṭlaq*) [e.g. one-ḥadīth narrator, one-compiler narrator, one-narrator ḥadīth, one-locality narrations].
- The second is the relatively-unique report (*fard nisbī*), and it is rare that the term 'unique' (*fard*) is used for it without qualification.

### Dividing Accepted Reports into Sound and Fair

The solitary report (*āḥād*) transmitted by:

- (1) an upright ('*adl*)
- (2) thoroughly accurate person (*tāmm al-ḍabt*)
- (3) with a continuous chain (*sanad*)
- (4) that is not defective (*mu' allal*)
- (5) nor anomalous (*shādhdh*)

is the sound-in-itself report (*ṣaḥīḥ bi-dhātihi*). Its ranks are commensurate to variation in these conditions. Hence al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* was put first, then Muslim's, and then what matches their criteria (*shurūṭ*).

### Fair Reports

If the accuracy decreases then it is the fair-in-itself report (*ḥasan li-dhātihi*); with multiple paths it is considered sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*).

If the grading is composite [e.g. fair-sound (*ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*)] it is [either] because of indecision regarding the reporter when it [=his report] is unique [either fair or sound]; otherwise it is from examining two chains [one fair and one sound].

### Additions from Trustworthy Narrators

An addition from a narrator of each of these two types of chains [the sound and the fair] is accepted as long as his addition does not negate [the report of] someone who is more trustworthy.

- If the addition is contrary to something superior (*arjah*), the stronger is the preserved report (*maḥfūz*), and its opposite is the anomalous report (*shādhah*).
- If in addition to being contrary it is weak (*da'īf*), the stronger is the well-recognized (*ma'rūf*), and its opposite is the disclaimed report (*munkar*).

When a report agrees with a relatively-unique report (*fard nisbī*) it is called a corroborative chain (*mutābi'*).

If a report's content (*matn*) is found that resembles it, then it is a witness-report (*shāhid*).

Investigating the paths of transmission for the above is called evaluation (*i'tibār*).

### Contradiction and Objection

That which is accepted (*maqbul*):

– if it is free from contradiction or objection (*mu'āraḍa*), then it is decisive (*muḥkam*).

If it is contradicted by something equal to it [in soundness]:

– if reconciliation (*jam'*) is possible, they are reconcilable reports (*mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*);

– if not and the later one is positively established (*thābit*), then one is the abrogating report (*nāsikh*) and the other is the abrogated report (*mansūkh*);

– if not, superiority is sought (*tarjih*);

– and lastly, neither one is confirmed or denied (*tawaqquf*).

### The Rejected and its Divisions

Reports are rejected because of:

(1) lacuna (*saqt*)

(2) or aspersion (*ta'n*).

## Lacunas

Lacunas are either:

- (1) at the beginning of the chain (*sanad*) on the part of the compiler,
- (2) at the end of the chain after the Successor ﷺ,
- (3) or elsewhere.

- The first [case] is the suspended report (*mu'allaq*).
- The second is the expedient report (*mursal*).
- The third:

If the lacuna consists in two or more narrators consecutively then it is the problematic report (*mu'dal*),

If not, then it is the broken-chained report (*munqaṭi'*).

The lacunas can be:

- (1) obvious
- (2) or hidden.

- The first is recognized by lack of meeting [between interconnected reporters]. Hence the need for [biographical] history.
- The second is the camouflaged report (*mudallas*), a report related with a phrase which implies possible meeting, such as "From so-and-so", "He said...", ('*an, qāla*). Likewise, the hidden expedient report (*mursal khafī*) from a contemporary he did not meet [or did not meet as a narrator, such as a baby Companion from the Prophet ﷺ, e.g. Mūsā ibn Ṭalḥa ﷺ].

### Aspersion

Aspersion (*ṭa' n*) is because of one of the following:

- (1) the narrator lying
  - (2) being accused of lying
  - (3) making enormous mistakes
  - (4) being heedless (*ghafla*)
  - (5) being morally corrupt (*fāsiq*)
  - (6) being delusionary (*wahm*)
  - (7) contradicting others (*mukhālaḥa*)
  - (8) being unknown (*jahāla*)
  - (9) being an innovator
  - (10) being chronically forgetful
- The first is the forged report (*mawḍū'ī*).
  - The second is the discarded report (*matrūk*).
  - The third is the disclaimed report (*munkar*) according to one opinion, as are the fourth and fifth.
  - When **delusion** (*wahm*) is discovered through external indications (*qarā'in*) and gathering the paths of transmission, then it is the defective report (*mu'allal*).
  - As for **contradicting others** (*mukhālaḥa*), if it results from:  
changing the wording of the chain, it is the chain-interpolated report (*mudraj al-isnād*)

conflating a halted Companion-report (*mawqūf*) with a raised Prophetic-report (*marfū'*), then it is the content-interpolated report (*mudraj al-matn*)

or transposition, then the topsy-turvy report (*maqlūb*)

or inserting a narrator, then it is the insertion into an already-connected-chain report (*mazīd fī muttaṣil al-masānīd*)

or it is substituting one narrator for another [without preponderance of one chain over the other], then it is the inconsistent report (*muḍṭarīb*). Substitution may occur intentionally for the sake of testing

or alternating dots or vowels while orthography remains the same, then it is the dot-distorted report (*muṣahḥaf*) and the vowel-distorted report (*muḥarraf*).

It is not permissible to intentionally alter a ḥadīth's content (*matn*) by omission or paraphrase, except for someone knowledgeable of what changes meanings.

If the meaning is obscure, explaining odd words and clarifying the problematic is needed.

– The causes for which a **narrator is unknown** (*jahāla*) are:

The narrator may have many names and he is mentioned with one that is not well-known, for a purpose. Concerning this they compiled the clarifier (*al-mūḍiḥ*).

The narrator has few [narrations] and is not frequently taken from. Concerning this they wrote single-report narrators (*al-wuḥḍān*).

Or he may be left unnamed out of brevity. Concerning this [they compiled] the anonymous mentions (*mubhamāt*).

The anonymous narrator (*mubham*) is not accepted, even if he is mentioned anonymously with a grading of commendation (*ta' dīl*), according to the soundest opinion.

If the narrator is named:

If only one person related from him, then he is an unidentifiable reporter (*majhūl al-‘ayn*).

If two or more related from him and he is not [explicitly] declared reliable, then he is a reporter of unknown status (*majhūl al-ḥāl*); and that is the veiled reporter (*mastūr*).

– **Innovation** is of two types:

(1) tantamount to apostasy

(2) or tantamount to moral corruption.

As for the first: The vast majority do not accept any narrator thus described.

As for the second: Someone who is not inviting people to it is accepted according to the soundest opinion, unless he related something supporting his innovation: in that case he is rejected according to the preferred opinion. This is what al-Nasā'ī's shaykh, al-Jūzajānī, explicitly said.

– Then **poor memory**:

If it is chronic, then it is the anomalous report (*shādhdh*) according to one opinion

or occasional, then the jumbled report (*mukhtalaṭ*).

Whenever a chronically-forgetful reporter is corroborated by a reporter worthy of consideration, the veiled reporter (*mastūr*), the expedient reporter (*mursil*), and likewise the camouflager-reporter (*mudallis*), the ḥadīth becomes the fair (*ḥasan*) report, not in itself, but on the whole (*lā li-dhātihi bal bil-majmūʿ*).

### **To Whom the Report is Attributed**

The chain's ascription (*isnād*) explicitly or implicitly goes to

- (1) the Prophet ﷺ: consisting in his statements, or his actions, or his tacit approval
- (2) a Companion ﷺ. He is whoever encountered the Prophet ﷺ believing in him and died as a Muslim, even if [his Islam] was interrupted by apostasy according to the strongest opinion
- (3) or a Successor, namely anyone who met one of the Companions.

The first is the raised-chain (Prophetic) report (*marfūʿ*).

The second is the halted-chain (Companion) report (*mawqūf*).

The third is the severed-chain (sub-Companion) report (*maqtūʿ*). It is the same for anyone subsequent to the Successor.

The last two are said to be non-Prophetic reports (*āthār*).

### How the Report is Attributed

A grounded report (*musnad*) is a report that a Companion raised to the Prophet ﷺ with a chain that has the outward appearance of being connected. If the numbers [of narrators in the chain] are few, either it ends with:

- (1) the Prophet ﷺ
- (2) or an Imām with a distinguished description, like Shu‘ba.

The first is absolute elevation (‘*ulūw muṭlaq*)

The second is relative elevation (‘*ulūw nisbī*). It includes:

concurrent chain (*muwāfaqa*) which arrives at the shaykh of one of the compilers without using the compiler’s path;

convergent chain (*badal*) which arrives at the shaykh’s shaykh in the same way;

parity (*musāwāt*) which is the number of narrator-links in the chain from the narrator to the end equaling [the length of] the chains of one of the compilers;

and handshaking (*muṣāfaḥa*) which equals the chain of that compiler’s student.

Descent (*nuzūl*) corresponds to elevation (‘*ulūw*) in all of its categories.

If the narrator is the same age as someone who narrates from him and they met, then it is peer narration (*aqrān*).

If each of them related from each other then it is reciprocal narration (*mudabbaj*).

If he relates from someone inferior [in age, teachers or knowledge] to him, then it is seniors-from-juniors narration (*akābir* ‘*an aṣāghir*). It includes: fathers-from-sons narration (*al-ābā* ‘*an al-abnā*’); its opposite is frequent. It includes son-from-father or grandfather narration (‘*an abihi* ‘*an jaddihi*).

If two share the same shaykh and one’s death precedes, then it is predecessor-successor narration (*sābiq wa-lāḥiq*).

If he relates from two shaykhs whose names match and cannot be differentiated, then the fact that he specializes in narrations from one of them is a sign that the other one is irrelevant.

If he denies what is related from him

    categorically, the report is rejected

    or possibly, then it is accepted according to the soundest opinion.

Concerning this is the genre of those-who-narrated-and-forgot (*man ḥaddatha wa-nasiya*).

If the narrators conform in the phrasing used to convey or in some other manner, then it is pattern-chained narration (*musalsal*).

### Forms of Conveyance

The forms of conveyance are:

- (1) “*Sami‘tu*” (I heard)
- (2) and “*ḥaddathanī*” (he narrated to me)
- (3) then “*akhbaranī*” (he reported to me)
- (4) and “*qara’tu ‘alayhi*” (I read to him)
- (5) then “*qurī’a ‘alayhi wa-ana asma‘u*” (it was read to him while I heard)
- (6) then “*anba’anī*” (he informed me)
- (7) then “*nāwalanī*” (he put into my hands)
- (8) then “*shāfahanī*” (he told me verbally)
- (9) then “*kataba ilayya*” (he wrote to me)
- (10) then “*‘an*” (from) and the like

- The first two are for someone who heard the shaykh verbatim one-on-one. If pluralized then [he heard] with someone else. The first is the most explicit and is the highest-ranked in ḥadīth dictation.
- The third and fourth are for someone who read [to the shaykh] while alone. If the plural is used it is like the fifth.
- Informing [the sixth] is synonymous with reporting [the third]. However, in the custom of the later generations it is for authorization (*ijāza*), like *‘an* [from].

- The indecisive-transmission terminology [‘*an‘ana* i.e. “from so-and-so, from so-and-so”] of contemporaries is understood to be direct audition unless from a camouflaging reporter (*mudallis*). It is said that a condition is that the meeting of the said contemporaries be positively proven, even if only once; it is the preferred opinion (*mukhtār*).
- They used *mushāfaha* for an oral authorization and *mukātaba* for a written authorization [with the late scholars].
- For the authenticity of *munāwala*, they stipulated that it be accompanied by permission to relate; it is the highest type of authorization (*ijāza*).
- They also stipulated permission for a report found (*wijāda* i.e. “something found in a book”), likewise a book bequeathed (*waṣīyya bil-kitāb*), and in a shaykh’s public announcement that he narrates something (*i‘lām*), otherwise it is of no consequence; as is an authorization that is universal or to someone unknown [to us], or to someone nonexistent – according to the soundest opinion concerning all of the above.

### Names of Narrators

If the names of the narrators and the names of their fathers and on up match although they are different individuals, then it is same-name different-identity narrator (*muttafiq wa-muftariq*).

If the names match in writing but differ in pronunciation, then it is homographic-heterophonic (*mu'talif wa-mukhtalif*).

If the names match but differ in their fathers, or the opposite, it is same-name-different-father-or-son narrators (*mutashābih*), and likewise if the similarity occurred in the name and the name of the father while there is a difference in the affiliation (*nisba*).

This and the previous can form various combinations, including:

- similarity or difference occurring except in one or two letters
- or transposition
- or the like.

### Conclusion

It is also important to know:

- (1) the synchronous layers (*ṭabaqāt*) of narrators
- (2) the dates of their birth and death
- (3) their lands and regions
- (4) and their conditions: commendation (*ta' dīl*), discreditation (*jarḥ*), and being unknown (*jahāla*).

The categories of discreditation (*jarḥ*) are [from worst to slight] :

- (1) To be described with the superlative (*af'al*), e.g. “greatest of all liars” (“*akdhab al-nās*”)
- (2) “Arch-imposter”, “arch-fabricator”, “arch-liar” (“*dajjāl*”, “*waḍḍā'*”, or “*kadhḥāb*”)
- (3) The slightest is “malleable”, “chronically forgetful”, and “he leaves something to be desired” (“*layyin*”, “*sayyī' al-ḥifẓ*”, and “*fīhi maqāl*”).

And the ranks of commendation (*ta'dīl*) are [from highest to lowest]:

- (1) To be described with the superlative (*af'al*), e.g. “most trustworthy of people” (“*awthaq al-nās*”)
- (2) What is emphasized with one attribute or two, e.g. “trustworthy-trustworthy”, “trustworthy and memorizer” (“*thiqa thiqa*” or “*thiqa ḥāfiẓ*”)
- (3) Something that suggests proximity to the slightest levels of discreditation, e.g. “honest layman” (“*shaykh*”).

Attesting someone's good record (*tazkiya*) is accepted from someone knowledgeable in its criteria, even if from a single person according to the soundest opinion (*aṣaḥḥ*).

Discreditation (*jarḥ*) takes precedence over commendation (*ta'dīl*) if it comes in detail from someone knowledgeable in its criteria. When lacking commendation, discreditation is accepted without specifics, according to the preferred opinion (*mukhtār*).

### Miscellaneous Topics

It is also important to know:

- agnomens (*kunā*, sing. *kunya*) of the people referred to by [first] name,
- the names of people referred to by agnomen,
- those whose agnomen and name are one and the same,
- those with multiple agnomens or multiple titles;
- the one whose agnomen matches his father's name,
- or vice-versa;
- or his agnomen [matches] his wife's agnomen;
- and whoever is affiliated to someone other than his father or is affiliated to his mother,
- or to something that does not immediately come to mind;
- and whose name matches the name of his father and his grandfather,
- or his shaykh's name and the shaykh's shaykh, and on up;
- and whose name matches the shaykh's name and the person narrating from him;
- and the basic names of narrators;
- and the names exclusive to one person (*mufrada*),
- and agnomens and nicknames.

[It is also important to know:]

- Affiliations, *i.e.* to tribes, homelands, countries, localities, roads and alleys, proximity, crafts and professions. It gives rise to similarities (*ittifāq*) and confusions (*ishtibāh*), as with names; and affiliations sometimes take place as nicknames
- and the reasons for these [because it may be contrary to the obvious].
- The *mawālī*: topwise [patrons and masters], and bottomwise [clients and freedmen],
- male and female siblings,
- and the etiquette of the shaykh and the student.
- Including it is the age of procurement and conveyance; the manner of writing ḥadīth, reading [the shaykh's own narrations] back to the shaykh, audition, recital, and traveling for ḥadīth;

One should also know how ḥadīth is compiled: according to chains of narrators (*masānīd*), subject matter (*abwāb*), defects (*'ilal*), or keywords (*atrāf*); and knowing the historical context for the ḥadīth. One of the shaykhs of al-Qaḍī Abū Ya'la ibn al-Farrā' wrote about it.

They have written books in most of these genres. This is a basic list mentioning definitions without examples. It is difficult to be thorough, so consult the longer books.

Allah is the One Who grants success. He is the Guider. There is no god except He.



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