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And they made their camp near [the tents of] Maysūn...

Where the sun forever rose first over the dry land...

- Jundub b. Su‘ūd al-Asmarī

To Maisoon, who inspires me to seek knowledge
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ABSTRACT

The two ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the Sahihayn, are the most revered books in Islamic civilization after the Qur‘ān. This dissertation addresses how, when and why these two books achieved this station and identifies their principal functions in Islamic civilization. This study approaches these questions through the lens of canonization, a process of interaction between text, authority and communal identification. During the lives of al-Bukhārī and Muslim and in the years immediately after their deaths, their compilation of ḥadīth collections devoted solely to authentic Prophetic reports proved controversial within the Sunni community. In the fourth/tenth century, however, a network of Shafi‘ī scholars began studying the Sahihayn and employing them as standards against which to measure their own ḥadīths. In the late fourth/tenth century, the influential Sunni ḥadīth scholar al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī adopted this notion of the Sahihayn as a standard of authenticity and applied it to polemical purposes: he claimed that the standards used by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in selecting ḥadīths met the requirements of both Sunni ḥadīth scholars and their rationalist foes. Spreading outward from al-Ḥākim’s students in the early fifth/eleventh century, the idea of the Sahihayn as a common standard of authenticity, authoritative reference and exemplum of ḥadīth scholarship gained currency among Sunni scholars. In the seventh/thirteenth century, the Sahihayn also acquired a significance in Muslim societies far beyond scholarly debate. From Mali to India, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works became symbols for the Prophet’s charismatic authority and liminality in the realms of
ritual and historical narrative. From the fifth/eleventh century onward, the Sunni
tradition built up a canonical culture around the Șahīhayn and their authors that recast the
history of the two books and affirmed their authoritative station. Some ḥadīth scholars,
however, did not accept this attempt to protect the Șahīhayn as institutions of authority.
Instead, these scholars continued to apply the methods of ḥadīth criticism to them. This
tension has continued with the emergence of the Salafi movement and the scholarship of
Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī in the modern period, where the standing of the Șahīhayn has
crystallized Muslim debate over text, authority and communal identification.
DATES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Dates in this dissertation will follow the Hijrī/Common Era format for all dates through the eleventh/seventeenth century. After that, Hijrī dates are of little use, and only CE dates will be provided.

The phrase “may the peace and blessings of God be upon him (sallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa sallam)” that usually follows the Prophet Muḥammad’s name in Muslim sources will be abbreviated as (ṣ). The phrase “may God be pleased with him/her/them (raḍiya Allāh ʿan...) that usually follows the names of Companions will be represented with (r).
I.

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Introduction

In 465/1072-3, the grand vizier of the Seljuq Empire, a statesman so spectacularly powerful that he was hailed as Nizām al-Mulk (The Order of the Realm), heard of a scholar who possessed a particularly authoritative copy of the most famous collection of traditions (ḥadīth) related from the Prophet Muḥammad: the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870). Nizām al-Mulk ordered this scholar brought to his newly founded college in the Iranian city of Naysābūr, where the vizier gathered the children of the city’s judges, scholars and other notables to hear a reading of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ.1 Why did Nizām al-Mulk order such a promulgation of the Ṣaḥīḥ, and why did he convene the next generation of the Sunni Muslim elite in attendance?

Nizām al-Mulk stood at the intersection of the great forces of Islamic religious history at a time when Sunni Islam was coalescing in its institutional form. While serving the Seljuq sultans, who were generously endowing educational institutions for the Ḥanāfī school of law, he established his Nizāmiyya college network in the principal cities of the empire for the use of the rival Shāfiʿī school. Yet Nizām al-Mulk also held ḥadīth study circles that glorified the ‘partisans of ḥadīth (aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth)’ closely associated

with the contending Ḥanbalī school. These policies unfolded in the threatening shadow of the Sunni Seljuqs’ principal rival, the Ismāʿīlī Shiites, whose assassins would eventually bring Nizām al-Mulk’s career to an end.

In this divided milieu, Nizām al-Mulk sought to foster a common ground of Sunni Islam. In 469/1076–77, when the leading Shafi‘ī scholar of Baghdad tried to win Nizām al-Mulk’s support in a bitter debate with Ḥanbalī rivals, the vizier sent him a missive refusing to intervene on his behalf. “We believe in bolstering the Sunni ways (al-sunan), not building up communal strife (al-fitan),” he explained. “We undertook the building of this [Nizāmiyya] college in order to support and protect the people of knowledge and the welfare of the community, not for creating divisions amongst Muslims (tafrīq al-kalima).”

By gathering the children of the empire’s scholarly and administrative elite around a reading of al-Bukhārī’s Sahih, Nizām al-Mulk was reinforcing a sense of Sunni communalism. As we shall see, by the vizier’s time scholars from most of the disputing legal and theological schools that would comprise the Sunni fold had together deemed the Sahihayn, the two ‘Authentic’ hadith collections of al-Bukhārī and his student Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875), authoritative representations of the Prophet’s legacy.

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convening this reading, Niẓām al-Mulk was inculcating al-Bukhārī’s book as a touchstone of Sunni identity in the impressionable young minds of the next generation.

The canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim thus forms part of the greater drama of the formation of Sunni Islam. Niẓām al-Mulk’s fifth/eleventh-century world brought together all the leading characters in this saga. Among them were the textualist Ḥanbalīs and the more rationalist Shāfiʿīs, both heirs to the heritage of ‘the partisans of ḥadīth’ but divided over the role of speculative theology in Islam. We also find the Ḥanafīs, rooted in their own distinct, ḥadīth-wary hermeneutic tradition. These groups composed competing ‘orthodoxies,’ each independent and self-righteously justified. The canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim is the story of how these and other disjointed segments of what became the Sunni community forged a common language for addressing the shared heritage of the Prophet’s legacy (sunna).

This drama began in the classical period, but it has continued into modern times. Indeed, the questions that arise in a study of the formation, function and status of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon reflect tensions between the competing schools of thought within today’s Sunni community. Why does a modern Ḥanafī scholar from India seeking to defend his school against Salafī critics prominently cite a ḥadīth from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī on the cover of his book? Why does a Salafī scholar insist on his right to criticize al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections, while his opponents vociferously condemn him for “violating the integrity of these motherbooks”? These questions fuel fierce debates in Muslim

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discourse today, but they descend from the centuries of historical development that forged and maintained the canon of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

After the Qurʿān, the Ṣaḥīḥayn are the two most venerated books in Sunni Islam. Yet until now no one has explained this undeniable reality. This study examines the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim in order to discover how, when and why the two Ṣaḥīḥs attained their authoritative station. It explores the nature of this authority, the tensions surrounding it, and the roles that the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon has played in Islamic civilization.

I.2. Thesis

Canons form at the nexus of text, authority and communal identification. Their formation, however, is neither a random nor an inevitable process. Canonization involves a community's act of authorizing specific books in order to meet certain needs. It entails the transformation of texts, through use, study, and appreciation, from nondescript tomes into powerful symbols of divine, legal or artistic authority for a particular audience. In their own time, al-Bukhārī and Muslim were accomplished representatives of the transmission-based tradition of Islamic law. Like their teacher, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), they saw collecting and acting on the reports of the early Muslim community as the only legitimate means by which believers could ascertain God’s will and live according to it. Yet they were only two of many such scholars, with al-Bukhārī’s career in particular marred by scandal. For over two centuries after al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s deaths, the study and collection of ḥadīths continued unabated. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s remarkable contribution came with their decision to compile
books devoted only to ḥadīths they considered authentic (ṣaḥīḥ). This act broke
stridently with the practices of the transmission-based school and thus met with
significant disapproval in the immediate wake of the authors’ careers.

In the fourth/tenth century, however, the initial controversy surrounding the
Ṣaḥīḥayn and their authors dissipated as a relatively small and focused network of
scholars from the moderate Shāfī‘ī tradition began appreciating the books’ utility. These
scholars found the Ṣaḥīḥayn ideal vehicles for articulating their relationship to the
Prophet’s normative legacy as well as standards against which to measure the strength of
their own ḥadīth collections. Employing the Ṣaḥīḥayn for these purposes required
intimate familiarity with the two books and thus spurred an intensive study of the works
and their authors’ methodologies. Simultaneously, during this period between the end of
the third/ninth and the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the broader Muslim community began
imagining a new level of authority for Prophetic traditions. Scholars representing a wide
range of opinion started to conceive of certain ḥadīths and ḥadīth collections as providing
loci of consensus amid the burgeoning diversity of Islamic thought.

One scholar in particular inherited the body of scholarship on the Ṣaḥīḥayn and
harnessed the two works as a new measure of authenticity for evaluating reports
attributed to the Prophet. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014) recognized that the
Ṣaḥīḥayn possessed tremendous polemical value as common measures of ḥadīth
authenticity that met the requirements of both the transmission-based scholars whom he
championed and the Mu‘tazilites whom he bitterly opposed. He thus conceived of the
criteria that al-Bukhārī and Muslim had used in compiling their works as a standard he
claimed authorized a vast new body of ḥadīths binding on both parties. A cadre of his
students, hailing from the rival Ḥanbalī and Shāfi‘ī strains of the transmission-based school, agreed on the Ṣaḥīḥayn as a commonly accepted tract of the Prophetic past. Drawing on developments in legal theory that were common to all the major non-Shiite schools of the fifth/eleventh century, they declared that the community’s supposed consensus on the reliability of the Ṣaḥīḥayn guaranteed the absolute certainty of their contents.

This ability of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections to serve as an acknowledged convention for discussing the Prophet’s authenticated legacy would serve three important needs in the Sunni scholarly culture of the fifth/eleventh century. As the division between different schools of theology and law became more defined, scholars from the competing Shāfi‘ī, Ḥanbalī and Mālikī schools quickly began employing the Ṣaḥīḥayn as a measure of authenticity in debates and polemics. By the early eighth/fourteenth century, even the ḥadīth-wary Ḥanafī school had found adopting this convention inevitable. With the increased division of labor between jurists and ḥadīth scholars in the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the Ṣaḥīḥayn also became an indispensable authoritative reference for jurists who lacked expertise in ḥadīth evaluation. Finally, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works served as standards of excellence that could shape the science of ḥadīth criticism as scholars from the fifth/eleventh to the seventh/thirteenth century sought to systematize the study of the Prophet’s word.

The authority of the canon as a measure of authenticity, however, was an illusion conjured up in the dialogic space of debate and exposition. It vanished outside such interactive arenas. Scholars directed the compelling authority of the Ṣaḥīḥayn only
against others, and within the closed doors of one school of law or theology, they had no compunction about ignoring or criticizing reports from either collection.

Although occasional criticism of the *Ṣahīḥayn* continued even after their canonization at the dawn of the fifth/eleventh century, advocates of institutional Sunnism found it essential to protect the two works and the important roles they played. Beginning at the turn of the fourth/tenth century and climaxing in the mid-seventh/thirteenth, a set of predominately Shafi’i scholars created a canonical culture around the *Ṣahīḥayn* that recast the two books’ pre-canonical pasts as well as those of their authors according to the exigent contours of the canon. The canonical culture of the *Ṣahīḥayn* also had to reconcile instances where al-Bukhāri’s and Muslim’s methods had fallen short of what had emerged as the common requirements of Sunni hadith criticism in the centuries after their deaths.

While most influential participants in the Sunni tradition accepted the canonical culture of the *Ṣahīḥayn*, some hadith scholars refused to compromise the critical standards of hadith study to safeguard the canon. The tension between the majority’s commitment to the institutional security of the *Ṣahīḥayn* and this iconoclastic strain came to a head with the emergence of the modern hadith-based Salafi movement in the eighteenth century. In a conflict that reflects the anxieties of redefining Islam in the modern world, the impermissibility of criticizing the *Ṣahīḥayn* has become a rallying cry for those devoted to defending the classical institutions of Islamic civilization against the iconoclastic Salafi call to revive the primordial greatness of Islam through the hadith tradition.
Beyond the *Ṣahiḥayn*’s role as a measure of authenticity, an authoritative reference and exemplum among Sunni scholars, the canon has played an important role in a variety of ritual domains and broader historical narratives about Islamic civilization. Here the *Ṣahiḥayn* have become a synecdochic representation of the Prophet himself, essentializing his role as a liminal figure and medium of blessing. The two works have also come to serve as a literary trope, symbolizing the primordial purity of the Prophet’s true teachings in the Sunni tradition’s vision of itself.

I.3. Scholarship on the *Ṣahiḥayn* and the Ḥadīth Canon

Western scholars have regularly spoken of ‘canonical’ ḥadīth collections in Islamic civilization. This recognition follows the Muslim sources themselves, which refer to this canon in a myriad of ways, such as ‘the relied-upon books (al-kutub al-muˈtamad ʿalayhā),’ ‘the Four Books,’ ‘the Five Books,’ ‘the Six Books,’ and finally ‘the Authentic Collections (Ṣiḥāḥ).’ We can discern three strata of the Sunni ḥadīth canon.

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The perennial core has been the Sahihayn. Beyond these two foundational classics, some fourth/tenth-century scholars refer to a four-book selection that adds the two Sunans of Abu Dawud (d. 275/888) and al-Nasāʿī (d. 303/915). The Five Book canon, which is first noted in the sixth/twelfth century, incorporates the Jāmiʿ of al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892). Finally the Six Book canon, which hails from the same period, adds either the Sunan of Ibn Majah (d. 273/886), the Sunan of al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) or the Muwatta' of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795). Later hadith compendia often included other collections as well. None of these books, however, has enjoyed the esteem of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works.

A study tackling the entirety of the Sunni hadith canon would require many more volumes than the present project allows. Because the Sahihayn form the unchanging core of the canon, and because the roles that the two books have played and the station they

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have achieved differ qualitatively from the other components of the canon, this study only addresses the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. A comprehensive study of the Sunni ḥadīth canon as a whole must wait until another day.

Oddly, although the broader ḥadīth canon and the Ṣaḥīḥayn are frequently mentioned in Western scholarship, neither topic has received significant attention. Despite its having been published over a century ago, the work of the prescient Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921 CE) remains the most profound and detailed study of the ḥadīth canon. His interest in the entire span of the ḥadīth tradition and his special attention to the question of the ḥadīth canon have made his study the most useful to date. Even Muslim authors who regularly criticize Goldziher and other elder statesmen of Orientalism quote him in order to explain when certain ḥadīth collections entered the canon. Following the predominant Sunni division of the ḥadīth canon into the Ṣaḥīḥayn and the four Sunans of al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasāʿī and Ibn Mājah, Goldziher devotes separate sections to each of these two groups. He was able to fix approximately where and by what time the four Sunans had gained canonical status and the Six Book canon had formed. He asserts that this authoritative selection coalesced gradually and was in place by the seventh/thirteenth century, perceptively adding that the Maghrib and the Islamic heartlands had varying definitions of what constituted the canon.

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Aside from Goldziher’s appreciable contributions to our understanding of the hadith canon’s emergence, his most astute observation was that formidable questions about the canon await answers. He evinces a particular pessimism about dating the canonization of the Sahihayn. “[W]e cannot establish with chronological accuracy the date which brought the consensus publicus for the two Sahih to maturity…,” he states.\(^{10}\) Goldziher also notes the extreme difficulty of determining why the hadith canon was closed and why it excluded certain collections, such as the Sahih of Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923), written in the same period as the Sahihayn.\(^{11}\) The present study will offer answers to both these questions.

Goldziher also made a rare foray into the function of the hadith canon and the nature of the veneration for al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works. He submits that the hadith canon as a whole served as a legal “reference in order to find out the traditional teachings about a given question.”\(^{12}\) He touches on other functions of al-Bukhārī’s work in particular, raising the possibility of a ritual dimension to the canon and its role in defining communal identity. He notes how oaths were sworn on al-Bukhārī’s Sahih, an honor otherwise reserved for the Qur’ān.\(^{13}\) Most importantly, Goldziher hints that the canonization of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works was a dynamic process of interaction between the texts and the needs of the Muslim scholarly community.\(^{14}\) In our discussion

\(^{10}\) Goldziher, 240.

\(^{11}\) Goldziher, 239.

\(^{12}\) Goldziher, 240.

\(^{13}\) Goldziher, 234.

\(^{14}\) Goldziher, 222.
of the multivalent functions of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon in Chapters Six and Nine, both the insight and limitations of Goldziher’s comments will become evident.

Goldziher also makes a unique effort to explain how the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* were both venerated and open to criticism. The heart of the canonical status of the books, he explains, was not a claim of infallibility regarding al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works, but rather the community’s demand that they be recognized as legally compelling indicators of “religious praxis” on the basis of the community’s consensus on their authenticity. He says: “[v]eneration was directed at this canonical work [al-Bukhārī’s collection] as a whole but not to its individual lines and paragraphs.”15 Goldziher concludes that “the veneration [of the Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim] never went so far as to cause free criticism of the sayings and remarks incorporated in these collections to be considered impermissible or unseemly….16 As we shall see in Chapter Eight, Goldziher’s assessment proves correct until the early modern period, when criticism of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* became anathema to many scholars.

Since Goldziher, scholars investigating Islamic intellectual history or evaluating the sources for the formative first three centuries of the Muslim community have found acknowledging the existence of the ḥadīth canon inevitable. Few discussions of Islamic thought or society fail to mention the canon and the unique status of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Most scholars, however, have been content to either reproduce Goldziher’s conclusions or

15 Goldziher, 247.

16 Goldziher, 236-7.
devote only cursory remarks to the issue.\textsuperscript{17} The superficial character of these observations stems from the frequency with which they treat the hadith canon as ancillary to some greater discussion, such as early Islamic historiography or a survey of the sources of Islamic law. Such studies have followed Goldziher by dating the emergence of the canon from anywhere between the collections’ compilation in the third/ninth century to the seventh/thirteenth century, devoting little thought to the actual nature or function of the canon within the community. In his unparalleled study of Islamic civilization, for example, Marshall Hodgson only notes the existence of “canonical collections” of hadith, adding that al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Sahīhs “came to be revered as especially holy.”\textsuperscript{18} In his otherwise comprehensive study of the formation of Islamic dogma and society in the second and third centuries Hijri, Josef van Ess acknowledges the existence of the hadith canon but does not devote further attention to it.\textsuperscript{19} Other excellent studies of Muslim scholarly culture in the classical period cast similarly cursory glances at the hadith canon, interpreting it as a natural product of the salient role Prophetic traditions played in Islamic thought. In \textit{A Learned Society in a Period of Transition}, for example, Daphna Ephrat states that “by the third Muslim century, hadith had also achieved a central place in Muslim religious life, and the basic canons of the prophetic Sunna had been codified.”\textsuperscript{20}

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\textsuperscript{17} For a deferral to Goldziher by one of the leading Western scholars on hadith, see Eerik Dickinson, “Ibn al-Ṣalāh al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād,” \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society} 122, no. 3 (2002): 488.
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\textsuperscript{18} Hodgson, \textit{The Venture of Islam}, 1:332.
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\textsuperscript{19} Van Ess, \textit{Theologie und Gesellschaft}, 1:62.
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\textsuperscript{20} Ephrat, \textit{A Learned Society in a Period of Transition}, 40.
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Scholars have generally perceived the canonical ḥadīth collections as representative of the Sunni worldview, and as such they have discussed them as a final chapter in the development of Islamic orthodoxy in the third/ninth century. Henri Lammens attributed the success of the Six Books to “the fact that they came at the right time, at the moment when Qorānic religion was about to take definitive shape....” In the conclusion to The Eye of the Beholder, a study on how the Sunni community articulated an image of the Prophet as an act of self-definition, Uri Rubin refers to the large collections that appeared in this century as “canonical ḥadīth compilations” that defined orthodox Muslim stances. They “served as the venue for the authoritative formulation of an Islamic sense of spiritual and legal identity in Umayyad and early Abbasid times....” Rubin thus recognizes the intimate connection between these canonical works and the question of communal identity, but his focus on Islamic origins prevents him from pursuing this discussion further.

Similarly, other scholars concerned with Islamic historiography and the development of the ḥadīth tradition have stressed that the Ṣaḥīḥayn and their authors represent the culmination of ḥadīth study. Thus, in his Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Age, Tarif Khalidi states that in Muslim’s time “Hadith had reached its quantitative limits and spelled out its method.” “Bukhārī and Muslim,” he adds, “gave


22 Rubin, The Eye of the Beholder, 224.

Both Rubin and Khalidi focus on the writing of the *Sahihayn* as one of the seals of orthodoxy, paying little attention to their role as a medium through which an ongoing process of institutional authorization and communal identification would take place.

Scholarship that addresses the continuing development of hadith literature after the appearance of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections has granted more space to discussions of the canon. It has not, however, followed the promising lead of Goldziher’s work. In his *Islam: The View from the Edge*, Richard Bulliet refers to the canonical hadith collections as a watershed event in the Muslim community’s transition from the oral transmission of the Prophet’s sunna to limiting it to specific texts. He prefers to identify the formation of the canon with this transition rather than with the genesis of the *Sahihayn* themselves. Following Goldziher, he thus says that the “evolution of hadith culminated in the general acceptance, by the thirteenth century, of six books of sound traditions as canonical, as least for the Sunni majority of the population.”25 In his valuable discussion of the development of hadith literature in the *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, Muhammad Abd al-Rauf straddles the two opinions: that the special recognition of the *Sahihayn* followed on the heels of their compilation, and that their final canonization took place in the seventh/thirteenth century. Thus Abd al-Rauf describes how al-Bukhārī’s book in particular was “almost immediately and universally acknowledged as the most authentic work in view of the author’s stringent authentication

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requirements.”26 But after the famous systematizer of the ḥadīth sciences, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), announced that the Muslim community (ʿumma) had decisively acknowledged the Ṣaḥīḥayn’s unquestioned authenticity, “no more criticism [of the two books] could be tolerated....”27

Modern Muslim scholarship on this question resembles its Western counterpart in its failure to answer questions about the canon’s emergence and functions. This is largely due to the polemic motivation of Muslim authors addressing this subject. Khalīl Mulla Khāṭir’s Makānat al-Ṣaḥīḥayn (The Place of the Ṣaḥīḥayn) (1994)28 proceeds from an orthodox Sunni standpoint and seeks to defend al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work from opponents who criticize them. The Ibāḍī Saʿīd b. Mabrūk al-Qanūbī’s ingenious al-Ṣayf al-ḥādd ʿalā man akhadha bi-ḥadīth al-āhād fī masāʾil al-iʿtiqād (The Incisive Sword: A Refutation of Those Who Use Āḥad Ḥadiths in Questions of Dogma)29 (1997-8) and the Twelver Shiite Mūḥammad Ṣādeq Najmī’s Sayrī dar Ṣaḥīḥayn: sayr va barrasi dar do ketāb-e mohemm va madrak-e ahl-e sonnat (A Voyage through the Ṣaḥīḥayn: An Exploration and Examination of Two Important Books and Sources of the Sunnis) (2001)30 approach the issue of the Ṣaḥīḥayn from non-Sunni stances seeking to


30 Mūḥammad Ṣādeq Najmī, Sayrī dar Ṣaḥīḥayn: sayr va barrasi dar do ketāb-e mohemm va madrak-e ahl-sonnat ([Tehran]: Daftar-e Enteshārāt-e Eslāmī, 1379/[2001]).
shed light on what they consider undue Sunni reverence for the two works. Although they offer few analytical insights into the function or formation of the canon, these three books provide invaluable citations and guide the reader to pertinent primary sources. These Arabic- and Persian-language secondary sources are thus indispensable aids in studying the Sahihayn. Without them, navigating the vast expanses of the Islamic intellectual heritage would be nearly impossible.

1.4. Addressing the Sahihayn as a Canon

Scholars of Islamic history have been unsuccessful in addressing questions concerning the hadith canon in great part because they have not sufficiently articulated what precisely canons are, why they form and how they function. As Goldziher sensed, canons are not agents that simply leap onto the stage of history. They are created by communities in acts of authorization and self-definition because they meet certain pressing needs for their audiences. Studies on canons have proven that they are complicated creatures, whose emergence and functions must be examined as a network of interactions between a community's needs, its conceptions of authority, and the nature and uses of specific texts. Goldziher realized that in order to understand the canonical place of the Sahihayn one had to appreciate their functions. In the absence of clear expectations about what these could be, however, Goldziher's efforts to explore the canon could not move beyond insightful observations. A more comprehensive discussion of the emergence and function of the Sahihayn canon requires a sensitivity to issues of communal identity, institutional authority and the way in which texts can serve as mediums for their expression.
Conversely, some scholars have cultivated an acute sensitivity to employing the term ‘canon’ when treating the *Sahihayn* and the other authoritative ḥadīth collections. The term ‘canon’ is so culturally loaded and so inevitably evokes the Biblical tradition that a commendable commitment to distinguishing the Islamic tradition from the Occidental has led some to deny that any ḥadīth canon existed. Whether or not one can discuss the history of the *Sahihayn* in the language of canons and canonicity, however, requires an investigation of these fecund terms and their historical application.

1.5. Note on the Sources and Approaches of this Study

The study of canonization is a study of historical perceptions more than of historical reality. Although al-Bukhārī, Muslim and their *Sahīhs* are the centerpiece of this story, they are not its primary actors. It is the community that received, used and responded to their legacies that forged the *Sahihayn* canon. Establishing the background, context and historical realities of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s careers is certainly essential for appreciating the genesis of the canon. This study, however, is not about the *Sahihayn* as much as it is about the drama that unfolded around them. This interest in reception and perception as opposed to reconstructing an authenticated textual or historical reality spares us a prolonged focus on the questions of textual authenticity that so concern scholars of early Islamic history. As we will see in Chapter Three, surviving textual sources from the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries provide multidimensional and generally reliable biographies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Sources from this period also leave little doubt that the texts of the *Sahihayn* reached complete,
although perhaps not polished, forms during their respective authors’ lives. For us, however, the true significance of the details of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s lives lies in their roles as stimuli for later Muslims looking back at these two personages.

Of course, this does not in any way relieve us of our duty to assume a historical critical approach to our source material; the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon is one of the most salient features of Sunni orthodoxy and thus has attracted a tremendous amount of sacralizing attention from the Sunni tradition. According to the historical critical method, we will exert all efforts to rely on multiple sources of close temporal proximity to the subjects they address, relying on isolated or later works only if the probability of their accuracy outweighs that of contrivance. If a source does not meet the requirements of the Principle of Contextual Credibility, which dictates that a source must conform to the known features of its historical context, and the Principle of Dissimilarity, which states that a non-‘orthodox’ account probably precedes an ‘orthodox’ one, then we must treat it as suspect from a historical critical standpoint. Such material, however, remains tremendously valuable in charting the development of historical perceptions about al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

The Ṣaḥīḥayn are arguably the most famous and prominent books in the Sunni tradition after the Qur’ān, and al-Bukhārī and Muslim are titanic figures in Islamic civilization. We must thus cast a very wide net in the sources we examine for tracing the

31 See Appendix III.

historical development of the canon. Narrative sources such as biographical dictionaries and local histories provide invaluable source material. The *Tārīkh Baghdaḍ* of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdaḍī (d. 463/1071), the *Muntazam fi tārīkh al-umam w’al-mulūk* of Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), the *Ṣiyar a’lām al-mubalā‘* and *Tadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ* of Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and the *Daw’ al-lāmi‘li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi‘* of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) exemplify these two genres. In addition to providing essential biographical data, these works also record the manner in which al-Bukhārī, Muslim and their books were perceived in different periods and localities.

Normative sources from the various genres of ḥadīth literature provide another major source for the history of the canon. Ḥadīth collections that postdate the Ṣaḥiḥayn, such as al-Baghawi’s (d. 516/1122) *Maṣāḥīḥ al-sunnah*; works on the technical science of ḥadīth collection and criticism, such as al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī’s *Ma’rifat ilm al-ḥadīth* and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s (d. 852/1449) *al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*; dictionaries of ḥadīth transmitters such as al-Khalīlī’s (d. 446/1054) *al-Irshāḍ fi ma’rifat ‘ulamā’ al-ḥadīth*, and commentaries on the Ṣaḥiḥayn such as Ibn Ḥajar’s *Fath al-bārī* provide the bulk of data on the manner in which the Ṣaḥiḥayn were studied and used by the Sunni community. We must also draw from a wider range of normative sources. Works on jurisprudence, such as the *Kitāb al-mabsūṭ* of al-Sarakhsī (d.ca. 490/1096); legal theory, such as the *Kitāb al-burhān* of al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085); mysticism, like the *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* of ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), and sectarian literature, such as ‘Abd al-Jalīl Abū al-Ḥusayn Qazvīnī’s (fl. 560/1162) *Ketāb-e naqḍ*, allow crucial glimpses into the various usages of the Ṣaḥiḥayn beyond the limited realm of ḥadīth study.
As this study continues into the modern period, even the most recent Muslim scholarship can serve as a source for grasping the nature and function of the *Sahihayn* canon. Furthermore, the modern period furnishes oral sources such as lectures from scholarly centers like Cairo’s al-Azhar University, or the recorded lectures of Salafi *shaykhs* like Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE).

Historians can only work with what history has preserved for them. Like all other historical data, the sources on the origins, development and function of the *Sahihayn* canon have been subject to the vicissitudes of time and fortune. Our ability to collect and interpret such data is similarly prisoner to our own interpretive choices and biases. Yet we must have answers, whatever they may be, and for the period since the two books emerged as a canon their very prominence in Islamic civilization has preserved a plethora of textual sources in manuscript or published form. For the occasionally disreputable period of al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s pre-canonical gestation, we have only what Muslim scholars dutifully preserved for us. That we can even attempt a history of this early period is a testament to the integrity of those tireless ‘seekers of knowledge (*talabat al-film*)’ who for centuries led pack animals weighed down with notebooks from teacher to teacher along the dusty road between Baghdad and Khurāsān.
II.

THE STUDY OF CANONS AND CANONIZATION

II.1. Introduction

What happens when a book begins to be read as a classic or part of a selection of classics? A sentence or turn of phrase, previously bereft of significance beyond its literal import, is suddenly pregnant with meaning and worthy of exegesis. What happens if a collection of texts is deemed an authentic conduit to God’s will or legal right? Its very ontological status is raised, and minute inconsistencies within the texts themselves or challenges from outside sources can undermine the very definition of truth to which a community adheres. In neither of these cases were the texts themselves agents. Rather it was their body of readers who, out of a need for exemplary literature or select writings through which to approach the divine, made the books more than a sum of their pages, endowing them with a new authority and significance. This elevation binds these texts, their writers and audiences together in a new authoritative relationship. It creates a new universe of possible meanings and functions for these valorized works. This reverence or appreciation of the texts draws lines around the audience, including, excluding and defining the community. At this nexus of text, authority and communal identity, a canon has been formed.

Regardless of their specific qualities, canons can be studied as a unified phenomenon that appears when communities authorize certain texts, radically changing
the ways they are interpreted and used. The Greek work *kanôn* originally meant ‘measuring stick’ or a tool used to guarantee straightness, thus connoting the notion of a standard. Aristotle employed the term in the context of the virtuous man, whom he considered to be ‘the standard of good measure’ in ethics.¹ Epicurus would consider logic to be the ‘*kanôn*’ of true knowledge.²

In the early Christian tradition Paul used the word to refer to the ‘straight path’ of correct belief, and ‘canon’ soon acquired the meaning of the ‘list’ of sacred writings that guided the believer. Over the centuries the term ‘canon’ has thus come to indicate a set of authoritative or exemplary texts within a specific community of readers. Fierce debates have raged of late and much ink has been spilled in efforts to provide more exact definitions for this denotation of the word.³ Its true and global import, however, is best grasped not through restricting it to an exhaustive definition, but rather through viewing its reflections in the myriad studies on canons and canonicity produced by scholars from different fields. By examining the variety of canons, their commonalities, and efforts to distill the essence of canonicity, we can identify common historical processes and acquire

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³ In his study of the canon as a tool of social control, M.B. Ter Borg, for example, tries to distill the “primordial definition” for the concept of canon, concluding that its essence is that of an “objectified standard rule”; see M.B. Ter Borg, “Canon and Social Control,” in *Canonization and Decanonization*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 411-2; see also Jonathan Z. Smith’s “Canons, Catalogues and Classics” in the same volume, pgs. 299-303.
II.2. Canons in Context and the Emergence of Canon Studies

Canons have generally occurred in scriptural, literary or legal contexts. It was thus in these fields that the study of canons and canonization began. In the 1970s, however, the various strands of critical theory and postmodernism penetrated these arenas and presented a common challenge to the master narrative of canons and objective criteria. Although there remains scholarship devoted to religious, literary and legal canons, these fields have increasingly adopted the common language of hermeneutic studies in a joint investigation of the "politics of interpretation." Leading experts such as Frank Kermode and Stanley Fish have exemplified this development, as they straddle Biblical studies and literature, and literature and law, respectively. This unified field of canon studies has matured enough to produce a series of reflections on debates over the notion and value of canons, and works such as Jan Gorak's *The Making of the Modern Canon* (1991) have traced the Western concept of 'the canon' from its origins in classical Greece until modern times.

An early attempt to study canonization as a phenomenon in religious traditions was Allan Menzies's prescient 1897 article "The Natural History of Sacred Books: Some Suggestions for a Preface to the History of the Canon of Scripture." Menzies ultimately

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4 Scholars such as Jonathan Z. Smith, H.J. Adriaanse and Jan Assmann have sought to remind audiences that it is the theological usage of canon that lies at the root of all modern discussion of the issues; see Jonathan Z. Smith, "Canons, Catalogues and Classics," and H.J. Adriaanse’s "Canonicity and the Problem of the Golden Mean" in *Canonization and Decanonization*, 295, 316.
aims at applauding the Christian Biblical canon for its unique excellence and assumes an evolution of religion from primitive to advanced, but his work nonetheless possesses remarkable foresight. Indeed, Menzies's description of the raw emotive forces that build canons beautifully encapsulates the place of hadīth in the Muslim worldview. These forces are:

books which place the believer where the first disciples stood, which enable him to listen to the Master's words, and overhear perhaps even his secret thoughts and prayers, so that he feels for himself what that spirit was which reached the Master from the upper region and passed forth from him to other men....

In this article, Menzies sets forth what he considers the two essential conditions for the formation of any scriptural canon: "the existence of books which the nation is prepared to recognize as the norm of its religion," and "the existence of a religious authority of sufficient power to prescribe to the nation what books it shall receive as that norm."

Menzies's approach to canons and canonization touches on themes central to later examinations of the issue. Even at this early stage of theorizing the canon, we see the importance of communal identity (Menzies's "nation"), authority and a standard, or norm, for truth and authenticity in a religious community. His stipulation of an extant and sufficiently powerful "religious authority" to declare and enforce the canon is compelling, raising questions about the potential forms such authorities could assume across various communities.

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Further study of scriptural canons owes a great deal to the investigation of the formation of the Old and New Testament canons, which began in earnest in Germany during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The rival works of Theodor Zahn (1888-92) and Adolf Harnak (1889) were formative in this field. In the twentieth century, Hans von Campenhausen’s *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (1969) is undoubtedly the most frequently cited, although it has been surpassed by Bruce Metzger’s definitive *The Canon of the New Testament* (1987). In 1977 a series of studies on the Old Testament, most notably Joseph Blenkinsopp’s *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins*, focused on the canon of the Hebrew Bible but bound it to the universal issues of communal conflict and identity, thus providing an apt point of transition into the study of the canon as a phenomenon.

The approach to canon *qua* canon owes much to the field of literary criticism. Classical Greek literary and aesthetic criticism originated in the book *Kanon* of the mimetic artist Polycletus (fl. 450 BCE). Although merely a manual on how to most perfectly mimic the human form in sculpture, Polycletus’s work was appreciated by later classical figures in ways the author never intended, with Pliny the Elder stating that Polycletus’s exemplary statues were the “canon,” or standard for artistic expression.⁷ Although he never uses the Greek term *kanon* in his *Poetics*, Aristotle presents aesthetic criteria for the literary genres of epic and tragedy.⁸ Each genre culminates in an unsurpassable masterpiece, such as the Homeric epics or Sophocles’s tragedy *Oedipus*

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Rex, which themselves embody the standards of excellence for that genre. Implied is the notion that there exists a set of these exemplary works, a collection that one might term a canon. Indeed, later Hellenistic scholars applied the term to a group of books whose high level of language made them worthy of imitation. In the classical Greek and Hellenistic worlds, the term canon thus communicated the notion of 'model' or 'exemplum,' "a set of unsurpassable masterpieces to be studied and copied by all later practitioners in the field."

Since the advent of the novel and the bourgeois tragedy in the eighteenth century, the fixed canon of classical literature has dissolved amid debate over which works of literature merit the title of masterpiece and who possesses the authority to pronounce them canonical. Following the post-modernist assault on the cultural systems and normative assumptions that framed both scriptural and literary canons, the study of canons and canonization as phenomena has progressed continuously during the last quarter century. Much of this discussion has centered on the proper place of a literary or cultural canon within a modern pluralistic society, an issue that Jan Gorak has termed "the canon debate."

The masterful literary and hermeneutic scholarship of Frank Kermode, exemplified in his book *The Classic* (1975), made the daring and lasting association between the notion of the literary classic, a shared historical vision, and empire. For

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9 Metzger, 289.


Kermode the exemplification of the pre-modern literary canon was Virgil's *Aeneid*, which embodied both the Catholic Church's and European rulers' dream of a Holy Roman Empire. Not only was a canon an expression of a shared worldview, it could entail the imperial extension and maintenance of that vision. Kermode addressed literary and scriptural canon through a unified approach in 1979 with his hermeneutic study *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* and his article "Institutional Control of Interpretation." These studies linked the canon more closely to notions of hermeneutic authority, control and the institutional constraint of a scholarly or priestly class.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of a wave of comprehensive studies on the formation of the Biblical canon, with a renewed emphasis on the role of the canon in forging identity. Through numerous books and articles, James Sanders exerted a strong influence on canon studies, adopting the term 'canonical criticism' for the study of the “function of authoritative traditions in the believing communities....” Principally aimed at undoing the historical-critical obsession with finding the original *sitz im leben* of Biblical texts, his interests lie in the way that the needs of a community shape and define a canonical corpus over time. Sanders focuses on the “period of intense canonical process” between the crafting of a text by its author and the stabilization of a discrete canon. “It was in such periods that the faithful of believing communities... shaped what

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13 See Kermode, "Institutional Control of Interpretation," *Salmagundi* 43 (1979): 72-87.

they received in ways that rendered it most meaningful and valuable for them." Due to very real and pressing needs that appear in this period, a society's conception of the authority a text could acquire leaps forward. For Sanders, it is not merely the canonization of a text that changes its ontological status; rather, the pressing needs and dynamics of a faith community lead to a leap in that society's conception of what authority a text can attain. Canonization is therefore not simply a ritual of raising a text's ontological status that a community can perform at any time. Rather, communities undergo certain processes in which they acquire the imaginative ability to canonize. These ideas were further developed in Kermode's article "The Canon" (1987) in The Literary Guide to the Bible. Canon studies has also generated a number of studies in comparative religion. Miriam Levering's volume Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective (1989) tackled issues of canonization and authority in a wide range of scriptural traditions. Kendall W. Folkert's chapter on "The 'Canons' of 'Scripture'" in this collection presents a novel distinction between the scriptural power of a canonical text and its actual physical presence in ritual. Gerald T. Sheppard's influential entry on "Canon" in the Encyclopedia of Religion spreads this loaded term out along a continuum.

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15 Sanders, 30.

16 Sanders, 32-33.

between two poles that he terms Canon 1 and Canon 2.\textsuperscript{18} The former represents the notion of canon as a criterion between truth and falsehood, inspired and uninspired. Canon 2 manifests itself as a list, catalog or “fixed collection, and/or standardized text.”\textsuperscript{19} Sheppard proposes these two denotations of canon as “an illuminating heuristic device” for examining the textual traditions of different faiths.\textsuperscript{20}

One of religious studies’ most influential contributions came in 1977 when Jonathan Z. Smith presented a definition of the canon as a religious phenomenon partially based on several sub-Saharan African religious traditions. Smith claims that canonization is “one form of a basic cultural process of limitation and of overcoming that limitation through ingenuity.”\textsuperscript{21} That ingenuity, he proposes, is the hermeneutic process by which a religious community applies the tradition delineated by the canon to new problems. “A canon,” Smith states, “cannot exist without a tradition and an interpreter.”\textsuperscript{22} Through canonizing a set of texts, a tradition can deposit religious authority in a manageable and durable form. Later interpreters of that tradition can then bring the authority embodied in this canon to bear on new issues.


\textsuperscript{19} Sheppard, “Canon,” 66.

\textsuperscript{20} Sheppard, 64.


\textsuperscript{22} Smith, “Sacred Persistence,” 49.
A landmark issue of *Critical Inquiry* in the early 1980s, developed into a book in 1984, brought canon studies fully under the rubric of critical theory and the postmodernist focus on the politics of expression. This volume pursued the structural study of the canon and its relationship to power and communal identity by bringing together articles on literary, scriptural, musical and theoretical topics. Its editor, Robert von Hallberg, built on the recognition that canons had become commonly understood as expressions of social and political power. Referring specifically to questions of aesthetics, he states that “the question is not whether or not canons serve political functions, but rather how fully their potential functions account for their origins and limit their utility.”

The most striking essay in this collection is Gerald Burns’s “Canon and Power in the Hebrew Scriptures.” In this chapter Burns addresses the distinction between scripture and canon. He moves away from a previous supposition that defines scripture as authoritative and open to additional texts, as opposed to a canon, which is authoritative but closed. Instead, he asserts that the defining characteristic of canons is their power. Canons are not simply inspired or authentic collections of texts, they are “binding on a group of people.” Burns goes on to link this powerful notion of the canon as binding to the act of a public reading of the text. He recalls the story of Deuteronomy’s discovery in 2 Kings. In ca. 621 BCE, a Jewish priest finds this bound revelation from God in the Temple and brings it to King Josiah, who immediately rends his clothes in awe.

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Furthermore, he orders the new text read to the people. Burns adds that Ezra was also commanded to read the Torah to his people in public places as part of his reconstruction of the Jewish community in Palestine. For Burns, the Biblical canon is primarily textual power, and the binding act of canonization takes place through an authoritative public reading of the text in front of a populace it compels to heed and obey.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a series of books and articles that turned these new theoretical models back on scriptural and literary traditions. Edward Said's *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) and Lilian S. Robinson's essay “Treason our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon,”27 represent attacks on the concept of a literary canon from the two dominant trends of feminist and post-colonial studies. A conference held at the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religion in 1997 produced a massive volume entitled *Canonization and Decanonization*, which includes essays addressing the phenomenon of scriptural canonization and also examining the canonical traditions of every major religion. In another collection, Guy Stroumsa's fascinating essay “The Body of Truth and its Measures: New Testament Canonization in Context” emphasizes that “[c]anonization processes should be understood as part and parcel of religious and social processes of identification.”28 This article seconds Metzger’s

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25 Burns, 69-70.

26 Burns, 87.


emphasis on the role of the Gnostic\textsuperscript{29} and Montanist\textsuperscript{30} movements in the articulation of the New Testament but also points out the effect that Christian-Jewish polemics had on the formation of these two communities. Christians and Jews each claimed to possess the correct interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, the former with the oral teachings of Christ and the latter through the hermeneutic tradition descending from the Oral Torah revealed to Moses at Sinai. That the New Testament’s codification of Christ’s words and the Mishna’s setting down the interpretive methods of the Rabbis found written expression in the late second or early third centuries CE suggests that both communities were canonizing “secondary” holy texts. These were competing keys to understanding and unlocking a shared legacy.\textsuperscript{31} In this strongly polemical context, Stroumsa’s discussion of the Greek expression “\textit{kanon tès alètheias},” the ‘rule of revealed truth,’ as used by Irenaeus in his writings against what he considered heretical Christian sects, illustrates a powerfully normative function of “canon” as the criterion distinguishing truth from heresy.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Gnosticism: this broad and flexible mantle applies to the diverse groups of early Christians who believed that the material world was inherently evil and the creation of an evil force (demiurge). Christ was a divine redeemer (aeon) sent from the true God, bringing salvational knowledge that would allow that elect who gained access to it to rejoin the higher realms of light and truth. Gnostics favored the \textit{Gospel of John} as well as that of Thomas, one of the Gnostic gospels uncovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Montanism: started by the former priest Montanus in the second half of the second century CE, this ecstatic Christian movement began in Asia Minor and quickly spread throughout the Mediterranean basin. Montanus and his two female companions believed in the continuing revelation of the Holy Ghost to the Christian community in the form of trances and prophetic outbursts.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Stroumsa, 315-16; see also Sanders, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Stroumsa, 314. See also Elaine Pagels, \textit{Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas} (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 114-141.
\end{itemize}
Stroumsa also highlights the distinction between cultural and religious canons. The cementing of the New Testament as a religious canon in the late second century proved a very separate event from its emergence in the fourth century as a cultural canon, or selection of classics to be studied as part of the curriculum of an educated man in the Roman world.\textsuperscript{33} The notion of the scriptures functioning as a cultural as well as a religious canon highlights the importance of Kermode’s discussion of “the classic” and its power to extend a communal vision through the imperial gravity that ‘proper taste’ and ‘proper edification’ exert in a society.

The study of canons in law has proven much more insular than its literary or scriptural counterparts. Recently, however, interdisciplinary scholars such as Stanley Fish have brought legal canons under the aegis of canon studies. Lenora Ledwon’s collection \textit{Law and Literature: Text and Theory} (1996) is one of the most comprehensive efforts to join these two fields. More recently, J.M. Balkin and Sanford Levinson produced a collection of essays addressing specific questions of canonicity and law. Although these essays deal with topics of an explicitly legal nature, the editors’ introduction articulates a visionary and overarching aim for canon studies: “[t]he study of canons and canonicity is the very key to the secrets of a culture and its characteristic modes of thought.”\textsuperscript{34} They echo truisms of canon studies such as the important influence of ferment and change on the visibility of a canon, but also explore topics unplumbed by other scholars. Balkin and Levinson introduce the idea of “deep canonicity,” or those

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\textsuperscript{33} Stroumsa, 308.
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canonical modes of thinking, master narratives and canonical examples that form the
background for a culture’s process of expression and argument. Most importantly,
however, Balkin and Levinson were perhaps the first scholars since Sanders stressed the
“multivalency” of canonical texts to explain how canons can function differently
depending on the audience that they are supposed to guide or bind together.

The study of legal canons has also produced some of the most articulate and
incisive observations about the phenomenon of the canon in general. Stanley Fish’s 1993
article “Not for an Age but for All Time: Canons and Postmodernism,” published in The

Journal of Legal Education, identifies the intersection of legal and literary canons in the
realm of high culture, where both fields stress the “valorization of the life of the mind.”

Fish, often considered one of the most vigorous critics of canons in society, stresses the
probative force possessed by canonical works. Addressing a case in which a judge
rejected a proposed law banning all forms of racist expression because it would prohibit
teaching Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice, Fish notes that “if Shakespeare is on
your side in an argument, the argument is over.” Much like Irenaeus’s kanôn as ‘rule of
revealed truth,’ Fish concludes that the function of the canon is not to encourage thought,
but rather to stop it. His explanation for Shakespeare’s compelling power harks back to
Aristotle’s Poetics, for the bard is “the very canon – role, norm, measure, standard – in
relation to which canonicity is established.” A text becomes canonical when a

35 Balkin and Levinson, 15-18.

36 Balkin and Levinson, 8.

37 Stanley Fish, “Not for an Age but for All Time: Canons and Postmodernism,” Journal of Legal
community recognizes that it is the thing to which “all workers in the enterprise,” or, in Aristotle’s case, the genre, aspire.⁴⁸

A new standard in canon studies was set by Moshe Halbertal’s 1997 *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority*. In this work, Halbertal uses the Judaic tradition as a case study to synthesize applicable theory on the canon as it pertains to both the Hebrew Bible and the phenomenological study of canonization. In doing so, Halbertal draws on fields ranging from jurisprudence to the philosophy of language. Unlike previous scholars, however, he constructs a revolutionary yet practical framework for studying the relationship between canonization, authority and identity in what he terms “text centered communities,” whose members are bound together through a common commitment to canonical texts. Halbertal explains that a text centered community exhibits several characteristics. First, expertise in the canonical text is a source of authority and prestige within the community. Second, study of the canonical text is itself an act of devotion urged upon all. Third, the text becomes “a locus of religious experience,” with those who pore over or imbibe it engaging in “a religious drama in and of itself.” Finally, the canonical text defines the boundaries of the community. It is the only recourse and source for the justification of ideas.⁴⁹ “In a text centered community the boundaries of a community are shaped in relation to loyalty to a shared canon,” asserts Halbertal.⁵⁰

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⁴⁸ Fish, 12-15.


⁵⁰ Halbertal, 129.
Another important concept explored in *People of the Book* is the notion of formative texts, a type of canonical text that serves as a template for the development of expression and interpretation within a community. Beyond simply being a classic worthy of study and imitation, "[a] formative text is one in which progress in the field[, in this case, of understanding revealed law] is made through interpretation of that text."41

Halbertal also proposes a principle by which the vague and intangible notion of canonicity can be gauged. Drawing from literary hermeneutics, Halbertal employs the well-traveled Principle of Charity (a concept whose development and use will be traced later in this chapter), stipulating that the canonicity of a scripture can be measured by the charity with which it is read and interpreted. If a community reads a text in the best possible light, attempting to minimize internal contradictions and reconcile notions of truth established by the text with those evident in the outside world, their reading is charitable and the text’s canonicity secure. Readings that either highlight problems within the text or challenge its probity by preferring external truths, such as those provided by modern science, pose threats to the canon and indicate a decrease in the text’s holiness.

Halbertal’s work thus constitutes a new stage of canon studies. His promulgation of discrete definitions and conceptual tools for the study of canons in text centered communities is a corollary to Menzies’ prescient if parochial work a century earlier. Both scholars grasp that canonization in religious communities is an irrepressible reality and that our understanding of canonization is nothing more than a tool for understanding

41 Halbertal, 94.
the secrets of a culture and its characteristic modes of thought." As von Hallberg noted, it has been widely acknowledged that sacred canons are intimately bound to the profanity of self-identification and authority. Given this reality, our ability to increase our knowledge of what the great Muslim scholar Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) called "the truth of things (haqā'iq al-umār)" hinges on our mastery of a lexicon and conceptual framework capable of advancing our understanding of how canons are informed by and govern historical processes.

II.3. Canon Studies and the Islamic Tradition

The study of canons emerged in the West. With the exception of more global efforts such as those of Kendall Folkert and Jonathan Z. Smith, inquiries into canons and canonization have often been directly tied to the religious or literary aspects of Christianity or Judaism. To what extent can the history of certain authoritative ḥadīth collections in Islamic civilization be read in this light? Scholars of Islam, Islamic civilization and its varied genres of literary and religious expression have been cautious in applying approaches developed in the Occidental tradition to their corresponding fields in Islamic studies. One might argue that scholars of other civilizations should not blunder into seeing canons where none exist or assume that they function in the same manner as those in the West. As Folkert has pointed out, Western scholars of South Asian scriptural traditions had been misrepresenting the nature and contents of the Jain canon since 1882. Not only had generations of scholars based their understanding of the

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42 Balkin and Levinson, 4.
Jain canon on only one primary source, their conceptualization of a canon as a discrete and complete list of texts distracted them from the fact that "it is not specific texts or scriptures" but a specific "class of knowledge" that the Jain community considered authoritative.\textsuperscript{43}

Tackling the mighty task of summing up the "Muslim Canon" from late Antiquity to the modern era, Aziz al-Azmeh is thus duly cautious in his contribution to the \textit{Canonization and Decanonization} volume. Al-Azmeh confines himself to discussing in the broadest terms how the Islamic scriptural tradition of the Qur'an and the hadith took shape over centuries as part of a process of communal identification. He admits that his efforts are hobbled by the primitive state of Islamic studies, which leads him to identify more questions than he answers. As a result, he concludes that the process of canonization in the Muslim tradition is "historically obscure except in some of its details."\textsuperscript{44}

Two more directed forays into the study of the canon in the Islamic legal and literary worlds have been William Hanaway's article "Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?" (1993) and Brannon Wheeler's \textit{Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship} (1996). Hanaway believes that one of a canon's primary functions is that of a "heavy weapon to fire at the


\textsuperscript{44} Aziz al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism," in \textit{Canonization and Decanonization}, 197 and 203. Al-Azmeh's critical description of Orientalist scholarship as "far too philologically technical and detailed in its approach and furtive in its conclusions" seems unfair given his evaluation of the state of the field (see al-Azmeh, 193). Such caution and attention to detail must precede any attempts at more general conclusions.

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enemy as well as a means of defining the collective self."\textsuperscript{45} He thus cites the homogeneity of the courtly audience to which classical Persian poetry was addressed, and the lack of any "significant other" or "counter canon" contesting it, as evidence against the existence of a poetic canon in medieval Persia.\textsuperscript{46} Here he echoes the argument of scholars such as Kermode, Blenkinsopp and Metzger that it was communal tension and competing identities that defined the canons of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.\textsuperscript{47} Jonathan Z. Smith's inclusive definition of a religious canon proved more easily applicable to Islamic tradition, and Brannon Wheeler employed it to understand how the Hanafi school of legal scholarship in Islam preserved the authority of the Qur'\'anic revelation and the Prophet's precedent through its chain of authorized legal interpreters.\textsuperscript{48}

Hanaway's and Wheeler's studies are extremely valuable, but they nonetheless demonstrate the Scylla and Charybdis of forcing a conceptual framework onto the complex terrain of textual history. This framework may distract a scholar from crucial areas that might otherwise be explored, while accommodating the idiosyncrasies of the local tradition in question might neutralize a theory's efficacy. Hanaway's focus on a very narrow definition of a canon, for example, limited his inquiry to determining whether one existed or not. But canon studies has proven the diversity of approaches to

\textsuperscript{45} William L. Hanaway Jr., "Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?" \textit{Edebiyät} 4, no. 1 (1993): 3

\textsuperscript{46} Hanaway, 3; for a reply, see Julia Rubanovich, "Literary Canon and Patterns of Evaluation in Persian Prose on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion," \textit{Studia Iranica} 32 (2003): 47-76, esp. 48.

\textsuperscript{47} See Metzger, 90-104.

the issue of canonicity and identified the manifold functions canons can serve. If, as Moshe Halbertal contends, “canon and heresy are twins,” must we seek the emergence of religious canons only in times of ideological combat or sectarian strife? Is this role of a weapon in conflict an essential function of a canon? Or, as Menzies alone has argued, is the formulation of a religious canon the result of consolidation in the wake of tumult?

Conversely, the definition of canon that Wheeler borrows from Smith proves too broad and insubstantial when he tackles the topic of the hadith canon. Wheeler’s *Applying the Canon in Islam* is in and of itself a fascinating study of the Islamic legal tradition, affirming von Hallberg’s stance by concluding that the notion of canon in the Hanafi case “is best understood as a device to promote the pedagogical agenda of those who use certain texts to represent the authority of the past.” Wheeler’s applied definition of canon, however, is so distanced from the physicality of a text that the distinction between ‘canonicity’ and ‘authority’ in his study sometimes collapses. In terms of Sheppard’s and Folkert’s distinction between Canon 1, the criterion of truth in interpretation, and Canon 2, a set of representative texts, Wheeler emphasizes the former to the latter’s exclusion.

Describing the role of the Six Books, he explains that “[t]he Six Books are different attempts to delineate in ‘written’ form what was, at that time, considered to be

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49 Halbertal, 5.

50 Menzies, 91.

51 Wheeler, 2. See also page 238.

52 See, for example, Wheeler, 18, where one can often interchange the words “canonize” and “authorize” with little change in meaning.
the ‘text’ of the Sunnah.” For Wheeler, however, these attempts do not merit mention as
a canon. The author follows Schacht and others in emphasizing al-Shafīʿi’s (d. 204/819-
20) transition from local schools of customary law to an exclusive reliance on
Muhammad’s precedent as a source of law. He thus states that it was the entirety of the
Prophet’s sunna that was canonized as opposed to certain collections of his ḥadīth.
Wheeler warns that “the canonical text of the Sunnah… is not to be equated with a
particular book or a group of books, nor even necessarily with a written text.”53 This
distinction between the incalculably vast and amorphous corpus of the Prophet’s legacy
and distinct collections of ḥadīth is valuable. What lies unrealized in Wheeler’s dismissal
of physical tomes, however, is that those books that the community recognized as
successful efforts to “delineate… the ‘text’ of the Sunnah” themselves became a canon
(Canon 2). As we shall see in Chapter Nine, it was precisely these books’ ability to
function as physical, manageable symbols of the Prophet’s sunna that met a need in the
Muslim community and created one of the canonical dimensions of the Ṣahihayn.
Because he has chosen a definition of ‘canon’ easily divorced from actual physical texts
and has instead understood ‘canon’ on the ethereal plane of religious authority, Wheeler
misses a truly canonical function of the Six Books.

A skeptic might argue that any Western definition of canon might adulterate our
perceptions of other traditions. Should we even employ the term ‘canon’ in our reading

53 Wheeler, 59. Here Wheeler repeats the same oversight committed by Sheppard, whose very brief
discussion of ḥadīth describes the Sunna, as manifested in ḥadīth, as providing a “normative and, therefore,
‘canonical’ (Canon 1) guide to Muslim exegesis.” See Sheppard, 67.
of ḥadīth literature and its functions, or is our belief that it could fit into our compartments of canon and canonicity naive?

A more germane question might be whether popular senses of scriptural canon in the West really acknowledge the potential subtleties and varied stages of a canon's development. The great scholar of Islamic law, Bernard Weiss, for example, dismisses the existence of a ḥadīth canon in Sunni Islam by stating that in Islamic civilization "[God] guides no council of elders or divines in the formation of a sacred canon...."54 Indeed, at first glance the acephalous, consensus-based religious leadership in classical Islam might seem completely incomparable to the Pauline authority or council-driven first few centuries of Christian history that gave us the Biblical canon. As our view shifts, however, these images dissolve into one another. It seems evident that neither the Christian nor the Jewish scriptural canons were the products of councils or the decrees they issued. Rather, they emerged gradually through consensus, external pressures and liturgical use within these two believing communities.55 Indeed, the final exercise of papal power that yielded the present canon of the Catholic Bible, declaring its text infallible and making any rejection of its content anathema, did not occur until as late as the Council of Trent in 1546.56 The Biblical canon had thus existed for well over a


55 There is startling agreement on this point. See Metzger, 7; Kermode, “The Canon,” 601; Stroumsa, 314.

millennium before it reached the stringency imposed on the Qur’ānic text by the caliph ʿUthmān (d. 35/655) less than two decades after the death of the Prophet.

Even when the long centuries of consensus on the Tanakh were sealed with a final debate over the Song of Songs and the Esther scroll, it was the tremendous scholarly reputation of Rabbi Akiva and not the edict of the Sanhedrin that gained these two books admittance into the canon. Biblical scholars like Guy Stroumsa and Blenkinsopp even reject the notion that it was the Council of Jamnia ca. 90 CE that resulted in the final closure of the Hebrew Bible canon. Indeed, the state-sponsored promulgation of the Qur’ānic text by ʿUthmān, or state attempts (even if unsuccessful) to produce official compilations of fiscal ḥadīths or the Prophet’s biography under the caliphs ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101/720) and al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), seem much more suited to prevalent Western ideas of a decreed canon than the truly gradual maturation of the Biblical canon. Why, then, must we tie canonization so firmly to councils?

Weiss’s intention-driven understanding of canon formation, drawn no doubt from the general belief that New Testament writings were produced and received as canonical texts ab initio, further limits his ability to conceive of a ḥadīth canon. He states that while the Qur’ānic text “may be regarded as a canon of sorts, the great compilations of

57 Stroumsa, 308; Joseph Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 3; Sanders, 10-11.

58 Citing a report about this order that appears in Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī’s (d. 189/805) recension of the Muwatta’, Nabia Abbott states that ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz did not order the recording of the whole sunna, but only aspects relating to administrative concerns. There are numerous reports that the Abbasid caliphs al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and Ḥārūn al-Rashīd tried to make Mālik b. Anas’s Muwatta’ the source of imperial law; see Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur’ānic Commentary and Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 2:26; and Muḥammad Abū Zahra, Mālik (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2002), 184-6.
Sunnaic hadīth material are definitely not canons.” Rather, he continues, “they represent a purely individual attempt on the part of the renowned compilers to gather together what was in their judgment the most reliable of the Sunnaic material known to them.”

Here one must ask if the authors of the synoptic gospels were striving to do anything more than set down on paper “what was in their judgment” the most appropriate understanding of Christ’s life. Ultimately, canon studies has demonstrated unequivocally that canonization is not the product of an author’s intention, but rather of a community’s reception of texts.

Like Wheeler, Weiss concludes that “while the Qur’ān was a fairly discrete entity with discernible boundaries, the body of hadīth narratives constituted an amorphous mass whose boundaries no one could hope to catch sight of, at least with any degree of clarity.” Yet on the same page he acknowledges the crucial role of the canonical hadīth collections. The concept of the Prophet’s ‘sunna,’ he states, “conjures up the great compilations of hadīth material such as those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.” Should we not, then, consider the possibility that the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim played precisely the role of synecdochic symbols for the Prophet’s sunna in a community that understood the need to delimit an otherwise amorphous entity?

Although canon studies may be a product of the Western intellectual tradition, it has been demonstrated that even within one civilization the term ‘canon’ is multivalent. Within this diversity, however, canon studies has recognized that when communities authorize texts this involves common historical processes that change the way these texts

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function and are used. Addressing concerns about whether or not one can truly term the Bible a ‘canon,’ Kermode states that “works transmitted inside a canon are understood differently from those without....” It is thus ultimately the manner in which the Muslim community has treated the Sahihayn and the functions that they have served, not any external and sometimes rigid definitions of canon, that determine the two works’ canonicity. Acknowledging that they have occupied a position of authority in the Sunni tradition is simply recognizing a historical reality.

The reality of the hadith canon as an indigenous product of Muslims’ understanding of their own scriptural tradition is exemplified by the historical writing of Rashid al-Din (d. 718/1318), the famous minister and court historian of the Ilkhan Mongol sultan Ghazan Khân (d. 703/1304). Directing the writing of one of humanity’s first world histories in the wake of Ghazan’s conversion to Islam, this Persian scholar, physician and historian devotes a section of its introduction to an epistemology of historical knowledge. The reports from the past on which historians rely, he explains, fall into two categories. The first are so well known (tavator) that they convey epistemological certainty. The vast majority of information, however, falls into the second category of less well-attested narrations (ňhãd), which are subject to uncertainty and distortion. Even reports culled from eyewitnesess can transform and eventually become cause for disagreement as they pass from person to person. This reality, he states, has even affected the Prophet’s legacy. “The foremost imãms,” however, “conducted thorough research and made certain selections, and they called them the

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Rashid al-Din was not writing a religious history. The overpowering charisma of the “Golden Family” of Genghis Khan and the dictates of classical Persian political theory occupied him far more than the distinctly theological or sectarian concerns of the first centuries of Islam. The Islam to which the Mongol rulers of Iran and Rashid al-Din himself had converted was a fully mature civilization that initiated its citizens into a cosmopolitan worldview and shared vision of history. Rashid al-Din’s historical epistemology is itself a product of Hellenistic Near Eastern discussions over mediate and immediate (apodictic) knowledge. Yet even in this context, the Six “authentic” ḥadīth collections represent religious and social order amid the polyglot historical roots of Islamic civilization. The Ṣiḥāḥ canonized a tract of the past, securing the Prophetic authority so central to Islamic communal identification in the medium of specific texts.

The unique status of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥs similarly constitutes an undeniable historical reality in Islamic civilization. From his seat in Delhi, capital of the Muslim Moghul Empire in the 1700s, Shāh Wālī Allāḥ (d. 1762 CE) summarized the legal and doctrinal controversies that had unfolded over more than a millennium of Islamic history in his masterpiece, Ḥujjat Allāh al-bālígha (God’s Conclusive Argument). In his chapter on ḥadīth, he concludes that “as for the two Ṣaḥīḥs [of al-Bukhārī and Muslim], the scholars of ḥadīth have agreed that everything in them attributed to the

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Prophet is absolutely authentic,” adding that “anyone who belittles their stature is guilty of corruptive innovation (mubtadi’) and not following the path of the believers.”

The existence of the ḥadīth canon in general, and the exceptional canonical status of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections in particular, are thus historical realities that we ignore at our own peril. Noting opportunities for using the tools developed in canon studies to better understand and articulate the form and function of the ḥadīth canon is nothing more than responding to voices from within the Islamic tradition that call us to view the ḥadīth canon as part of a broader phenomenon.

II.4. Theoretical Tools and Common Historical Processes: Canon Studies and the Ḥadīth Canon

The present study is thus not theory-driven, nor is it comparative. The story of the ḥadīth canon must be read on its own. It does, however, recognize that any canon represents the interaction of text, authority and communal identification. The foregoing discussion of different canons and the phenomenon of canonicity has highlighted this common historical process and provided a conceptual lexicon that is useful for addressing the ḥadīth canon. Investigating this issue in light of the way other literary and scriptural communities have conceived of canonization can bring elements otherwise unperceived into relief. In tackling a subject that lies at the nexus of text, community and authority, we must expect to address the same themes as studies of other canons. It is the extent to which the Muslim community’s perception and use of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥs

meets these expectations that justifies this approach. Ultimately, it is the prominence of questions of self-definition, the institutionalization of religious authority and a qualitative change in the way the community viewed these two works that qualifies them as canonical.

Having reviewed the development of canon studies, let us now elaborate more fully some of the central themes and constructs that will be employed in the study of the Ṣahiḥayn canon.

II.4. a. Canons and Community

Texts may become authoritative, but they are not binding on all mankind. Canons are necessarily the creations of specific communities or audiences. Because the act of authorizing certain books inevitably draws lines excluding other works, canons have been understood as tools of inclusion and exclusion within a broader community. As Gerald Burns and Joseph Blenkinsopp have observed in the case of the Hebrew scriptures, “what we call ‘canon’ is intelligible only in the context of conflicting claims to control the redemptive media and, in particular, to mediate and interpret authoritatively the common tradition.”64 Scriptural canons thus form when certain sections of a community attempt to monopolize the true interpretation of a religious message shared by all its members, excluding those audiences that identify with the non-canonical.

In the case of the formation of the New Testament canon, one of the first to advance a set of authoritative media for understanding Christ’s legacy was the second-

64 Burns, 81; Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon, 96.
century Gnostic Marcion. His list of works, one of the first 'canons,' excluded the Hebrew Bible as the corrupt revelation of the Old Testament God who had plunged the world into darkness. The true salvational teachings of Christ that could reunite man's soul with the Divine, Marcion contended, were contained solely in a purified version of Luke's gospel and a selection of Paul's letters. Championing what would become orthodox Christianity, Irenaeus, the second-century bishop of Lyons and inveterate enemy of the Gnostics, responded by affirming the unity of the Old and New Testaments. More importantly, he proclaimed a closed canon of only the "four-formed gospel" of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These books alone, not the myriad of other gospels circulating among Christians at the time, captured Jesus's life and teachings; like the four directions of the compass, there could be no more and no less. As scholars such as Metzger and Elaine Pagels have shown, the formation of the New Testament canon cannot be grasped without acknowledging the catalyst of Marcion's heretical counter-canon. By declaring that only certain books were authentic and binding for Christians, Irenaeus had dubbed not only the Gnostics but also the audiences of other innocuous gospels heretics. Halbertal's stipulation that "canon and heresy are twins" succinctly represents this vein of scholarship.

66 Kermode, "Institutional Control," 77. For an excellent treatment of Marcion's beliefs and sources, see Metzger, 90-94.
67 Pagels, 81-5; Metzger, 153-7.
68 Halbertal, 5.
This conception of canonicity as tied to competing claims to the control of a common tradition has so dominated canon studies that Hanaway concluded that the absence of such a "significant other" as an opponent in Medieval Persian literature precluded the existence of a canon of Persian poetry. This trend's commanding role in canon studies is not difficult to understand. Canons are necessarily vehicles for identification, and just as 'non-canonical' works are a byproduct of their formation, so they must delineate a new community of believers from the old, wider audience.

Such valid assumptions have, however, left unexplored another function of canons in community. Canons can also emphasize inclusion and agreement more than exclusivity. They can function as a tool of reconciliation, a medium for communication or for creating common ground between adversaries. Although a canon might be advanced as a polemical tool by one sect in a time of strife, it need not serve to exclude other forms of redemptive media. Rather, its compelling power could dwell in its broad appeal. As Hanaway contends, canons may serve chiefly as a "heavy weapon to fire at the enemy," but only evidence also accepted by that enemy will prove compelling in debate. Even in polemic, a canon's power must spring from its status as part of a shared language. Considering the powerful role of the consensus (ijma') of the Muslim community in Islamic epistemology, we must take care to consider the emergence of the Sahihayn canon as an inclusive effort to force various sects to recognize a common medium for discussing the Prophet's legacy.

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69 Hanaway, 3.
II.4. b. Kanòn and the Measure of Revealed Truth

Despite its overwhelming denotation of “authoritative list” in modern and many pre-modern minds, the kanòn that meant “measure” to Aristotle and lent itself so readily to the “rule of revealed truth” in early Christian polemic has survived as one of the most useful tools for conceptualizing canonicity. Canon studies has emphasized canonization as an impetus for interpretative activity, with Kermode underscoring that authorizing books transforms them into potentially inexhaustible mines of interpretation. “Licensed for exegesis,” he concludes, “such is the seal we place upon our canonical works.”

This focus has somewhat overshadowed the role of the canon as a categorical measure of truth, a tool that Fish notes is designed to end discussion rather than encourage it. Here the kanòn as measure is “an authority that can be invoked in the face of almost any counterevidence because it is its own evidence and stronger in its force than any other.”

Indeed, the original purpose of the kanòn tès alètheias, or ‘measure of revealed truth,’ advanced by Irenaeus was to limit interpretation of the gospels. Just as the early church father had proclaimed an authorized collection of four gospels, so had he propounded a hermeneutic lens to ensure an orthodox reading of his canon. When reading rich and pregnant texts like the Gospel of John, so favored by many Gnostics, one must apply “the measure of revealed truth” that interprets them in as literal a manner as possible and in the light of Jesus’s ‘true’ teachings. To open the doors of esoteric interpretation of the canonical gospels would mimic the methods of pagan philosophers

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70 Kermode, “Institutional Control,” 83.
71 Fish, 12.
such as the Stoics, who interpreted Homer's epics allegorically. Irenaeus sought to end the subversive preaching of the Montanist movement of Asia Minor, whose wandering prophets claimed to be seized by the Holy Ghost and proclaimed the continuing revelation of Christ in the community. The message and authority of Christ thus had to be contained in the canon and interpreted properly. As rabbis debating questions of holy law had declared when some scholars claimed that God had validated their position in a dream, "we do not listen to voices from heaven." For Irenaeus, the canon as text and kanon as measure were guarantors of an orthodox monopoly on interpretation. In J.Z. Smith's definition of the canon as a tool in which the authority of a tradition is deposited in order to extend its implementation into future circumstances, Irenaeus's "measure of truth" would be a trump card in determining the authentic vision of Christianity. Indeed, the authority of his canon, Irenaeus claimed, stemmed from its authenticity. He had chosen his "four-formed gospel" because they were the only books supposedly written by eyewitnesses of the events they described.

Like Irenaeus, Muslim scholars of hadith have been preoccupied with questions of authenticity. The traditions of the Prophet were certainly subject to interpretation as scholars applied them to questions of law, morality and doctrine, but it was the question of authenticity that was paramount in their collection and criticism. The more authentic the Prophetic report, the more authoritative it was. In the elaboration of the faith, and

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72 Pagels, 117.

73 The contemporary Shāfi‘ī scholar Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-La‘īf Fūda concurs, stating that “inspiration (ilhām) is not a conduit for revealed knowledge (ilm) among the people of truth”; see http://www.al-razii.net/website/pages/warakat.htm, part 10 (last accessed 9/14/2005).

74 Pagels, 111.
certainly in inter-school polemics, “interpretation is a function of authentication (al-tawī'wil far 'alā al-ithbāt).” While Irenaeus's canon required a canonical lens for proper viewing, for ḥadīth collections the kanōn of truth was the canonical books themselves. A collection deemed an authentic repository for the Prophet's hermeneutic authority was the tool through which that authority could be employed decisively in the further elaboration of Islam. For Kermode the canon is licensed for exegesis; for Muslims a canonical ḥadīth collection was licensed for common use.

II.4. c. The Principle of Charity and Canonical Culture

One of the most useful conceptual tools for studying the emergence and development of the ḥadīth canon is the Principle of Charity, a notion only recently applied to canonicity. In its most general sense, the Principle of Charity assumes that people interpret signs in the best possible light. It was first developed as a tool of analytical philosophy, and later explored by N.L. Wilson in a 1959 issue of *Review of Metaphysics*. Wilson proposes that, presented with a field of data or propositions, humans will choose the designation that makes the maximum number of statements true.75 Here an individual forced to come to terms with a set of propositions treats reality with charity, reading its ‘text’ in the best possible light. He charitably assumes a system must exist, so he reasons that one should select the data that best support some notion of order.

The Principle of Charity has also found significant use in the study of language. Members of a speech community all subscribe to rules that govern the common activities of construction and interpretation, so every sentence and expression is a new proposition that must fit into this shared system. If one’s interlocutor says, “I ran the light at the introspection,” one would automatically assume that he or she had meant to say ‘intersection.’ At a certain point in conversation, it becomes more likely that a speaker has simply erred than that he or she is trying to subvert grammar or convention. It is not simply due to a reliance on the stability of convention that one treats the interlocutor’s remarks with charity; we automatically view them in the best possible light in order to uphold the very conventions of language that allow us to understand one another. As Donald Davidson explains, “We do this sort of off the cuff interpretation all the time, deciding in favour of reinterpretation of words in order to preserve a reasonable theory of belief.” As a result, context can overwhelm isolated or fleeting divergences in an otherwise consistent system.

The Principle of Charity has been similarly applied to the communication between author and reader through the medium of text. In textual interpretation, the Principle involves approaching a work with the assumption that its author is rational and that its elements of plot, theme and character conform to some sense of order. Here grammar and semantic convention morph into notions of intra-textual uniformity and interpretive harmony. The Principle of Charity manifests the reader’s need for what


Kermode calls “that concordance of beginning, middle and end which is the essence of our explanatory fictions....”

Drawing on Ronald Dworkin’s *Law’s Empire*, Halbertal extends the Principle of Charity to the domain of canonicity. Given several possible interpretations of a canonical passage, the ‘correct’ one will be the one that supports the text’s internal consistency and compatibility with accepted notions of truth or propriety. Canonizing a legal or scriptural text thus “not only endows it with authority but also requires a commitment to make the best of it.” The Principle of Charity recognizes that in the case of a scriptural or legal canon, “there is an a priori interpretive commitment to show the text in the best possible light. Conversely, the loss of this sense of obligation to the text is an undeniable sign that it is no longer perceived as holy.” Halbertal thus stipulates the principle that “the degree of canonicity of a text corresponds to the amount of charity it receives in its interpretation.”

The assumed existence of an ordered reality in Wilson’s study, and the manifest authority of linguistic context and convention in a speech community, here become the worldview that a community has constructed around a canonized text. One might refer to this surrounding system as the text’s **canonical culture**. It is the system that trains readers or listeners to interpret a canonical text in a reverential manner and with suitable

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80 Halbertal, 28.

81 Halbertal, 29.
awe. In short, canonical culture obliges readers to treat the canon with charity. Unlike grammar or linguistic convention in a speech community, however, a canonical culture cannot be taken for granted or unconsciously defended. It must be consciously created and nurtured through careful control of the manner in which the canon is read and discussed. Upholders of this canonical culture must themselves actively propagate it and condemn its breaches. A canonical culture would demand that interpreters of the canon observe certain respectful formalities, accord the text and its authors the proper accolades and gloss over possible flaws. Like a language, however, one can identify the rules of canonical culture and recognize certain violations of its grammar. By measuring the charity extended, one can observe the construction of a canonical culture as it seeks to cast a text, and perhaps even its author, in the best possible light. Once one gains a familiarity with this canonical culture, one can detect lapses and even perceive its participants interacting with its boundaries and demands.

The Principle of Charity is ideally suited for studying the canonization of the *Sahihayn* because the canonical culture surrounding them has depended entirely on the compatibility of the two texts and their authors with prevailing notions of truth and authenticity.82 From the early second/eighth century, many pious Muslims who collected the sayings of their Prophet recognized that an exacting criticism of both those who reported these traditions and the traditions themselves was necessary to identify forged material. Their opponents from among the Muslim rationalists and the more analogy-based legal schools of Iraq, however, were very skeptical of their claims to be able to

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82 For a very brief but parallel discussion of the “critical gentleness” with which Muslim scholars treated their canonical texts, see Aziz al-Azmeh, “The Muslim Canon,” 212.
collect and authenticate statements transmitted orally. The image that the ḥadīth scholars therefore cultivated in the Muslim community highlighted their caution, lack of tolerance for lapses in memory or inconsistencies in transmission, and an almost pathological devotion to amassing and sifting through the Prophet’s legacy. The idealized muḥaddith (ḥadīth scholar) was singularly devoted to mastering the Prophet’s word, dismissing as corruptive innovation anything that did not extend back to him. For them the ḥadīth’s chain of transmission (isnād), the only lifeline to the Prophet’s teachings and an Islam unpolluted by the cosmopolitan religious atmosphere of the Near East, became the center of a cult of authenticity. “The isnād for us is religion; were it not for the isnād,” they claimed, “whoever wanted could say whatever they wanted.”83 It was the very authenticity of these isnāds, however, that the ḥadīth scholars’ opponents doubted. To canonize the Sahīḥayn, the ḥadīth scholars’ cult of authenticity had to become both more intensified and accepted in the wider Sunni community. It was argued, as we shall see, that these two demanding books met the whole community’s requirements for ḥadīth authenticity. The canon thus rested on a claim that required the approval of segments of the community that had been perennially mistrustful of the ḥadīth scholars’ methodology and the ever-critical ḥadīth scholars themselves. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, a perpetual reinforcing of this cult of authenticity would prove the salient feature of the canonical culture surrounding the two works. The two books and their authors had to be lifted above their peers and any possibility of error. The extent to which different

segments of the Sunni community gradually extended the charity of this unblemished authenticity to al-Bukhāri and Muslim and their works charts the emergence of this canonical culture.

II.5. Conclusion

Whether scriptural, legal or literary, canons lie at the intersection of text, authority and communal identification. They are no more unique to the Occidental tradition than are these three seminal notions. Indeed, canons are undeniable historical realities that change the manner in which the books function and are treated by their audiences. Where exactly the canon of the Sahih collections of al-Bukhāri and Muslim fits in this nexus is a question only a study devoted to their unique history can answer. The remarkable efforts of scholars such as J.Z. Smith, Halbertal and Kermode to understand canons in their various contexts, however, must serve as guides in alerting us to the possibilities and perhaps even the inevitabilities facing the study of a canon's emergence and functions. Canon studies has drawn our attention to the role of the canon as a possible tool for inclusion in a community. It has provided the Principle of Charity as a device to measure canonicity and chart the development of a canonical culture. Finally, we can conceive of the canon as a common measure of truth in which the authority of tradition is deposited for later application. As Menzies, the earliest student of canonization as phenomenon, so ably pointed out, a canon must begin with books.84 What, then, was the genesis of those two books that allowed Muslims to stand “where the

84 Menzies, 90.
first disciples stood..., to listen to the Master’s words, and overhear perhaps even his
crrent thoughts and prayers," feeling “what that spirit was which reached the Master from
the upper region and passed forth from him to other men...?85
III.
THE GENESIS OF AL-BUKHĀRĪ AND MUSLIM

III.1. Introduction

Leafing through the pages of al-Bukhārī's *Sahih* today, the book seems to be the natural culmination of the Muslim study of the Prophetic legacy: Muḥammad’s authenticated words and actions, enclosed in a few volumes. For the ḥadīth scholars and pious Muslims of the third/ninth century, however, ḥadīths were not bound tomes taken off the shelf and read. They were living links to the Prophet and the manifestation of his charismatic authority in everyday life. Although Muslim scholars of the first three centuries of Islam strove to prevent forged ḥadīths from being attributed to the Prophet, even in the case of dubious transmissions the powerful formula “the Messenger of God said…” made reports from Muḥammad *prima facie* compelling to many jurists. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s compilation of works limited to authenticated reports was thus a revolutionary act. The two *Sahīhs* were eventually destined for canonization, but in the decades after their authors’ deaths important segments of the scholarly community saw them as an insolent departure from tradition. The *Sahīhayn* possessed an elitism and finality that clashed with the manner in which ḥadīth-based jurists employed the Prophetic legacy. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work thus constituted a split in the ḥadīth tradition; although the *Sahīhayn* would go on to become an authoritative institution, they
would exist side by side with the continued amassing of Prophetic traditions through the living isnād.

III.2. The Development of Ḥadīth Literature

When he was sixteen years old, Muḥammad b. ʿIsmāʿīl al-Bukhārī left his hometown of Bukhara in Transoxiana with his mother and brother ʿAḥmad on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The small party would probably have attached themselves to one of the merchant caravans carrying luxury goods west along the Silk Road. They would have passed through the bustling garrison-city of Merv before climbing the mountains to Sarakhs and then descending into the rolling green and golden valleys of Khurasān.1 They would have made a stop in the city of Naysābūr, its northernmost orchards lying against the foothills of the mountains. As they continued west along the northern edge of the Iranian desert, they would have passed through Bayhaq, the great commercial and scholarly center of Rayy, before voyaging across the Zagros Mountains and down onto the flood plain of Iraq. They may have stopped in Baghdad, the “navel of the world” and a throbbing center of trade, scholarship and political intrigue. They would have continued along the caravan trail, now crowded more with pilgrims than merchants, across the north Arabian deserts to the rugged mountains of the Ḥijāz. Skirting jagged

1 ‘Khurasān’ as a topographical and administrative term has had a wide range of meanings. In the early Islamic period the name was often used to denote the region extending from Western Iran to Transoxiana. Today it is a relatively contained province in Eastern Iran with its capital at Mashhad. We will use the name as the geographer al-Muqaddisi (d. after 380/990) did: to describe the area in Eastern Iran centered on the four major cities of Naysābūr, Merv, Herat and Balkh. We will distinguish this region from Transoxiana, with its Zarafšān River cities of Bukhara and Samarqand; Anon., Hudūd al-ʿĀlam: The Regions of the World, trans. and ed. V. Minorsky (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 102-109; Paul Wheatley, The Places Where Men Pray Together (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 172-90; C.E. Bosworth, “Khurāsān,” EI2.
ridges interspaced by yellow tracts of sand, they would have ended their journey where Islam began over two centuries earlier, in the dry and rocky valley of Mecca.

Al-Bukhārī, like generations of dedicated and pious Muslims before him, devoted his life to answering the question that lies at the heart of the Islamic religious tradition: how does one live according to God's will as revealed in the Qur'ān and taught by His Prophet? Almost two centuries before al-Bukhārī set off on his pilgrimage, the same road had carried the Muslim armies into Eastern Iran and Transoxiana as they triumphantly spread their new religion outwards in time and space from its epicenter in the Ḥijāz. His voyage back to Mecca, the Prophet's home and location of the Ka'ba, fulfilled the duty ordained upon all Muslims to return to the place where God had revealed their religion and where the Prophet had served as its first authoritative interpreter.

In the two hundred years since the beginning of the Islamic tradition, Muslims such as al-Bukhārī had turned back again and again to the authoritative legacy of the Prophet's teachings as it radiated outwards through the transmission and interpretation of pious members of the community. In Medina, al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (d. 108/726-7), the grandson of the first caliph of Islam, and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), the son-in-law of the most prolific student of the Prophet's legacy, Abū Hurayra, became two of the leading interpreters of the new faith after the death of the formative first generation of Muslims. Their interpretations of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's legacy, as well as those of founding fathers such as 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, were collected and synthesized by the seminal Medinan jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795). In Kufa, the
Prophet’s friend and pillar of the early Muslim community, ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652-3), instructed his newly established community on the tenets and practice of Islam as it adapted to the surroundings of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Iraq. His disciple ‘Alqama b. Qays (d. 62/681) transmitted these teachings to a promising junior, Ibrāhīm al-Nakhā’ī (d. 95/714), who in turn passed his approaches and methods of legal reasoning to Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān (d. 120/738). His student of eighteen years, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), would become a cornerstone of legal interpretive effort in Iraq and the eponym of the Ḥanāfī school of law. Unlike Medina, the Prophet’s adopted home where his legacy thrived in the form of living communal practice, the polyglot environment of Kufa teemed with ancient doctrines and practices foreign to the early Muslim community. Many such ideas found legitimation in the form of spurious reports attributed to the Prophet, and Abū Ḥanīfa thus preferred a cautious reliance on the Qur’ān and his own reasoning rather than to risk acting on these fraudulent ḥadīths.

By the mid-second century, there had emerged two general trends in interpreting and applying Islam in its newly conquered lands. For both these trends, the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s implementation of that message were the only constitutive sources of authority for Muslims. The practice and rulings of the early community, who participated in establishing the faith and inherited the Prophet’s hermeneutic authority, were the lenses through which scholars like Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik understood these two sources. Scholars like ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Awzā‘ī of Beirut (d. 157/773-4) thus stated that “religious knowledge (ilm) is what has come to us from the Companions of the
Prophet; what has not is not knowledge.”2 When presented with a situation for which the Qur’ān and the well known teachings of the Prophet and his Companions provided no clear answer, scholars like Abū Ḥanīfa relied on their own interpretations of these sources to respond. Early Muslim intellectuals like Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/890) referred to such scholars as ‘ahl al-ra’y,’ or the practitioners of individual legal reasoning.3 Other pious members of the community preferred to limit themselves to the opinions of the earliest generations and more dubious reports from the Prophet rather than to opine in a realm they felt was the purview of God and His Prophet alone. The great Baghdad scholar Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) epitomized this transmission-based approach to understanding law and faith in his famous statement: “You hardly see anyone applying reason (ra’y) [to some issue of religion or law] except that there lies, in his heart, some deep-seated resentment (ghill). A weak narration [from the Prophet] is thus dearer to me than the use of reason.”4 Such transmission-based scholars, referred to as ‘the partisans of ḥadīth (ahl al-hadīth),’ preferred the interpretations of members of the early Islamic community to their own. For them the Muslim confrontation with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Near East threatened the unadulterated purity of Islam. A narcissistic indulgence of human reason would encourage the agendas of heresy and the temptation to stray from God’s revealed path. Only by clinging stubbornly to the ways of the Prophet and his righteous successors could they preserve the authenticity of their religion.


3 For more on this subject, see Christopher Melchert, “Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the Framing of Islamic Law,” Islamic Law and Society 8, no. 3 (2001): 383-406, esp. 385.

4 Muḥammad Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, [1965]), 239.
It was in this milieu that the tradition of ḥadīth literature emerged. Although Muslims had been memorizing or writing down the words of the Prophet and his followers from an early period, the first major ḥadīth collections, called musannafs, were essentially transcripts of the legal discourse that had developed during the first two centuries of Islam. Arranged into chapters dealing with different legal or ritual questions, they were topical records of pious Muslims’ efforts to respond to questions about proper faith and practice. Mālik b. Anas’s Muwatta’ is thus a mixture of Prophetic ḥadīths, the rulings of his Companions, the practice of the scholars of Medina and the opinions of Mālik himself. The musannaf of Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) is similarly a collection of reports from the Prophet, Companions and Successors such as ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732).

During the late second and early third centuries, however, the prevalence of specious ḥadīths being attributed to the Prophet led to the emergence of a shared three-tiered process of authentication among the transmission-based scholars in cities such as Medina, Basra, Baghdad and Naysābūr. In the first tier, scholars such as Abū Dāwūd al-

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6 Yahyā b. Yabya al-Laythī’s recension of the Muwatta’, which was transmitted to the West into Andalusia, contains 1,720 narrations, of which 613 are statements of the Companions, 285 of the Successors and 61 with no isnād at all; Abd al-Rauf, “Ḥadīth Literature,” 273.

Tayālisī (d. 204/818) and Ibn Ḥanbal strove to anchor core doctrine and practice in the teachings of the Prophet. They thus compiled collections limited to reports possessing explicit chains of transmission (isnād) going back to Muhammad. These musnad collections would have proven a very effective first line of defense against material entering the Islamic tradition from outside sources; Ibn Ḥanbal and other early transmission-based scholars paid no heed to material lacking an isnād.8

These isnāds, however, could be forged or inauthentic material simply equipped with one and then circulated. In what constituted the second tier of hadīth criticism, Iraqi scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234/849) evaluated the quality of these isnāds by collecting opinions about the transmitters who comprised them. As Scott C. Lucas has determined in his study of Ibn Saʿd and Ibn Ḥanbal’s work, they drew on two previous generations of hadīth-transmission critics: that of Mālik and his contemporaries like Shuʿbā b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776), and that of the next generation of the great Basran critics ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/814) and Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/813).9 Ibn Saʿd amassed a huge dictionary of hadīth transmitters, his Tabaqāt, which included statements from respected hadīth authorities rating transmitters for honesty, piety and their command of the material they conveyed. In addition, works like the Tabaqāt and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s Ilāl also tried to ascertain the personal links between different narrators in order to assure the continuity of transmission.

8 Al-Ḥakīm al-Naysābūrī quotes the famous early muḥaddith Shuʿbā b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) as saying, “all religious knowledge (ilm) which does not feature ‘he narrated to me’ or ‘he reported to me’ is vinegar and sprouts (khall wa baql)”; al-Ḥakīm al-Naysābūrī, Kitāb al-madkhāl ilā maʿrifat kitāb al-ikilīl, ed. Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Sulūm (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1423/2003), 58.

and establish the most secure links to the Prophet. A liar, a forgetful person or a break in the isnād could thus weaken the reliability of a ḥadīth.

Finally, the third tier consisted of demanding corroboration for ḥadīths being circulated among the network of ḥadīth transmitters that spread from Yemen to Transoxiana. Even though a ḥadīth narration might possess a sound isnād, it was considered unreliable if only one out of several students of a famous transmitter reported it from him. Reports that either conflicted with others similar to them or lacked corroboration were deemed likely errors. A genre of books identifying these ʿilal (flaws) thus arose with the work of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī and Ibn Ḥanbal.

Although such scholars applied these three tiers of criticism to their corpora of ḥadīths, they did not dispense with weaker material or require a report to be sound (ṣaḥīḥ) in order to function in deriving laws. Ibn Ḥanbal’s massive Musnad of approximately thirty thousand ḥadīths represented a lifetime of collection and review, with the compiler adding or removing reports as he became aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Ibn Ḥanbal himself, however, admitted that his collection contained weak ḥadīths. ¹⁰ As he

¹⁰ Ibn Ḥanbal is reported as saying that none of the twenty-eight narrations of the famous ḥadīth in which the Prophet tells ʿAmmār b. Yāsir that he will be killed by the rebellious party (al-fiʿa al-bāghiya, i.e. Muʿāwiya), several of which he includes in his Musnad, are correct; see Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), al-Muntakhab min al-ʿilāl li l-Khallāl, ed. Abū Muʿādh Ṭāriq b. ʿAwād Allāh (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1419/1997), 222; for a famous Ḥanbalī’s rebuttal of this attribution to Ibn Ḥanbal, see Ibn Ṣalāh, Fatḥ al-bārī, ed. Māhмūd Shaʿbān ʿAbd al-Maqṣūd et al. (Medina: Maktubat al-Gharāba al-Athariyya, 1417/1996), 3:310. For a more general statement on this from a later ḥadīth scholar, see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrāzūrī, Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ wa Maḥāsin al-ʾiqṣīlāh, ed. ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Rahmān (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1411/1990), 286.
declared, he readily employed these lackluster hadiths in situations where no stronger reports could be found.\footnote{Ibn Hanbal is quoted by later scholars as saying that “if we are narrating [hadiths] about prohibition or permissibility (aḥālāl wa aḥārām) we are strict, but if we are narrating them in matters of the virtues [of the early community] and similar matters, we are lax”; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 

\section*{III.3. The \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} Movement and the Bifurcation of the Ḥadīth Tradition}

Two of Ibn Ḥanbal’s students, however, found such latitude in the use of weak hadiths unnecessary. Muḥammad b. ʿIsmāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875) were the first to produce \textit{muṣannaf} collections devoted only to hadiths they felt met the requirements of authenticity (ṣiḥḥa). Their books were the first wave of what Muhammad Abd al-Rauf terms “the ṣaḥīḥ movement.”\footnote{Muhammad Abd al-Rauf, \textit{Ḥadīth Literature}, 274.} Unlike Ibn Ḥanbal, Muslim felt that there were enough ṣaḥīḥ hadiths in circulation that transmission-based scholars could dispense with less worthy narrations in elaborating Islamic law and doctrine.\footnote{Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim} (Cairo: Maṭba‘at wa Maṭba‘at Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣubayḥ, [1963]), 1:22. Al-Bukhārī is also quoted as rejecting the use of non-ṣaḥīḥ hadiths in issues of prohibition (tahlīl wa tahārīm); Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr, \textit{Tanqīḥ al-anzār fi ma‘rifat ʿulūm al-āthār}, ed. Muḥammad Subhī b. Ḥasan Ḥallāq (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1420/1999), 72.} Such thinking represented a new stage in the critical study of hadith but continued the transmission-based legal strain in Islamic scholarly culture. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim made the authenticity always prized by hadith scholars paramount in their books, but the works themselves were still \textit{muṣannafs} designed for use as comprehensive legal and doctrinal references.
This notion of legal and ritual utility strongly influenced other scholars who soon followed in al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s footsteps. Their students and colleagues Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888), Muḥammad b. ’Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and Aḥmad b. Shu’ayb al-Nasā’ī (d. 303/915),14 as well as Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah (d. 273/886), aimed at providing collections of ḥadīths that combined this utility with high standards of authenticity. These collections nonetheless did feature reports that their authors acknowledged as weak but included either because they were widely used among jurists or because they, like Ibn Ḥanbal, could find no saḥīḥ ḥadīth addressing that particular topic.15 Sa’īd b. ’Uthmān Ibn al-Sakān (d. 353/964), who lived mostly in Egypt, also collected a small saḥīḥ book consisting of ḥadīths necessary for legal rulings and whose authenticity he claimed was agreed on by all.16

Other contemporaries of al-Bukhārī and Muslim adhered more to the requirement of authenticity than to legal utility. Muḥammad b. Ishaq Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923), an early pivot of the Shafi’ī school who both studied with and transmitted ḥadīths to al-

14 There is some doubt as to whether al-Nasā’ī studied with al-Bukhārī, with scholars such as al-Nawawī affirming this while al-Dhahabī said that al-Nasā’ī never transmitted from al-Bukhārī; see al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-islām wa waqayāt al-mashāhīr wa al-a‘lām, ed. Bashshār Awwād Ma’rūf, Shu’ayb al-Arnā’ūt and Shāhīd Mahfūz ‘Abbās (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1988-present), 19:241.


Bukhārī and Muslim, compiled a sahih work he entitled *Mukhtasār al-mukhtasār min al-musnad al-sahiḥ 'an al-nabi* (The Abridged Abridgement of the *Sahiḥ Musnad* from the Prophet).\(^{17}\) Abū Ḥāṣṣ 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Bujayrī of Samarqand (d. 311/924) produced a collection called *al-Jāmiʿ al-sahiḥ*.\(^{18}\) Even the famous historian and exegete Muḥammad b. Jaʿrār al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) attempted a gigantic sahih musnad called *Kitāb tahdhib al-āthār*, but died before he finished it.\(^{19}\) Ibn Ḥibbān al-Busīrī’s (d. 354/965) massive sahih has been highly esteemed by Muslim scholars and is usually considered the last installment in the sahih movement (though three sahih works were evidently produced in the fifth/eleventh century).\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) It is difficult to determine whether or not these works were actually collections devoted to authentic hadiths or just utilized the word sahih in the title. Abū al-Qāsim ‘Āli b. al-Muḥṣīsīn al-Tānūkī (d. 407/1016), a Shiite hadith scholar, evidently had a sahih. Ibn Ḥazm had a book called *al-Jāmiʿ fi sahiḥ al-ḥadīth bi-iktīṣār al-āsānīd*, and Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Ahmad al-Kūkhmaythī (?) (d. 491/1098) wrote book of 800 juz’i s called *Bahr al-āsānīd fi sahiḥ al-masānīd* that was never studied; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyyar al-aṭām al-nubalā‘*, ed. Shu’ayb al-Ārāfī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1982), 17:650; idem, *Tadhkīrat al-huffāẓ*, 3:230 and 4:21.
Although the *sahih* movement seems a natural progression of the collection and criticism of Prophetic ḥadīths, it possessed an inherent elitism and a definitiveness that clashed with underlying characteristics of ḥadīth transmission in the Muslim community. Since the early days of Islam, the transmission of ḥadīths was a means for everyday Muslims to bind themselves to the inspirational authority of the Prophet and incorporate his charisma into their lives. Like all early Muslim scholarship, the collection and study of ḥadīths was not the product of institutions of learning; it was undertaken by devout individuals whose eventual knowledge and pious allure earned them positions of respect and authority in their communities. In the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, however, a new perspective emerged in Muslim society. A self-aware scholarly and educated class (*al-khāṣṣa*) appeared which began distinguishing itself from the masses (*al-ṣāmma*). The great legal theorist Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819-20) thus divided knowledge of Islamic law and ritual into that which is demanded of the masses (*ṣāmm*) and that which is the purview of the scholars (*khāṣṣ*). This bifurcation between plebeians and specialists also appears in the introduction to Muslim’s *Ṣahih* collection. Just as al-Shāfiʿī articulates the domain and duties of a scholarly elite, so does Muslim urge a specialized corps of ḥadīth scholars to study the sunna and guide the regular folk, who should not concern themselves with amassing ḥadīths beyond a few authentic

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21 For the function of Prophetic ḥadīth as a relic of the Prophet, see Eerik Dickenson, “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrāzūrī and the Isnād,” 481-505.

22 This did not mean that one could not earn money studying ḥadīth. Some scholars asked fees for narrating ḥadīths, but this was the subject of much controversy in the scholarly community.

reports. Abū Dāwūd al-Sījistānī evinces the same legal paternalism in a letter to the scholars of Mecca explaining the content and structure of his Sunan. He may not, he explains, alert the reader to all the weaknesses of a ḥadīth because “it would be harmful to the masses (al-ʿāmma)” to reveal such minor flaws to them. This might undermine their faith in the report’s legal applicability.24

Furthermore, for Muslim and Abū Dāwūd, their authentic collections provided all the legal and ritual knowledge an ordinary Muslim required. Abū Dāwūd states confidently that he knows of “nothing after the Qur’ān more essential for people to learn than this book [his Sunan], and a person would suffer no loss if he did not take in any more knowledge (an lā yaktuba min al-ʿilm) after this book.”25 If the masses of Muslims should leave the collection and criticism of ḥadīths to a class of specialists, and this elite had now provided them with definitive references, what use were the activities of other ḥadīth scholars?

This elitism and definitiveness was therefore not directed simply at the Muslim masses. It also addressed the bulk of more serious ḥadīth collectors, whose laxity in criticism and irresponsible leadership had motivated Muslim to write his Sahīh in the first place. He believed that many of those scholars who strove to collect as many ḥadīths as possible regardless of their quality were doing so only to win the acclaim of the masses, who would express in awe, “How numerous are the ḥadīths so and so has collected!”26


26 Muslim, Sahīh, 1:22.
the introduction to his Ṣahīḥ, Muslim expresses serious concern over those who claim to be ḥadīth scholars transmitting material of dubious nature to the exclusion of well-known and well-authenticated ḥadīths. They provide this material to the common people and thus mislead them in their faith. It is this fact, he says, that has made him feel comfortable about producing a work restricted to only authentic material.²⁷ It is in fact the duty of those who understand the science of ḥadīth to leave the common folk with trustworthy reports only. To do otherwise would be a sin (āthim), for the masses would believe and act on these ḥadīths.²⁸

The Ṣahīḥ movement therefore entailed a departure from the mainstream transmission-based scholars and from the masses whose amateur ḥadīth collection was a means of tying themselves to their Prophet. In fact, there were some who opposed the very notion of criticizing isnāds and the narrators who comprised them. Muslim addresses his Kitāb al-tamyīz (Book of Distinguishing) to someone who had been censured for distinguishing between Ṣahīḥ and incorrect ḥadīths, or asserting that “so and so has erred in his narration of a ḥadīth.” Muslim explains that these skeptics accuse those who attempt to distinguish between correct and incorrect narrations of “slander ing the righteous forefathers (al-ṣāliḥīn min al-salaf al-mādīn)” and “raising accusations (mutakharris) in things of which they have no knowledge, making claims to knowledge of the unknown (ghayb) which they cannot attain.”²⁹

²⁷ Muslim, Ṣahīḥ, 1:6.
²⁸ Muslim, Ṣahīḥ, 1:22.
Such a rejection of the *sahih* movement’s ethos is extreme, but it differs only in degree from the practice of traditionists like Ibn Ḥanbal. Reports traced back to the Prophet, bearing his name and conveying his authority, were *prima facie* compelling.30 Not even a problematic *isnād* to such a figure could undermine the authority he commanded. Even in legal issues, scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal and Abū Dāwūd depended on weak or mediocre ḥadīths, and such ḥadīths were indispensable in fields like the history of the Prophet’s campaigns, contextualizing Qur’ānic verses or recounting the virtues of the Prophet’s Companions.31

From a modern perspective it seems difficult to understand why the study or legal use of ḥadīths did not culminate naturally with the *sahih* movement. Why would scholars elaborating law and doctrine they considered rooted in revelation rely on questionable reports when they now had purely authentic collections at their disposal? Answering this question a century after the *sahih* movement, the seminal systematizer of the ḥadīth tradition, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014), explained that using ḥadīths with problematic *isnāds* to interpret law was an established practice going back as far as the great legal scholar Abū Ḥanīfa. If the early Muslims had acted on a report from the Prophet, for example, then the fact that later ḥadīth critics could not find a strong *isnād* for the report should not affect its legal reliability – practice had already proven its authenticity. Furthermore, different ḥadīth critics employed different criteria for


authenticity; just because one strict scholar considered a narration weak does not mean that a less demanding legal scholar might not find it acceptable.32

III.4. The Continuity of the Living Isnād

The sahih movement thus marks a bifurcation in hadith literature. In the wake of the sahih collections, particularly the works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the study of hadith would diverge into two parallel streams that would clash and interact as the centuries progressed. Their relationship with one another would remain one of tension, sometimes complementary and sometimes destructive, between the transmission of individual hadiths through living isnāds back to the Prophet and the definitive and institutional power acquired by authentic hadith collections. The canonical destiny of the Sahihayn, the two works that inaugurated and epitomized the sahih movement, will be discussed in the following chapters. Here at the genesis of the Sahihayn, however, we must not allow the canonical status these works would acquire to distract us from their powerful alter-ego in the hadith tradition: the continuity of hadith transmission through the living isnād.

The hadith tradition from which the Sahihayn emerged remained preoccupied with the continued transmission of hadiths through personal study long after al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The strong legal and pietistic attachment to the living isnād of transmitters back to the Prophet continued to drive the hadith tradition, and both the oral transmission of hadiths and the compilation of major non-sahih works continued unabated. Scholars

32 It is important to note that such weak hadiths were problematic from the standpoint of hadith scholars, not for Abū Ḥanīfa; al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā maʿrifat kitāb al-ikkil, 66-8.
with strong affiliation to legal schools such as the Shāfi‘ī Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) compiled ḥadīth collections supporting their madhhab’s positions. His massive al-Sunan al-kubrā represents a landmark in the Shāfi‘ī legal school, supporting its detailed case law with a myriad of reports from the Prophet and his Companions.

During the fourth/tenth century several Ḥanafi scholars produced musnad collections of the ḥadīths used by Abū Ḥanīfa and his students. Even non-Ḥanafis like Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) participated in efforts to find chains going back to the Prophet for Abū Ḥanīfa’s reports.33 The Mālikī scholar Ibn al-Jabbāb (d. 322/934) even created a musnad version of the muṣannaf-style Mawwatta’.34

The personal collection of ḥadīths expanded after and even despite the sahiḥ movement, with ḥadīth collectors amassing titanic works in the fourth/tenth century. Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) of Isfahan compiled a huge collection, his Muḥjam al-kabīr, that amounted to two hundred juz’s.35 His pride lay in gathering rare ḥadīths found nowhere else as well as their relatively short isnāds. Authenticity was not one of his concerns.36 ‘Alī b. Ḥarshād of Naysābūr (d. 338/950) produced a personal musnad twice as large as al-Ṭabarānī’s, and al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Māsarjīsī of

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33 See Fuat Sezgin, Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, 1:414-6.
34 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 3:25.
35 A juz’ seems to have been a fascicule of about 20 folios. To contextualize what this meant in terms of size, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mīzzi’s (d. 741/1341) well-known biographical dictionary of ḥadīth transmitters Tahdhib al-kamāl, whose present-day published form consists of thirty-five volumes and occupies two library shelves, was 250 juz’s; see al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 4:194; Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, al-Muḥjam al-kabīr, ed. Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Salāfi, 25 vols. ([Baghdad]: Wizarat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu‘ūn al-Dimiyya, [1978-]).
Naysärbur (d. 365/976) compiled a *musnad* of an astounding one thousand three hundred *juz’s*.\(^{37}\)

Even as late as the sixth/twelfth century, for some it was the continued transmission of ḥadīths through living *isnāds*, not the study of existing ḥadīth collections, that defined the *muḥaddith*. In his history of his native Bayhaq and its prominent citizens, for example, Ibn Funduq ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1169-70) states that “a ḥadīth from the Prophet (ṣ) will be given for each of the scholars and *imāms* of ḥadīth.”\(^{38}\) Even in very brief entries, Ibn Funduq does indeed provide a narration of a ḥadīth that goes directly back to the Prophet for almost all the scholars he details. His focus on living *isnāds* for individual ḥadīths dominates his *Tārīkh-e Bayhaq*; in a history a great part of which is devoted to ḥadīth scholars, he only once mentions an actual ḥadīth collection: the *Sunan al-kubrā* of the city’s towering native doyen, Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī.\(^{39}\) We know that many of the scholars featured in *Tārīkh-e Bayhaq*, including Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, heard and mastered major ḥadīth collections such as the *Ṣaḥīḥhayn*. Yet so dominant is the role of personal transmission from the Prophet in the worldview of Ibn Funduq that the study or communication of such ḥadīth books goes undocumented. Soon after Ibn Funduq, however, in the early seventh/thirteenth century, producing compilations consisting of ḥadīths whose *isnāds* extended back to the Prophet generally ceased and scholarly energy was devoted to studying existing collections.

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These living isnāds had flourished for so long, however, because they carried significant pietistic weight due to both their Prophetic origin and their ability to trace Muḥammad’s authority outward through the venerated heirs to his legacy. The staunchly orthodox seventh/thirteenth-century Sufi `Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) began most of the chapters of his popular manual on Sufism, ‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif, with ḥadīths whose isnāds extend from him to the Prophet. Many of these chains reach the Prophet through major figures in the Sufi tradition, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī.⁴⁰

This is not to suggest that books played no role in the continuation of living isnāds. A ḥadīth scholar’s book could simply serve as a vehicle for passing on his transmitted material. Ḥadīth collections like al-Bukhārī’s Saḥīḥ or Mālik’s Muwatta’ were transmitted from teacher to student in the same manner as individual ḥadīths. For ḥadīth scholars, any referral to such books was contingent upon hearing them from a chain of transmitters back to the author. A book could not simply be taken off the shelf and used. Like a single report, only a student copying a text in the presence of his teacher could protect against the vagaries and errors of transmission.⁴¹ Furthermore, for ḥadīth

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⁴¹Abū Bakr Ahmad b. Mālik al-Qaṣīrī (d. 368/979), who was the principal transmitter of Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad from his son ‘Abdallāh, was severely criticized for transmitting one of Ibn Ḥanbal’s books from a copy which he had not heard directly from his teacher. Although al-Qaṣīrī had in fact heard this book previously, the copy he had used was destroyed in a flood, leaving him with only the other copy. This case demonstrates the sensitivity of ḥadīth scholars to the question of aural transmission (ṣamā‘); even a respected scholar who had actually heard a book from his teacher could be criticized for relying on another copy of that same book if he had not received ṣamā‘ for that copy; al-Khaṭīb, Tarīkh Baghdād, 4:293-4. Another fourth/tenth-century scholar, the Ḥanbalī Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997), was also criticized for poor ṣamā‘ practices. A scholar who had received Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghawi’s (d. 317/929-30) Muṣjam al-sahāba through Ibn Baṭṭa refused to grant any ḥadīths he found in that book a saḥīḥ rating because Ibn Baṭṭa’s isnād to the book’s author was broken. This demonstrates the continuity between the isnāds in a
scholars this act of becoming part of the text’s isnād to the author is what rendered the
book legally compelling. Speaking from this transmission-based perspective, Abū Bakr
Muḥammad b. Khayr al-Ishbīlī (d. 575/1179) said that no one could introduce a statement
with the formula “the Prophet said...” without possessing some personal chain of
transmission back to the Prophet for that report. Scholars like al-Qushayrī and al-
Iṣbahānī, through whom al-Suhrawardī linked himself by isnād back to the Prophet, had
set their ḥadīths down in book-form. The religious capital gained by providing living
islāmīn for ḥadīths transmitted through them, however, proved more compelling to al-
Suhrawardī than simply citing their books.

The tension between this centrality of living transmission for ḥadīth books and the
emerging independent authority of the sahih collections had important implications for
the development of legal institutions in the fifth/eleventh century. In this period (and
later on), both jurists and ḥadīth scholars found it necessary to respond to the question,
“If you find a well-authenticated copy of a sahih collection, can you act on or transmit its
contents?” Summarizing the majority opinion of the transmission-based scholars, Majd
al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) states that in the absence of a formal transmission of the
text (samāʿ), one should neither narrate any of the book’s contents to others nor feel

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42 Muḥammad b. Khayr al-Ishbīlī, Fahrasat maw rawahu ‘an shaykhīhi min al-dawāwīn al-
muṣannafa fi durūb al-ʿilm wa anwāʿ al-maʿārif (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, 1963), 17; Ibn al-Wazīr,
Tanjīl al-anzār, 62. On the issue of the orality of knowledge in Islamic civilization and its tension with
the written book, see Bulliet, Islam: The View from the Edge, 13-22; Paul L. Heck, “The Epistemological
Problem of Writing in Islamic Civilization: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s (d. 463/1071) Taqyid al-ʿilm,” Studia
obligated to act on its legal implications. Without transmission, the text simply had no power.

Scholars articulating legal theory (usūl al-fiqh) and the majority of Sunni jurists disagreed totally with this transmission-based stance. Acknowledging the prohibition of the muḥaddithūn, the great Shāfī jurist and theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) asserts that one can utilize a ḥadīth collection even without hearing it through an isnād. Here he follows his teacher Imām al-Ḥaramayn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), who states that if a ḥadīth appears in Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārī one can transmit it, act on it and ask others to do so as well. This opinion concurs with the Mālikī jurist Abū Walīd al-Bājī (d. 474/1081) and the vast majority of jurists and legal theorists. The

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44 Al-Ghazālī qualifies this by demanding that the copy be well-authenticated; Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, al-Mankhul min taqāṣīr al-usūl, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Ḥitī ([Damascus]: n.p., [1970]), 269.


legal utility of the *Sahihayn* as institutions distinct from the continued tradition of hadith transmission will resurface later in discussions of the two works’ canonization.

### III.5. Reality: The Life and Works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim

This study focuses on the perception of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as icons. Yet it is important to understand the historical reality from which the *Sahihayn* romance developed. Because al-Bukhārī and Muslim were eventually canonized, any accurate portrait of them in their own context must depend on the earliest possible sources and on the evidence they themselves left behind. As we will see later in Chapter Seven, it was not until the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century that a canonical culture formed around al-Bukhārī and Muslim. By referring to their own works and consulting early biographies that preceded this shift towards hagiography, we can broadly outline al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s careers as well as the immediate reactions to their work.

Very brief biographies or references to al-Bukhārī and Muslim appear in fourth/tenth century works such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī’s (d. 327/938) *al-Jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl*, Ibn Ḥibbān’s (d. 354/965) *Kitāb al-majrūḥin*, and Ibn al-Nadīm’s (d. after 385/995-8) *al-Fihrist*. More detailed early information for al-Bukhārī’s life and career occurs in sources like Ibn ‘Adī al-Jurjānī’s (d. 365/975-6) two books: *al-Kāmil fi ḍuʿaṭfā* al-rijāl and *Asāmī man rawā ‘anhum Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī min mashāyikhīhi alladhīna dhakarahum fi Jāmiʿihi al-ṣaḥīḥ*. For both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the *Tārīkh Naysābūr* of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014) provides our earliest comprehensive source. Although now lost, this work was quoted at length by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.
463/1071) in his Tārīkh Baghdaḏ and Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) in his Tārīkh al-islām. Fragments of Tārīkh Naysābūr have also survived in an eighth/fourteenth-century abridgement by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Khalīfa (fl. 720/1320).47 But since al-Ḥākim was one of the central figures in the canonization of the Shaykhayn (the ‘two shaykhs,’ an honorific for al-Bukhārī and Muslim), we must be very wary of relying on his work for reconstructing pre-canonical perceptions of the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Unfortunately, he represents the only real source for early information about Muslim in particular. Both Muslim and al-Ḥākim were citizens of Naysābūr, however, and al-Ḥākim’s father met the great traditionist. We may thus feel more comfortable relying on al-Ḥākim in outlining Muslim’s life and work in their native city.

III.6. Reality: al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīb al-Ṣaḥīḥ

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mughīra b. Bardizbēh al-Ju‘fī al-Bukhārī was born in Bukhara in 194/810. His family were wealthy landowners (dehqān), and his great-grandfather had converted to Islam from Zoroastrianism at the hands of Yāmān al-Ju‘fī, the Arab governor of the city.48 Al-Bukhārī himself lived off properties he rented out for monthly or yearly income.49 He started studying ḥadīth at a


49 Al-Dhahabī cites Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥāṣim al-Warrāq, al-Bukhārī’s secretary, as saying that al-Bukhārī had a piece of land that he would rent every year for 700 dirhams. He quotes al-Bukhārī as saying: “I used to acquire (astaghilla) every month 500 dirhams, and I spent it all in the quest for knowledge”; al-
young age, learning from local Bukharan experts, and in his late teens he began writing books on the sayings of the Companions and the Successors. His pilgrimage to Mecca at age sixteen was the beginning of a long career of traveling that took him to study with the most vaunted hadīth scholars of his day. In Khurāsān he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Ishāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in Khurasan he visited Balkh, Merv and Naysābūr, where he studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853). In western Iran he stayed in Rayy and made numerous trips to Baghdad, where he studied with Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. In Basra he heard from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, who would become one of his main teachers, and Abū ‘Aṣīm Ḍāḥhāk al-Nabīl (d. 212/827). He also studied in

Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī reported in his Tārīkh Naysābūr that al-Bukhārī arrived in Naysābūr for the last time in 250/864-5. Later Muslim sources convey the impression that he fairly quickly gained the enmity of Naysābūr’s senior hadīth scholar, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Dhuḥli (d. 258/873), who had him expelled from the city due to his statement that the physical recitation (laft) of the Qur’ān was created. We indeed do know from


51 Ibn ʿAsākir lists al-Bukhārī in his history of Damascus. For more on al-Bukhārī’s teachers, see Fuat Sezgin, Buhārī nin Kaynakları (Istanbul: İbrahim Horoz Başimevi, 1956).

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Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī’s (d. 327/938) al-Jarḥ wa al-ta’dīl, our earliest source on al-Bukhārī, that al-Dhuhī publicly condemned al-Bukhārī for his beliefs about the lafz of the Qur‘ān. Furthermore, our sources are also unanimous that he used this as a pretext to demand al-Bukhārī’s expulsion from Naysābūr.

Early information from al-Ḥākim and Ibn Ṭāhir, however, suggests that the tension between al-Bukhārī and al-Dhuhī was multifaceted and grew over some time. The earliest report mentioning the lafz scandal in detail, given by Ibn Ṭāhir, includes no mention of al-Dhuhī or of al-Bukhārī’s expulsion. It certainly portrays al-Bukhārī falling into disfavor with ḥadīth scholars due to his views on the Qur‘ān, but concludes with him retiring to his residence in Naysābūr, not leaving the city. This is not surprising, as al-Ḥākim states that al-Bukhārī’s last stay in Naysābūr was lengthy, lasting five years.53

Ibn Ṭāhir furnishes another reason for al-Dhuhī’s animosity towards al-Bukhārī. He reports third-hand from al-Dhuhī’s son, Ḥaykān b. Muḥammad al-Dhuhī54 (d. 267/881), that he asked his father, “What is with you and this man – meaning Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl – when you are not one of those from whom he transmits (wa lasta min rijālihi fī al-’ilm)? He said, ‘I saw him in Mecca and he was following Shamkhaḍa, (Ibn Ṭāhir: Shamkhaḍa is a Kufan Qadarite) and when I reached [al-Bukhārī], he said, ‘I entered Mecca and I didn’t know anyone from among the ḥadīth scholars,

53 As cited by al-Dhahabi; al-Dhahabi, Tarīkh al-Islām, 19:250.
54 Khaṣib, Tarīkh Baghdād, 14:220.
while Shamkhāda knew them, so I would follow him so that he would acquaint me with them; so what is the shame in that?"55 Interestingly, with the exception of the encyclopedic Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), Ibn 'Adī’s report appears in none of the later sources.56 There is not even any evidence that Ibn 'Adī’s younger contemporary, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, took it into consideration in his discussion of al-Bukhārī’s relationship with al-Dhuḥlī. Since later apologists for al-Bukhārī never acknowledged it, and it was the lafz scandal and not this accusation which attracted detractors, we have no reason to doubt the provenance and veracity of Ḥaykān’s report. It thus seems likely that the lafz incident was not the immediate cause of al-Dhuḥlī’s dislike for al-Bukhārī or of the latter’s expulsion. It was merely a pretext, the last episode in an aversion that al-Dhuḥlī had developed for al-Bukhārī earlier during his lengthy tenure in Naysābūr.

After his consequent expulsion from Naysābūr, al-Bukhārī returned to his native Bukhara in what would prove the last year of his life. He was soon driven from there as well. The Tāhirid amīr of Bukhara, Khālid b. Aḥmad (coincidentally also surnamed al-Dhuḥlī), entertained many ḥadīth scholars, such as Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwāzī (d. 294/906), as guests at his court.57 He even ordered the ḥadīth scholar Naṣr b. Aḥmad al-Kindī ‘Naṣrak’ (d. 293/905-6) to come to his court and make him a musnad.58 When he requested al-Bukhārī to provide his children with a private reading of the Sahīḥ and the

Tārīkh al-kabīr, the scholar refused to extend the amīr preferential treatment. Using al-Bukhārī’s controversial stance on the Qur’ān, the amīr ordered his expulsion from Bukhara. Tired and intimidated, al-Bukhārī passed through the city of Nasaf before dying in the village of Khartank a few miles from Samarqand.⁵⁹

Al-Bukhārī’s early works consisted of musings on the sayings of the Companions and the Successors. These writings later matured into a much more ambitious project. He began his al-Tārīkh al-kabīr (The Great History) while a young man in Medina. The extant work is a massive biographical dictionary of over 12,300 entries.⁶⁰ He is reported to have revised it at least three times over the course of his life, a fact that Christopher Melchert’s analysis of the Tārīkh corroborates.⁶¹ Al-Bukhārī consistently provides neither full names nor evaluations of the persons in question, focusing instead on locating each subject within the vast network of hadīth transmission. The Tārīkh seems to have no connection to the author’s Ṣaḥīḥ.⁶² Al-Bukhārī produced two smaller dictionaries of hadīth transmitters as well as the much smaller Kitāb al-du‘afā’, a book on weak narrators. In addition, he wrote several smaller topical works, such as his Khalq af‘al al-‘ibād (On the Createdness of Men’s Actions) and Kitāb ra‘al-yadayn fī al-ṣalāt (Book

⁵⁹ J. Robson, “al-Bukhārī,” El.


⁶² Melchert, “Bukhārī and Early Ḥadīth Criticism,” 12.
on Raising One’s Hands in Prayer). There are reports that al-Bukhārī also produced an ʿilal book as well as a large musnad, both now lost.\(^{63}\)

III.6. a. The Ṣaḥīḥ

Al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ, actually titled al-Jāmiʿ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar min umūr Rasūl Allāh wa sunanīhi wa ayyāmihi (The Abridged Authentic Compilation of the Affairs of the Messenger of God, his Sunna and Campaigns),\(^{64}\) was a mammoth expression of his personal method of ḥadīth criticism and legal vision. It covers the full range of legal and ritual topics, but also includes treatments of many other issues such as the implication of technical terms in ḥadīth transmission and the authority of ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīths (reports transmitted by only a few chains of transmission) in law.\(^{65}\) The Ṣaḥīḥ consists of ninety-seven chapters (kitāb), each divided into subchapters (bāb). The subchapter titles indicate the legal implication or ruling the reader should derive from the subsequent ḥadīths, and often include a short comment from the author.\(^{66}\) Such short

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\(^{63}\) Ibn Ḥajar, Hadiy al-sārī, 679.


\(^{65}\) Al-Bukhārī’s Chapter on Transmitted Knowledge (Kitāb al-ʿilm), for example, includes proof for his contention that the two technical phrases in ḥadīth transmission, “akhbaranā” and “ḥaddathanā,” are equivalent in meaning. In his chapter on the permissibility of using ḥādīth ḥadīths in law, he includes a section on how the Prophet and his companions heeded the reports of individual women; see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqālānī, Fath al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbdallāh b. Bāz and Muḥammad Fuʿād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1418/1997), 1:191-2; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-ʿilm, bāb 4; and Fath al-bārī, 13:302, 7267; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb akhbār al-ḥādīd, bāb 6.

legal discussions often feature ḥadīths not naming al-Bukhārī’s immediate source (termed taʿlīq or ḥadīth muʿallaq) or a report from a Companion for elucidation. Al-Bukhārī often repeats a Prophetic tradition, but through different narrations and in separate chapters. Opinions have varied about the exact number of ‘ḥadīths’ in the Ṣaḥīḥ, since between the notion of a ḥadīth as a ‘tradition’ (a saying attributed to the Prophet) and a ‘narration’ (one version of that saying narrated by a specific isnād) the definition of ‘ḥadīth’ can vary widely. Generally, experts have placed the number of full-isnād narrations at 7,397, with Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449) counting a total of 9,082 including all the incomplete isnāds. Of these around 4,000 are repetitions, placing the number of Prophetic traditions between 2,602 (Ibn Ḥajar’s lowest count) and the more widely accepted figure of 3,397-4,000.67

Unlike Muslim, al-Bukhārī provides no methodological introduction to his Ṣaḥīḥ. As we shall see in Chapter Five, later scholars spilled a great deal of ink attempting to reconstruct his requirements (rasm or shurūʿ) for authenticity (ṣiḥḥa) from his Ṣaḥīḥ and al-Tārīkh al-kabīr. With the exception of some statements gleaned from his extant works, however, our understanding of al-Bukhārī’s methods depends totally on either these later analyses or on statements attributed to al-Bukhārī in later sources.68 It is


68 An example of al-Bukhārī revealing his methods would be his statement in Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn that one narration adding a phrase in the main of a ḥadīth (literal main addition) is allowed if the narration is authentic (idhā thabata); al-Bukhārī, Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn fi al-ṣalāt, ed. Bāḍī’ al-Dīn al-Rāshidy (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1416/1996), 131-3.

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generally believed that in his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* followed his teacher ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī in requiring some proof that at each link in the *iḥaddāth* the two transmitters had to have narrated ḥadīth to one another in person at least once. Later scholars like al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā (d. 544/1149) verified this by locating an occurrence of “he narrated to us (ḥaddathana)” between every two transmitters at each link in al-Bukhārī’s *iḥaddāth*.69 This is crucial for *iḥaddāths* where transmission is recorded by the vague phrase “from/according to (*‘an.*)” Unlike the transmission terms “he narrated to us” or “he reported to us (akhbaranā),” “from/according to” could be used by someone who never met the transmitter of the ḥadīth in question. This means that in al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* any *iḥaddāth* with “from (*‘an.*) so and so” in the *iḥaddāth* is theoretically equivalent to “so and so narrated to us directly.”

III.6. b. Legal Identity and Method

Al-Bukhārī’s never explicitly adhered to any of the nascent schools of law, though he was eventually claimed by all four madhhabs. He studied with several

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scholars closely associated with al-Shāfi‘ī, like al-Ḥusayn al-Karābīsī (d. 245/859) and Abū Thawr (d. 240/854). Although al-Bukhārī never narrates ḥadīths through al-Shāfi‘ī, the Shāfi‘ī biographers Abū ‘Āṣim Muḥammad al-‘Abbādī (d. 458/1066) and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) use these scholarly links to tie al-Bukhārī to the school’s founder. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā al-Ḥanbalī (d. 526/1131-2) claims al-Bukhārī was a Ḥanbalī because he transmitted ḥadīths and legal rulings from Ibn Ḥanbal, and some Mālikīs have considered him one of their own because he transmitted the *Muwatta*’. Even later Ḥanafīs claim al-Bukhārī, since they argue that one of his teachers, Ibn Rāhawayh, was Ḥanafī.  

An examination of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣahih*, however, reveals that he was an independent scholar unconstrained by any particular school. In contrast to all four Sunni schools of law, he allows those who have had intercourse during the Ramaḍān fast to expiate their sin by performing charity but does not require them to repeat the day of fasting. In another break with the schools, he allows someone who has had intercourse (*junub*) and not performed ablutions to read the Qur‘ān. He also permits reading the

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72 J. Robson agrees in his entry on al-Bukhārī; see J. Robson, “al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl,” EI².

73 Ḥāshim, *al-Imām al-Bukhārī muḥaddith wa faqīh*, 190-1.
Qur'ān in the bathroom, declares 'umra to be mandatory just like ḥajj, and allows women not to veil themselves (iḥṭiǧāb) in the company of slaves.⁷⁴

Al-Bukhārī obliquely sets forth his legal methodology in what may have originally been a separate work but now constitutes the penultimate chapter of the Ṣaḥīḥ, the Kitāb al-iḥtiṣām biʾl-kitāb wa al-sunna (the Book of Clinging to [God's] Book and the Sunna).⁷⁵ From the author's often detailed subchapter headings and the Prophetic and Companion traditions that he includes, the reader gleans a minimalist approach to law closely tied to the revealed sources. The Prophet has been sent with the totality of guidance to mankind, and adhering to his message is the key to salvation. The precedent in the community, from the time of the first caliph Abū Bakr, is not to deviate from the Prophet's sunna. The next subchapter, however, is entitled "Concerning what is hated about asking too many questions," including a ḥadīth in which the Prophet states that the believer's greatest crime is to inquire about something previously unmentioned and thus cause its prohibition for the whole community.⁷⁶ Al-Bukhārī's opposition to the use of excessive legal reasoning and speculation manifests itself in his subchapters on "the condemnation of raʾy and excessive qiyās (takalluf al-qiyās)" and how the Prophet himself would not answer a question until God had revealed the answer to him.⁷⁷

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⁷⁵ For the tremendous implications of the chapter I am indebted to my friend and colleague Dr. Scott C. Lucas.


Bukhārī does, however, allow limited analogical reasoning based on the Prophet’s answer to a man who had refused to acknowledge a black child to whom his wife had just given birth. The Prophet enlightens the man by asking him rhetorically if his camels are always the same color as their parents.78

In the dichotomy between the *ahl al-hadīth* and the *ahl al-ra’y*, al-Bukhārī clearly identified himself with the transmission-based jurists. In the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, he uses his chapter headings and brief comments to differ on twenty-seven occasions with “a certain person (baḍ al-nās).” Fourteen of these instances occur in a chapter devoted solely to rebutting the use of legal devices (*hiyal*), which were employed predominantly by Ḥanafis to circumvent the literal requirements of their school’s law.79 Al-Bukhārī condemns *hiyal* using the famous hadīth that all deeds are judged by their intention.80 In this al-Bukhārī was following the precedent of tradition-based jurists such as Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn al-

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78 Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, 13:366-7, #7314. This section is entitled *bāb man shabbaha aṣlā* *ma *tūm* bi-aṣlān mubīn wa qad bāyyana al-Nabī (ṣ) hukmahu mā li-yaqīnna al-sā’ī* (He who compares a known basis (*aṣl*) to another clear basis (*aṣl mubīn*), and the Prophet (ṣ) has clarified their ruling so that one can understand).


80 Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, 12:405; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-hiyl, bāb 1*. For a recent discussion of *hiyal* in the Ḥanafi school and Islamic legal thought in general, see Satoe Horii, “Reconsideration of Legal Devices (*hiyal*) in Islamic Jurisprudence: The Ḥanafis and their “Exits” (makhārij),” *Journal of Islamic Law and Society*, 9, no. 3 (2002): 312-357. The author describes how the Ḥanafi tradition used *hiyal* to provide people means by which to escape the more difficult sanctions of law in everyday life. It is also probable, in my opinion, that the emphasis that the early Ḥanafis placed on the formal structure of *qiyyās*, where the ruling must inhere whenever its immediate cause (*illa*) appears, made *hiyal* attractive. They allowed scholars to preserve the logical continuity of the *qiyyās* system while avoiding some of its admittedly unjust or unfairly difficult results; a scholar could maintain the system of *qiyyās* by acknowledging that the ruling inhere in the case, but then use a *hilā* to deal more justly with it. The two manners in which *hiyal* were misunderstood by their opponents, that they were a means to cheat God’s law or that they represented inappropriate rational gymnastics, would both have offended al-Bukhārī.
Mubarak (d. 181/797), who vehemently rejected the use of *hiyal*.

Since the positions he rejects are associated with the Ḥanafi school, it seems almost certain that al-Bukhārī was referring to Abū Ḥanīfa. Al-Bukhārī, for example, disagrees with the well-known Ḥanafi laxity on defining intoxicants. Al-Bukhārī considers *tilā*′ (reduced grape juice) to be a type of wine (*nabīdhi*), while Ḥanafis do not.82

Outside his *Ṣaḥiḥ*, however, al-Bukhārī’s disagreement with Abū Ḥanīfa and the *ahl al-ra’y* in general manifests itself in virulent contempt. He introduces his *Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn fi al-ṣalāt* as “a rebuttal of he (man) who rejected raising the hands to the head before bowing” in prayer and “misleads the non-Arabs on this issue (abḥama ‘alā al-ʿajam fi dhālīka)... turning his back on the sunna of the Prophet and those who have followed him....” He did this “out of the constrictive rancor (*haraja*) of his heart, breaking with the practice (*sunan*) of the Messenger of God (s), disparaging what he transmitted out of arrogance and enmity for the people of the *sunan*; for heretical innovation in religion (*bid’a*) had tarnished his flesh, bones and mind and made him revel in the non-Arabs’ deluded celebration of him.”83 The object of this derision becomes clear later in the text, when al-Bukhārī includes a report of Ibn al-Mubārak praying with Abū Ḥanīfa (whom he calls by his first name and patronym, Nuʿmān b. Thābit). When

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83 Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn fi al-ṣalāt*, 20. This virulence is totally absent in Bukhārī’s chapters on this issue in his *Ṣaḥiḥ*; see Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, 2:277-84. Note that the above-mentioned edition of this text contains an error on this page; the editor read as “mustahiqqam” what can only be “mustakhiff.”
Ibn al-Mubārak raises his hands a second time before bowing, Abū Ḥanīfa asks sarcastically, “Aren’t you afraid you’ll fly away? (mā ḥaṣṣīta an ṭaṭīra?),” to which Ibn al-Mubārak replies, “I didn’t fly away the first time so I won’t the second.”

III.6. c. Al-Bukhārī and the Controversy over the Created Wording of the Qurʾān

In light of al-Bukhārī’s strong identification with the ahl al-hadīth, it seems difficult to believe that radical members of that camp ostracized him for his stance on the Qurʾān. The issue of the createdness of the Qurʾān had begun in the early Abbasid period, when a group of Muslim rationalists that the transmission-based scholars and later Sunni orthodoxy would refer to as the Jahmiyya began asserting that God did not speak in the anthropomorphic sense of the word, for this would necessitate Him having organs of speech. Since this would belittle a power beyond the scope of human comparison, they said that the Qurʾān and other instances of God’s speech (such as His speaking to Moses) were sounds that He created in order to convey His will to His domain. These rationalists were similarly opposed to other manifestations of anthropomorphism, such as the notion that God could be seen by the believers on the Day of Judgment or that He

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could sit on a throne or descend to the lowest heavens at night. They also rejected ideas equally incompatible with a rationalist demeanor, like the punishment of the grave (‘adḥāb al-qabr).

Muslims who believed that the community should rely on the literal revelation received from the Prophet and his interpretation of the Qur’ān as preserved in the sunna of the early Muslim community, however, saw this rationalist movement as an attack on the textual authenticity of Islam. These traditionalists, who believed that one should not discuss these issues speculatively, opposed all instances of what they saw as the rationalist denial of God’s attributes (ta.‘īf). Relying on the text of the Qur’ān, ḥadīths and the stances of prominent members of the early community, books such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s al-Radd ‘alā al-zanādiqa wa al-jahmiyya (Refutation of the Heretics and the Jahmiyya) asserted that God did in fact speak, that the Qur’ān was one of His uncreated attributes, that He did mount His throne and that the believers would receive the beatific vision.

The traditionalists’ objections were not simply academic; they equated the assertion that the Qur’ān was created with calling God Himself created. Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān asked rhetorically of those who said the Qur’ān is created, “How do you create (taṣna ‘ān) [the Qur’ānic verses] ‘say He is the One God (qu’ huwa Allah ʾahad; Qur’ān 112:1),’ how do you create ‘indeed I am Allāh, there is no deity besides Me (innanī anā...”

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86 There is some indication that the third caliph to preside over the miḥna, al-Wāthiq, added a denial of the beatific vision to the agenda of the inquisition; Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal, 143.

Moreover, the Qur’ān had become a bulwark of social capital in the emerging civilization of Islam. When a famous Ḥanafī judge, ʿĪsā b. Abān (d. 221/836), who upheld the createdness of the Qur’ān, was presiding over a dispute between a Muslim and a Jew, he asked the Muslim to swear “By God besides whom there is no other deity (wa’llāh alladhī lā ilāha illā huwa).” His opponent objected, demanding that the judge make him swear by the real Creator, since these words were in the Qur’ān, which Muslims claimed was created. The circulation of this story among traditionalists indicates that they felt that a belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān threatened its paramount role in society.

In the early third/ninth century, however, the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833) instituted a purge of these traditionalist beliefs from the empire’s corps of judges. His Inquisition (miḥna) was directed at those people who claimed to be the upholders of the Prophet’s sunna and defenders of the community’s unified identity, but, he claimed, were in reality demeaning God’s greatness by putting the Qur’ān on par with His essence. The rationalists behind this movement, including many of the Ḥanafī judges of Baghdad and Samarra, rejected the idea upheld by the traditionalists that the Qur’ān was co-external with God, for that would mean that God was not the only eternal being.

Many of these rationalists were primarily concerned with polemics against Christian

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scholars who attempted to corner Muslims into accepting the divine nature of Christ by comparing him with the Qurʾān. If God states in the Qurʾān that Jesus is the Word of God, just like the holy book itself, and that book is uncreated and co-eternal with God, then is Jesus not also co-eternal with God? Is it so absurd, then, to believe that in the beginning he was the Word, and that the Word was with God? In addition to rejecting the anthropomorphic claim that God spoke in the literal sense, these rationalists thus also insisted that the Qurʾān was created (muhdath) as opposed to being an eternal attribute (qadīm) of God.

The grueling torture, imprisonment or humiliation of prominent and widely respected ḥadīth scholars such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn and ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī in the Baghdad Mīḥna left an enduring and bitter impression on the ḥadīth scholar community. Although al-Maʿmūn and his two successors’ inquisition did not have as powerful a presence in Khurāsān and Transoxiana, it had increased the enmity between the ahl al-ḥadīth scholars and the Jahmī/Muʿtazilī/Hanafī rationalists who had prosecuted it. During the lifetime of al-Bukhārī and Muslim and in the decades after their deaths, the question of the nature of the Qurʾān in particular remained a touchstone for the resentment built up between these groups. In Iraq, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/890) wrote al-Ikhtilāfī al-lafz wa al-radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha (Disagreement over

91 Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal, 64; Madelung, “The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran,” 517. Madelung believes that the Muslim rationalist argument that the traditionalists were unintentionally abetting their Christian adversaries was more of an excuse for their attacks on the ahl al-ḥadīth. Muhammad Abū Zahra, however, holds that the Muʿtazila and al-Maʿmūn were in fact sincerely concerned with defending Islamic doctrine from Christian and other rationalist opponents. There is also an interesting story about the distinction between muḥdath (created) and qadīm (eternal) being integral to an interfaith discussion between Hārūn al-Rāshīd and the sovereign of India; see Ibn Ḥajar, Fath al-bārī, 13:340.
the Lafi and the Rebuttal of the Jahmiyya and the Anthropomorphists),92 and Ibn Abî Ḥātim also wrote a book refuting the Jahmiyya.93 Even as late a scholar as al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) wrote a book condemning those espousing a belief in the created Qurʾān.94 In Naysābūr, when someone who upheld the createdness of the Qurʾān arrived in town, the ḥadīth scholar Abû al-ʿAbbās al-Sarrāj (d. 313/925) ordered the people in the market to curse him, and they complied.95

The tremendous tension surrounding this issue led the most conservative section of the traditionalists to declare anathema anyone who asserted that the wording of the Qurʾān (lafi), the physical sound of the book being recited or its written form on a page, was created. This most intolerant end of the traditionalist spectrum, what George Makdisi called "ultra-conservatives,"96 included the standard portrayal of Abī b. Ḥanbal, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn al-Akhram (d. 301/913-4), Muḥammad b. Yahyā al-Duhlí of Naysābūr and others. These über-Sunnis repudiated any traditionists who did not declare that the Qurʾān was God’s eternal speech and utterly increate. Those who simply proclaimed that the Qurʾān was God’s speech and then were silent, even those who collapsed under the weight of the Inquisition such as ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, were dubbed

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92 Al-Bukhārī is not mentioned in this book, although Ibn Ḥanbal is; see Ibn Qutayba, al-Ikhtilāf fi al-laft wa al-radd ‘alā al-jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawthārī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Saʿāda, 1349/[1930]).

93 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:34.


95 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 2:215.

“Those who stopped short (wāqifīyya)” and often equated with Jahmīṣ. 97 As Christopher Melchert observes, the über-Sunnis saw them as doubly dangerous because they were “self-proclaimed traditionalists” who identified themselves with the ahl al-hadīth/ahl al-sunna camp. The über-Sunnis thus reserved some of their fiercest diatribe for these folk. 98 Melchert has astutely identified this group between the über-Sunnis and their rationalist adversaries, dubbing them “the semi-rationalists.” He includes a diverse selection of scholarly figures, from al-Shāfi‘ī’s most famous disciple, al-Muzanī, to the great historian and exegete al-Ṭabarī. 99 The identifying characteristic of what Melchert admits is a loosely-knit group is their belief that the lafz of the Qur’ān is created. He includes al-Bukhārī in this number because he upheld this stance.

Yet it is not very accurate to employ the term “rationalist” in any sense when describing al-Bukhārī, since he was a diehard traditionalist. Rather, we should view him

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99 Melchert’s evidence for al-Ṭabarī’s stance on this issue (see Ibn Hajar, Lisān al-miṣrān (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Maṣāri‘ al-Uthmānīyya, 1330/[1912]), 3:295 [biography of Abū Dāwūd al-Siṣīṣtānī]) is meager (as Melchert himself admits elsewhere, the charge “looks anachronistic”). In his al-Ṭabarī fi ma‘ālim al-dīn, al-Ṭabarī cleverly avoids discussing the issue of the lafz of the Qur’ān. He explicitly states that the Qur’ān is neither created nor a creator — the aḥl al-hadīth position — supporting his stance with a long logical argument. On the issue of the lafz of the Qur’ān, however, al-Ṭabarī refers the reader to his discussion of the acts of humans (ṣīf al-‘ibād). In this discussion, he rejects the Qadari and Jahmīṣ position (the latter that men have no control over their acts) and embraces the third position, that of the jamāhīr aḥl al-ithbāt (the majority of those who affirm God’s power over destiny), namely that God guides those destined for faith to faith and vice versa. He does not clearly state, however, whether or not men’s acts are created. His exact position on the lafz issue thus remains unclear. See al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭabarī fi ma‘ālim al-dīn, ed. ‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Shībī (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āṣima, 1416/1996); 167-76, 200-5; cf. Melchert, “The Adversaries of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal,” 245-7; idem, The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th and 10th Centuries C.E (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 195.
as a representative of Ibn Ḥanbal’s original traditionalist school who fell victim to its most radical wing. Indeed, al-Bukhārī’s *Khalq afʿāl al-ʾibād* constitutes the earliest representation of the position taken by Ibn Ḥanbal, a figure often co-opted by later groups to legitimize their stances. Al-Bukhārī wrote this work within years of Ibn Ḥanbal’s death in 241/855, and he incisively identified the polemical circus that had already grown up around Ibn Ḥanbal’s persona:

And as for the two sects [of the rationalists and ḥadīth scholars] that claim proof for themselves from Aḥmad, many of their reports [from him] are not reliable. Perhaps they have not understood the precise subtlety of his stance (*diqqat madhhabihī*). It is known that Aḥmad and all the people of knowledge hold that God’s speech is uncreated and that all other speech is created. Indeed they hated discussing and investigating obscure issues, and they avoided the people of dialectical theology (*kalām*), speculation (*al-khwād*) and disputation (*tankūz*) except on issues in which they had [textual] knowledge. Al-Bukhārī’s allegiance to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* camp and Ibn Ḥanbal himself is thus obvious. He even quotes Ibn Ḥanbal as evidence for his position on the *laft*. Melchert admits that the semi-rationalists were a diverse group, but it seems more accurate to group al-Bukhārī with the traditionalist camp of Ibn Ḥanbal than with al-

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100 Ibn Ḥanbal’s role as a figure on which different schools of thought have projected their particular stances is well known. Ibn Ḥanbal is most famous for stating that “he who says my wording of the Qurʾān is created is *Jahmi*, and he who says it is not created is guilty of *bidʿa*.” Another, less likely, report through Ibn Ḥanbal’s student Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī tells of someone asking Ibn Ḥanbal about a group of people who say that “our wording of the Qurʾān is created.” He replied, “The slave approaches God through the Qurʾān by five means, in which [the Qurʾān] is not created: memorizing in the heart, reading by the tongue, hearing by the ear, seeing with the eye, and writing by the hand. The heart is created and what it memorizes is not; the reading (*tāliwa*) is created but what is read is not; hearing is created but what is heard is not; sight is created but what is seen is not; and writing is created but what is written is not”; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Mukhtaṣar al-ṣawāʾiq al-mursala*, 2:313-4; for another example of attributions to Ibn Ḥanbal, see Zayn al-Dīn al-ʻIrāqī, *al-Ṭayyīd wa al-ʻišāh li-mā ʿulīqa wa ʿughliqa min Muqaddimāt Ibn al-Ṣalāh*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh Shāhīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya, 1420/1999), 205.


Tabari, whose explanation of why the Qur'an is uncreated consists of several pages of logic discussing accidents and whether or not speech can inhere in the essence (dhāt) of a thing. Also, Melchert's description of the semi-rationalists as "insinuating the tools of the rationalists into traditionalist practice" would hardly place al-Bukhari in the environs of the rationalist camp. None of al-Bukhari's extant works employ Islamicate logic or the philosophical jargon found in al-Tabari's discussion. 103

It is more accurate to describe al-Bukhari as a conservative traditionalist trying to navigate the contradictions inherent in the blunt ahl al-sunna creed touted by the über-Sunnis like al-Dhuhili. Al-Bukhari knew that the Qur'an was God's uncreated speech, but he also knew that God creates humans' actions, as the ahl al-sunna had insisted in their attacks on the free-will position of their Qadarite opponents. What, then, does one say of the Qur'an when it becomes manifested in a human act such as recitation or writing?

From our earliest sources about al-Bukhari's life, it seems that he was very reluctant to discuss this issue at all. He would understandably have viewed it as speculation (khawf) and thus tried to avoid it. Our earliest substantial source on al-Bukhari, Ibn 'Adi, includes a story he heard from a group of his teachers that tells of al-Bukhari refusing to answer questions about the nature of the Qur'an's wording until

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103 Al-Bukhari's Khalq qf'al al-'ibād is little more than a collection of proof texts from Prophetic hadiths and earlier Muslim authorities, including Ibn Hanbal himself. Only at the very end of his book does al-Bukhari resort to what could be termed dialectics, such as the use of constructions like "if someone says... let it be said to him" or terms like bayān. Often when this work does resort to dialectical arguments, they center on combating his opponents' use of hadiths. See al-Bukhari, Khalq qf'al al-'ibād, 105-6; al-Subki, Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘īyya, 2:229.
absolutely pressed, saying, “The Qur’an is God’s speech, uncreated, and the acts of men are created, and inquisition (imtiḥān) is heresy (bid‘a).”¹⁰⁴

Al-Bukhārī’s defense against the accusations of the über-Sunnis, his Khalq af‘āl al-‘ibād, displays this same caution. The first section of the book is devoted solely to narrations from earlier pious authorities such as Suﬁyān al-Thawrī that affirm the increate nature of the Qur’an and condemn anyone who holds the contrary position as a Jahmī or unbeliever. The second section argues that the acts of men are created, relying on Qur’ānic verses and reports from such vaunted traditionalists as Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān. Al-Bukhārī himself rarely comments, but does assert that men’s actions, voices and writing are created. He then begins introducing narrations from the Prophet that suggest that it is permissible to sell and buy written copies of the Qur’an.¹⁰⁵ Finally, he provides a ḥadīth of the Prophet enjoining Muslims to “beautify the Qur’an with your voices” and a report from ‘Alī b. Abī Talib that there will come a time when nothing remains of the Qur’an except its written form.¹⁰⁶ These reports insinuate that physical manifestations of the Qur’an do indeed belong to the material world. The author then returns to refuting the rationalists, reemphasizing that the belief that human acts are created is not heresy (bid‘a).¹⁰⁷ Only at this point does al-Bukhārī begin actively arguing that the sound of the Qur’an being recited is created.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Adī, Asāmī, 64-5. This story also appeared in al-Ḥakim’s Tārikh Naysābūr, narrated from Ibn ‘Adī. See al-Dhahābi Tārikh al-islām, 19:266.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Bukhārī, Khalq af‘āl al-‘ibād, 59-60.


¹⁰⁷ Al-Bukhārī, Khalq af‘āl al-‘ibād, 102-4.
III.7. Reality: Muslim, the Junior Partner

Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī was born in 206/821 in Naysābūr. He first learned ḥadith from Iṣḥāq b. Rāhawayh and Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Tamīmī (d. 224/839-41) in his hometown before leaving for a pilgrimage to Mecca in 220/835. In the Ḥijāz he heard from ‘Abdallāh b. Maslama al-Qa‘nabī (d. 220-1/835-6), a favorite transmitter of Mālik’s Muwaṭṭa, and others. He later visited Baghdad to hear from Ibn Ḥanbal and also went to Basra. He went to greater Syria, Egypt and Rayy, where he met several times with Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890). A few years before his death he settled in Naysābūr, where he became one of the senior ḥadith scholars in the city and a central figure for study.108 It was there that he studied and became acquainted with al-Bukhārī. Al-Ḥakim al-Naysābūrī, whose father met Muslim, recalls that Muslim’s “place of business (matjar) was Khān Maḥmash,” where his father saw him narrating ḥadiths. Muslim’s livelihood also came from his properties at Ustū which came from “the progeny (a‘qāb) of the females of his family.”109 He died in 261/875 at the age of fifty-five.

Muslim left many more works than his elder contemporary. His most famous, of course, was his Sahih, originally titled al-Musnad al-Sahih.110 Muslim also produced two larger collections, a muṣannaf and a musnad, representing the sum total of the ḥadith


110 This is somewhat misleading, since Muslim’s work is topically organized, not a musnad. Ibn Khayr al-ʾIṣbīlī recorded the full title as al-Musnad al-ṣahih al-mukhtasar min al-sunan bi-naql ʿal-ʿadl ḍan al-ʿadl ḍan rasūl Allāh ﷺ; Abū Ghudda, Taḥqīq ismāy al-Ṣaḥīḥayn, 33-4.
corpus from which he selected his *Sahih*. Ibn al-Jawzî does not believe that anyone ever transmitted this large *musnad* from Muslim.\(^{111}\) He also produced several biographical dictionaries. The largest one, his *Tabaqāt*, simply provides the names of the ḥadīth transmitters in the generations after the Prophet. Other smaller works, such as the *Munfaridāt*, the *Wiḥdān* and the *Dhikr man laysa lahu illā ráwin wāḥid min ruwāt al-ḥadīth*, detail people who lack more than one transmitter from them.\(^{112}\) Like al-Bukhārī and many other ḥadīth masters of his age, Muslim produced a book of criticized narrations (*Kitāb al-ṣilal*) and a work of the same ilk but designed for a more general audience, the *Kitāb al-tamyīz*. This latter work has survived in part, and along with Muslim’s involved introduction to his *Sahih*, provides invaluable information about its author and his leanings.

III.7. a. **Muslim’s Methodology in his *Sahih***

One of the most prominent statements Muslim makes about his methodology is his comparatively lax requirement for ascertaining whether a link in an *isnād* marked by “from/according to (*ʿan*)” actually occurred through personal contact. When “*ʿan*” is used, Muslim does not require affirmative proof that the two transmitters actually met, but rather that they were contemporaries with no “clear indication (*dalāla bayyina*)” that they did not meet. Here Muslim calls upon the example of Mālik, Shuʿba, Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān and ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī, who “only felt compelled to find a guarantee of


\(^{112}\) One such work has been published under the title *al-Munfaridāt wa al-waḥdān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Sulaymān al-Bandārī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʾIlmiyya, 1408/1988).
direct transmission (samā') if the narrator was known to conceal his immediate source
(mudallis).”113 In this Muslim openly breaks with what scholars have determined about
al-Bukhārī and his teacher 'Ali b. al-Madīnī. Muslim acknowledges that there are those
who uphold that position, but he angrily asserts that they lack precedent from earlier
ḥadīth masters.114 The notion that affirming one meeting between two transmitters
somehow assures direct transmission for all their ḥadīths, he states, is absurd. He
provides examples of isnāds where two narrators who had met nonetheless occasionally
transmitted via an intermediary concealed by a “ʿan” link in the isnād.115 Moreover, those
who adhere to this position are unnecessarily dismissing many authentic ḥadīths. “If we
were to count the authentic reports (al-akhbār al-siḥāḥ)…” he says, “that would be
maligning by the claim of this claimant, we would not be able to measure the extent.”116

In his introduction, Muslim divides ḥadīths and their concomitant transmitters
into three groups, stating that he will rely on two of them in his Ṣaḥīḥ. The first consists
of the well-established ḥadīths whose transmitters do not lapse into the “excessive
confusion” (takhkhīs) into which many muḥaddiths stumble. Having exhausted this
group, he will proceed to the reports of transmitters who are not as masterful as the first

113 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:26.

114 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:23, 28. The majority of later commentators assumed that Muslim meant al-
Bukhārī, but Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1374) believes he intended ‘Ali b. al-Madīnī. Several modern Muslim
scholars have also dealt with this question. In his comprehensive treatment of this question in the third
appendix to his edition of al-Dhahabi’s al-Mūqīṣa, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda states that the person in
question cannot be al-Bukhārī. Assuming Muslim wrote his introduction before he completed the book, he
would not even have met al-Bukhārī at the time; he only met his teacher in 250-1 AH when al-Bukhārī
came to Naysībūr; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bā‘ith al-ḥadīth, 45; al-Dhahabi, al-Mūqīṣa fi ʿulūm mustalah al-ḥadīth,

115 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:24-5.

116 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:26.
group but nonetheless “are characterized by pious behavior (satr), honesty and pursuing knowledge.” He will not take reports from the third group, which consists of those who either forge ḥadīths or whose material differs beyond reconciliation with that of superior scholars.\footnote{Muslim, \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ}, 1:4-5.}

Muslim’s \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} contains far fewer chapters than al-Bukhārī’s, with only fifty-four, and lacks al-Bukhārī’s legal commentary. It has many more narrations, numbering about 12,000, with 4,000 repetitions. According to Muslim’s companion ʿAbdul-Malik b. Salama al-Bazzār (d. 286/899), who was with Muslim for fifteen years while he wrote the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ}, this number is based on Muslim’s very isnād-based definition of a ḥadīth. If he had heard the same tradition from two shaykhs, he considered it to be two ḥadīths.\footnote{Al-Dhahabī, \textit{Tārīkh al-islām}, 20:186; Abd al-Rauf, “Ḥadīth Literature,” 275.} Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) places the number of Prophetic traditions in the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} at around 4,000.\footnote{Ibn al-Salālī, \textit{Ṣiyaḥat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}, 101-2.} Unlike al-Bukhārī, Muslim keeps all the narrations of a certain ḥadīth in the same section. Muslim also diverges significantly from al-Bukhārī in his exclusion of Companion ḥadīths and narrations without full isnāds (taʾīqāt) as commentary.\footnote{Scholars have generally counted only 12-14 instances of incomplete isnāds (taʾīqāt) used for commentary in Muslim’s book; cf. Ibn al-Ṣalālī, \textit{Ṣiyaḥat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}, 77.}

Muslim’s \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} overlaps a great deal with that of his teacher al-Bukhārī; according to Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Jawzaqī (d. 388/998), whose book \textit{al-Muttafaq} combined the two books, there are 2,326 common traditions.\footnote{Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ}, ed. Masʿūd ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Saʿdāfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʾIlmiyya, 1414/1994), 69-70. Ibn Ḥajar states that al-Jawzaqī considers the same tradition from 107
scholars drew on essentially the same pool of transmitters, with approximately 2,400 narrators in common.\textsuperscript{122} Al-Bukhārī narrated from only about 430 that Muslim did not, while Muslim used about 620 transmitters al-Bukhārī excluded.\textsuperscript{123}

Scholars have generally devoted much less attention to Muslim’s legal positions, perhaps because his \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} is more simply a ḥadīth book than al-Bukhārī’s legally charged work.\textsuperscript{124} Not only does Muslim’s book cover many fewer legal topics than his teacher’s, his chapters often provide support for both sides of a particular issue. Indeed, he may have left his subchapters without titles, and he never raged as angrily as al-Bukhārī in any of his extant works.\textsuperscript{125} Muslim thus does not appear in al-‘Abbādī or al-Subkī’s roster of the Shāfi‘ī school. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, on the other hand, does include him in the \textit{Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābīla}, emphasizing his narrations from Ibn Ḥanbal and his discussing ḥadīth narrators with him.\textsuperscript{126}

These sources leave little doubt concerning Muslim’s identification with the transmission-based school. Muslim reportedly criticized Abū Ḥanīfa and the \textit{ahl al-ra’y},

\textsuperscript{122} This number was arrived at by Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī b. al-Qaysarānī (d. 507/1113); Mulla Khāṭir, \textit{Makānāt al-Ṣaḥīḥayn}, 182.

\textsuperscript{123} This number was arrived at by al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and quoted by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, \textit{Ṣiyānāt Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}, 84.

\textsuperscript{124} In the introduction to his \textit{mustakhraj} of al-Bukhārī’s \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ}, al-Īsmā‘īlī states that one of the reasons al-Bukhārī’s book is superior to both Muslim’s and Abū Dāwūd’s is that he provides better explanation of the legal implications of the ḥadīth; see Tāhir al-Jazā‘īrī al-Dimashqī (d. 1338/1919-20), \textit{Tawjīh al-nazar ilā usūl al-athar}, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū al-Ghudda, 2 vols. (Aleppo: Maktab al-Māṭūrūt al-Islāmiyya, 1416/1995), 1:305.


\textsuperscript{126} Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, \textit{Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābīla}, 1:311-2.
but in this he is simply one of the legion of ḥadīth scholars who held that opinion. His comments certainly lack al-Bukhārī’s ferocity. Al-Jawzaqī quotes him as saying that Abū Ḥanīfa was “a practitioner of legal analogy whose ḥadīths are problematic (ṣāhib ra’ī, muḍtarib al-ḥadīth).”127 In the introduction to his Ṣaḥīḥ, Muslim also gives a report condemning answering questions for which one has no textual recourse (ʿilm) or narrating from untrustworthy people.128 Like al-Bukhārī, Ibn Ḥanbal and other ahl al-ḥadīth, this position represents the rejection of speculation on issues of dogma (khawād).

Unlike al-Bukhārī, Muslim managed to avoid the controversy that plagued the latter part of his senior’s career. Although later sources report that Muslim explicitly shared al-Bukhārī’s stance on the created lafz of the Qur’ān, there is no early evidence for this. Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, who notes al-Bukhārī’s lafz scandal, mentions nothing of the sort in his entry on Muslim. When al-Ḥassān b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 344/955) of Naysābūr asked his father whose book he should imitate, al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s, his father directed him towards Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ because he was not tainted by the lafz issue.129

Nonetheless, Muslim also fell out with al-Dhuhlī, who seems to have been unable to bear serious competition in Naysābūr. Like in al-Bukhārī’s case, al-Dhulī’s animosity towards Muslim was not sudden. Al-Ḥākim reports from Ṭāhir b. ʿAbd, who heard Muslim’s student Makkī b. ʿAbdān say that when Dāwūd b. ʿAlī al-Ẓāhirī (d.

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128 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:13.

270/884) came to Naysābūr to study with Ishāq b. Rāhawayh they held a discussion (*al-nazar*) session for him. Al-Duhūlī’s son Ḥāyḳān (d. 267/881) and Muslim, at that time no older than thirty-two, attended. Ḥāyḳān gave his opinion on an issue, and Dāwūd scolded him (*zabarahu*), saying, “Be silent, youth!” Muslim did not rally to his side. Ḥāyḳān then went back to his father and complained about Dāwūd. Al-Duhūlī asked who was with him in the debate, and Ḥāyḳān replied, “Muslim, and he did not support me.” Al-Duhūlī bellowed, “I take back all that I transmitted to him (*raja’u ‘an kull mā ḥaddatthu bihi*).” When Muslim heard this he “collected all that he had written from him in a basket and sent it to him, saying, ‘I won’t narrate from you ever,’” then left to study with ‘Abd b. Ḥumayd (d. 249/863).  

Al-Ḥākim, however, feels that the last part of this story is inaccurate. He states that Muslim continued to associate and study with al-Duhūlī until al-Bukhārī’s *laft* scandal some twenty years later. When al-Duhūlī prohibited his students from attending al-Bukhārī’s lessons, Muslim stood up and left al-Duhūlī’s circle, sending a porter to him with all the material he had received from him.  

That the tension between Muslim and al-Duhūlī was longstanding dovetails with an otherwise bizarre quote from Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī, who criticized Muslim as unreasonable, saying, “If he had tended properly to (*dārā*) Muḥammad b. Yahya [al-Duhūlī] he would have become a man!”

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III.8. Perception: al-Bukhārī, Muslim and the Greatest Generation

To the *ahl al-ḥadīth* community, in the decades after their deaths al-Bukhārī and Muslim were simply two accomplished scholars among many. They studied at the feet of titans and were survived by cohorts who often outshone them in the eyes of fourth/tenth century ḥadīth authorities. To best understand their place in this context, we shall compare perceptions of al-Bukhārī and Muslim with those of their teachers, such as ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, Iṣḥāq b. Rāhawayh and Ibn Ḥanbal; and of their peers, like al-Dhuhūlī, Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī and his colleague Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī.

Our earliest sources leave no doubt that al-Bukhārī and Muslim were certainly respected authorities whose talents were widely recognized. Al-Ḥākim narrates from Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mudhakkir that Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923) said, “I have not seen beneath the heavens one more knowledgeable in ḥadīth than Muḥammad b. Iṣmā‘īl al-Bukhārī.”133 Ibn ‘Adi heard al-Bukhārī’s student Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Firabī (d. 320/932) say that al-Najm b. al-Ḍāl had seen the Prophet in a dream, with al-Bukhārī walking behind him exactly in his footsteps.134 Oddly, there is little explicit praise for Muslim in the early sources. In a rare Persian quote, al-Ḥākim cites Iṣḥāq b. Rāhawayh saying, “What a man [Muslim] is!”135

Later sources, of course, overflow with reports about both men’s abilities, phrased in the hyperbolic style so common to Muslim scholarly expression. Al-Khaṭīb quotes Ibn


Hanbal’s saying that the mastery of hadith (hifz) ends with four people from Khurasan: Abu Zur’a, al-Bukhari, ‘Abdallah b. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Darimi (d. 255/869) and al-Hasan b. Shuja’ al-Balkhi (d. 266/880). In Tarikh Bagdad we also find a quote from al-Bukhari’s Basran teacher Muhammad b. Bashshar Bundar (d. 252/866) saying that “the hadith masters (huffaz) of the world are four...” Abu Zur’a al-Razi in Rayy, Muslim in Naysabur, al-Darimi in Samarqand and al-Bukhari in Bukhara. 

Yet in our earliest sources, instances of such hyperbolic praise often ignore al-Bukhari and Muslim. Even Muslim’s colleague Ahmad b. Salama (d. 286/899) is reported to have said, “I have not seen after Isfaq [b. Rahawayh] and Muhammad b. Yahya [al-Dhuhi] someone with more command of hadith (ahfaq li’l-hadith), nor more knowledgeable as to their meanings, than Abu Hativ Muhammad b. Idris [al-Razi].”

In his book on al-Bukhari’s teachers, Ibn ‘Adi records a statement from another of their contemporaries, Uthman b. ‘Abdallah b. Khurrzadh (d. 281-2/894-8). He says that “the most prodigious in memory (ahfaq) I have seen are four: Muhammad b. Minhail al-Darir, Ibrahirim b. Muhammad b. ‘Araa, Abu Zur’a and Abu Hativ [al-Razi].” Even reports only found in later sources often neglect the two scholars. In al-Dahabi’s Tadhkirat al-huffaz, Abu Isfah Ibrahirim Ibn Urma of Isfahan (d. 266/880) is quoted as saying during al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s lifetimes that “now there remain only three in the world:

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137 Al-Khatib, Tarikh Bagdad, 2:21; ibn ‘Asakir, Tarikh madinat Dimashq, 58:89.

138 Al-Hakim, Mi’rafat ‘uloom al-hadith, 95-96; al-Khatib, Tarikh Bagdad, 2:73.

139 Ibn ‘Adi, Asamit, 138; idem, al-Kamil, 1:143.
Dhuhlī in Khurāsān, Ibn al-Furat in Isfahan, and [al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī] al-Ḥulwānī (d. 243/857-8) in Mecca.\footnote{140}

But how did ḥadīth scholars in the century after al-Bukhārī and Muslim view them in holistic surveys of the ḥadīth tradition? The earliest impression we have comes from Abū Ḥātim’s son Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s (d. 327/938) monumental treatise on the discipline of ḥadīth criticism, \textit{al-Jarḥ wa al-taʿlīl} (Criticism and Approval). At the beginning of the work, the author provides lengthy and laudatory chapters devoted to pillars of the ḥadīth tradition such as Sufyān al-Thawrī and Wakī b. Jarrāḥ. This section ends with the great scholars Ibn Ḥanbal, Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, but also includes Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī and the author’s father. Although al-Bukhārī and Muslim both died before the two Rāzīs, Ibn Abī Ḥātim devotes only short and unremarkable entries to them in the main biographical body of his dictionary. For al-Bukhārī he states that his father and Abū Zur’a rejected his ḥadīths after al-Dhuhlī wrote informing them of his view on the Qur’ān.\footnote{141} Muslim receives a similarly plain entry with the compliment “trustworthy, one of the ḥadīth masters (huffāẓ) with knowledge of ḥadīth.”\footnote{142} Neither al-Bukhārī nor Muslim merited a place in the last great generation of their teachers.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s view is of course very biased; his inclusion of his father and his close associate Abū Zur’a in the pantheon of great ḥadīth scholars was no doubt an act of discretion. In examining the initial reception of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works,


however, it is precisely such biased perception that interests us. For Ibn Abī Ḥātim, one
of the most influential figures in the development of ḥadīth criticism, Muslim is
negligible and al-Bukhārī anathema. As we shall see, the cadre of Rāzī ḥadīth scholars
based in Rayy provided the earliest and most vocal reaction to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s
careers.

In his Kitāb al-majrūḥin (Book of Criticized Narrators), Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d.
354/965) includes a review of the various generations of ḥadīth scholars who had toiled
to preserve the legacy of the Prophet. The generation that inherited this trade and learned
from masters like Mālik b. Anas and Shu'ba b. al-Ḥajjāj consists of Ibn Ḥanbal, Yahyā b.
Maʿīn, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī (the three biggest), Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh, ‘Ubaydallāh al-Qawārīrī
(d. 235/850) and Abū Khaythama Zuhayr b. Ḥarb (d. 234/848). The next generation,
which “took from them this path of criticism,” he lists as al-Dhuḥlī, al-Dārimī, Abū Zur‘a
al-Rāzī, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī. 143 Here we clearly see a
division between al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s generation and that of the teachers from
whom they derived their skills. The two scholars, however, receive no special attention.

In his early work on the discipline of ḥadīth transmission, al-Muḥaddith al-fāḍil
(The Virtuous Ḥadīth Scholar), al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāmahurmuzī (d.
360/970-1) lists five generations of great ḥadīth collectors who brought together the
transmitted materials of various regions. His third generation includes men like Ibn
Ḥanbal and Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh, his fourth the likes of al-Dhuḥlī, Abū Zur‘a and Abū

143 Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, Kitāb al-majrūḥin min al-muḥaddithin al-duʿafā’

In his al-Kāmil fi duʿā’ al-rijāl (The Complete Book on Weak Transmitters), Ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/975-6) places al-Bukhārī at the beginning of the final generation (tabaqā) of ḥadīth scholars. Although this generation includes Abū Hātim and Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī as well as al-Nasāʾi, Muslim never appears. These scholars follow the era of men like Ibn Ḥanbal, Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh and ‘Alī b. al-Madānin. Ibn ʿAdī quotes the litterateur cum ḥadīth scholar Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839) of Nāṣībūr on the definitive place of this greatest generation: “[Mastery of] ḥadīth stopped at four people: Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, and ‘Alī b. al-Madānin.”

Muslim scholars outside the Sunni traditionalist fold also grasped the prominence of the greatest generation of Ibn Ḥanbal and his contemporaries. The Muʿtazilite Abū Qāsim al-Balkhī (known as al-Kaʿbī, d. 319/931) wrote his Qubūl al-akhbār (The Acceptance of Reports) as a weapon against the ahl al-ḥadīth. In it he gathered damning judgments on respected Sunni ḥadīth transmitters from prominent members of the ahl al-ḥadīth themselves. Yet al-Balkhī never refers to Muslim and does not mention al-Bukhārī in the chapter citing evaluations of Sunni transmitters. Instead, he relies

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145 Ibn ʿAdī, al-Kāmil, 1:129.


In his *Fiḥrist*, written in 377/987-8, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. after 385-8/995-8) lists al-Bukhārī and Muslim as just two of sixty-three transmission-based jurists in Islamic history. Along with others like Sufyān al-Thawrī, ʿAlī b. al-Mādinī and al-Tirmidhī, he describes them simply as experts and trustworthy narrators (*thiqā*). 147 Neither of their biographies, however, matches that of the later Kufan chief judge and ḫadīth scholar Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ismāʿīl al-Mahāmīlī (d. 330/942); Ibn al-Nadīm states that no one was more knowledgeable than him in ḫadīth.148

III.9. Reception: the Immediate Response to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Works

Al-Bukhārī and Muslim functioned as magnets for ḫadīth transmission during their lives, selecting choice narrations for the *Ṣaḥīḥs* that formed their lasting legacy. But strikingly enough, they themselves proved insignificant in the continuing transmission of ḫadīth through living *iṣnāds*. In his annals listing the significant ḫadīth scholars who died in the second half of the third/ninth century and the first few decades of the fourth/tenth, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) lists seventeen who studied with Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh, twenty-two with ʿAlī b. al-Mādinī, but only one with al-Bukhārī or Muslim. Indeed, other contemporaries of al-Bukhārī and Muslim completely obviated their role in the


transmission of ḥadīths. Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī of Baghdad heard from what al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī terms “uncountable masses” of ḥadīth transmitters, including Ibn Ḥanbal, ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. He died at the age of 104 or 110 in 317/929-30 and was thus much sought after for his elevated isnād to that greatest generation. The major scholars who heard from al-Baghawī directly, such as al-Daraqūṭnī (d. 385/995), or through his isnād, like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, had no need to refer to transmitters like al-Bukhārī or Muslim for living transmission. Even in the case of ḥadīths that appeared in Muslim’s Ṣahīḥ, for example, later ḥadīth scholars like al-Dhahabī preferred to narrate them through al-Baghawī in their own ḥadīth collections.

This focus on the living isnād and the veneration paid to previous generations of ḥadīth scholars also dominates the immediate reception of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works in the ḥadīth community. The ḥadīth scholars’ conception of their own tradition, as shown in the early and mid-fourth/tenth-century works of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Ibn Ḥībūn and Ibn ʿAdī, distinguishes between the colossal generation of Ibn Ḥanbal and ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī and that of their students al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Many in the ḥadīth community, such as the influential bloc of Rāzī scholars in Rayy, immediately balked at what they perceived as the elitism and finality of the two works, accusing al-Bukhārī and Muslim of insolence.

149 Al-Baghawī is often referred to as Ibn Maʿin or even Ibn Bint al-Manī. Some were skeptical of al-Baghawī’s narration from Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. Al-Khaṭībī says that he could narrate from one hundred shaykhīs that no one else in his time had met; al-Khaṭībī, al-Iṣrāḥ, 192.

150 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkīrat al-ḥuffāẓ, 4:159.
The reaction of the Rayy scholars to Muslim’s *Saḥīḥ* during his own lifetime portrays his work as an act of egoism that could undermine the legal methodology of the transmission-based scholars. The chief critics of Muslim’s *Saḥīḥ* were Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī and his colleague Muḥammad b. Muslim Ibn Wāra al-Rāzī (d. 270/884). Along with Abū Ḥātim, Abū Zur’a was an institution of ḥadīth study in Rayy. Even at middle age he had earned the respect of prominent scholars such as Ishāq b. Rāhawayh, who said that “any ḥadīth that Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī does not know has no basis.” Muslim met several times with the two Rāzīs and their colleague Ibn Wāra in Rayy. Their reaction to his *Saḥīḥ* clearly communicates the initial shock that the notion of a book of purely authentic ḥadīths had on some scholars in the ḥadīth community. It has been preserved in Abū Zur’a’s *Kitāb al-du‘afā’ wa ajwibatu hu ‘alā as’īlat al-Bardha’ī*, a compilation of both Abū Zur’a’s and Abū Ḥātim’s opinions on transmitters as transcribed by their student Abū ‘Uthmān Sa’īd b. ‘Amr al-Bardha’ī (d. 292/905), who also studied with Muslim:

I saw Abū Zur’a mention the *Saḥīḥ* book written by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, then [that of] al-Fadl al-Ṣā‘īgh based upon it (*‘alā mithāliḥi*). Abū Zur’a said to me, “These are people who wanted prominence (taqaddum) before their time, so they did something for which they show off (yatashawāfīn bihi); they wrote books the likes of which none had written before to gain for themselves precedence (riyāsā) before their time.” One day, when I was present, a man came to [Abū Zur’a] with the *Saḥīḥ* transmitted from Muslim, and Abū Zur’a started to look through it. When he came across ḥadīths from Asbāt b. Naṣr he said to me, “How far this is from *ṣaḥīḥ*! He includes Asbāt b. Naṣr in his book!” Then he saw in the book Qaṭān b. Nusayr, so he said to me, “This is even more overwhelming than the first one! Qaṭān b. Nusayr [incorrectly] attributed ḥadīths from Thābit [al-Bunānī] to Anas [b. Mālik].”

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Then he looked and said, “[Muslim] narrates from Ahmad b. ‘Isa al-Misrī in his Sahih book: did you not see the people of Egypt complaining that Ahmad b. ‘Isa,” and he pointed to his tongue as if to say, ‘lies,’ then said to me, “[Muslim] narrates from the likes of them and leaves out hadiths] from Muḥammad b. ‘Ajlān and those like him. He is making a path for the people of heresy (bida’) against us, for they see that they can respond to a hadith that we use as proof against them by saying ‘That is not in the Sahih!’”

I saw him denigrating the book and censuring it, so when I returned to Naysābūr on the second occasion I mentioned to Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj Abū Zur’ā’s rejection of his narrations in the book from Asbāt b. Naṣr, Qaṭan b. Nusayr and Ahmad b. ‘Isa. Muslim said to me, “Indeed I did deem [the book] Sahih, and what hadiths I included from Asbāt, Qaṭan and Ahmad have been narrated by [other] trustworthy narrators (thiqāt) from their [Asbāt, Qaṭan and Ahmad’s] shaykhs, except that these [that I included] came from [Asbāt and them] through shorter isnāds (bi’l-irtifā’a). But I also have these [hadiths] from those who are more reliable than them [Asbāt et al.] via longer isnāds (bi-muzūl) and the core report of the hadith is well known through the transmission of trustworthy transmitters.”

Muslim came to Rayy and it reached me that he went out to Abū ‘Abdallāh Muhammad b. Muslim b. Wārā, and he received him coldly (jaʿafāhu) and chastised him for the book, saying essentially what Abū Zur’ā said: this opens us up to the people of bida’. So Muslim apologized to him and said, “Indeed I produced this book and declared it authentic (siḥāb), but I did not say that that hadiths I did not include in this book are weak. Rather, I produced this from sahih hadiths to be a collection for me and those who transmit from me without its authenticity being doubted. I did not say that everything else is weak…” and Ibn Wārā accepted Muslim’s apology and transmitted [the book].

Al-Bardha‘ī’s report is so charged that it seems miraculous we have received it from a provokediated source. Indeed, Abū Zur’ā and Ibn Wārā’s reaction to the

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154 Sa’dī al-Hāshīmī’s edition of al-Bardha‘ī’s text is based on a manuscript from the Köprülū Library in Istanbul (83/40 in a 2 juz’ notebook). This report appears in the above sources but it is always narrated through the same initial isnād from al-Bardha‘ī. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and al-Ḥāzinī have isnāds
Saḥīḥ as well as Muslim’s concessions highlight issues that would later prove some of the most hotly debated questions in the ḥadīth tradition. The Rayy scholars raise three objections to Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ. First, they decry it as impertinent glory-seeking. Second, they disagree with Muslim’s judgment concerning the reliability of some transmitters, arguing that his criteria are flawed and subjective. Finally, they worry that producing a Ṣaḥīḥ compilation could hinder the use of other ḥadīths that would be considered lackluster in comparison. Absolute authenticity had never been the determining factor in the use of ḥadīths in either elaborating law or polemics with the ahl al-ḥadīth’s rationalist foes. We thus detect the immediate and palpable fear that a definitive Ṣaḥīḥ book would be used to exclude all other materials.

The concerns of the Rāzīs seem to have been pervasive, with al-Bukhārī also attracting criticism from younger experts like al-Nasā’ī for the seemingly arbitrary omission of ḥadīths from respected transmitters like Suhayl b. Abī Ṣāliḥ. Both al-

155 Interestingly, Muslim is quoted by his student Makkī b. ‘Abdān as supposedly saying, “I showed my book to Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī and everything that he indicated as having a flaw (‘illa) I left out. And what he said, ‘This is Ṣaḥīḥ with no ‘illa,’ I included.” The earliest appearance of this quote I have found is in the work of Abū ‘Ali al-Ghassānī al-Jayyānī of Andalusia (d. 498/1105); al-Tanbīḥ ‘alā al-awḥām al-waqī ‘a fi Ṣaḥīḥ al-imām Muslim, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl (Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1421/2000), 39; al-Qāḍī Iyād, Ikna al-mu i’tim bi-fawā’id Muslim, ed. Yahyā Ismā’īl, 9 vols. (Manṣūra, Egypt: Dār al-Wafi’, 1419/1998), 1:82; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Ṣiyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 68; al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:121.

Bukhārī and Muslim were thus forced on more than one occasion to deny that their works encompassed all authentic hadīths. Muslim did so in the body of his Sahih in a rare response to a question, saying that his book only contains those authentic hadīths that “were agreed upon (ajma‘u ‘alayhā)” and excludes other nonetheless worthy ones. Ibn ‘Adī provides an early quote from al-Bukhārī that he had left many saheeh reports out of his collection, which he entitled an “abridged (mukhtasar)” compilation, in order to keep its size manageable. We shall see in Chapter Five how prophetic the Rāzis’ concerns were.

Muslim’s response to Ibn Wāra provides a fascinating glimpse into the pre-canonical life of his Sahih. If a canon is a text endowed with authority and made binding on a community, its converse is a powerless text that reaches no farther than its author. Yet this is precisely how Muslim is forced to describe his Sahih in order to placate Ibn Wāra. He is forced to reduce his book to a private “collection for me and those who transmit from me.” In the face of resistance, we thus see that Muslim was obliged to deny his work the features that would one day accord it canonical status.

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157 Sahih Muslim: kitāb al-salāt, bāb al-tashahhud. Later analysts believed that the group that Muslim was referring to as “having agreed upon” these hadīths consisted of Ibn Ḥanbal, Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba and Sa‘īd b. Maṣṣūr al-Khurāsānī; Abū Ḥāfiz ‘Umar b. Raslän al-Bulqīnī (d. 805/1402-3), Maḥāsīn al-istilāh, in Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalīḥ wa Maḥāsīn al-istilāh, 162.

158 Ibn ‘Adī, Asāmī, 68.

159 Al-Bukhārī is also reported to have shown his Sahih to senior scholars such as ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī and Ibn Ḥanbal. This report only appears in a very late source, however: Ibn Ḥajjar’s (d. 852/1449) Hady al-sārī. He quotes Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Amr al-‘Uqaylī’s (d. 323/934) statement that these scholars acknowledged the authenticity of the Sahih with the exception of four hadīths. This information does not appear in the one work that has survived from al-‘Uqaylī, his Kitāb al-du‘afā’ al-kabīr. Ibn Ḥajjar had access to at least one other work by al-‘Uqaylī, his Kitāb al-sāhība, so he might have had a source for this quote. Al-‘Uqaylī was very familiar with al-Bukhārī’s al-Tārīkh al-kabīr (one of his principal sources in...
One of the earliest recorded reactions to al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ seconds the accusation of impudence leveled at Muslim by Abū Zur‘a. Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurtubi (d. 353/964) recorded a story about al-Bukhārī that paints him as a plagiarist whose brilliant Ṣaḥīḥ was truly the work of his famous teacher ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī. Maslama reports that ‘Alī had a book detailing the flaws in various ḥadīth narrations (Kitāb al-‘ilā) that represented his mastery of ḥadīth criticism. One day when ‘Alī had gone to view some of his properties, al-Bukhārī came to one of his sons and bribed him to lend him the book, which al-Bukhārī promptly had duplicated by a copyist. When ‘Alī returned and held a session for ḥadīth study, al-Bukhārī’s knowledge rivaled his teacher’s. ‘Alī grasped what had occurred from his student’s exact imitation of his own work and was so saddened that he eventually died of grief. Having no further need of his

his Kitāb al-duʿāfā‘) and his Ṣaḥīḥ, and he had studied with Ibn Ḥanbal’s son ‘Abdallāh. It is thus not improbable that he could have transmitted this information about the evaluation of the Ṣaḥīḥ. But since ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī died in 234/849, whatever al-Bukhārī might have showed him was probably only a very early draft of the work. See Ibn Ḥajar, Hady al-sārī, 7, 676; al-‘Uqayli, Kitāb al-duʿāfā‘ al-kabīr, 1:48-9 (editor’s introduction).

160 In his Tahdhib al-tahdhīb, the only place I have found this story, Ibn Ḥajar cites the source only as “Maslama.” We know that this is Maslama b. Qāsim, however, because in his al-Muḥīm bi-shuyūkh al-Bukhārī wa Muslim, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Iṣmā‘il ibn Khalfūn (d. 636/1238-9) duplicates the first line of the story (allaṣṣa ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī Kitāb al-‘ilal wa kāna ḍāmin bihi...) exactly in a quote from Maslama b. Qāsim. Ibn Ḥajar’s version then continues with the insulting story above, while in Ibn Khalfūn’s version Maslama goes on to tell how ‘Alī did not lend his book to anyone or narrate it because of its valuable content, then states “and he [Maslama] mentioned the story (wa dḥakara al-qīṣṣa).” See Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Iṣmā‘il ibn Khalfūn, al-Muḥīm bi-shuyūkh al-Bukhārī wa Muslim, ed. Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Ādil b. Sa’d (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1421/2000), 464.

161 This book could not possibly be ‘Alī’s Kitāb al-‘ilal that has come down to us today. While the book Maslama describes contains what seems to be the sum total of ‘Alī’s corpus of ḥadīth criticism, his extant work is very small and only deals with several dozen narrations. It is possible that the book mentioned here is a work of ‘Alī’s that Ibn al-Nadīm describes as a musnad accompanied by ‘ilal commentary; see Ibn al-Nadīm, The Fihrist, 556.
teacher, al-Bukhārī returned to Khurāsān and compiled his Sahīh, gaining fame and followers. 162

Maslama b. Qāsim was from Cordova, but sometime before 320/932 he traveled east to Egypt, greater Syria, Mecca, Wāsiṭ, Basra, Baghdad and Yemen before returning to Spain after losing his vision. 163 He certainly had a copy of al-Bukhārī’s al-Tārīkh al-kabīr, since Ibn Hajar states that Maslama compiled a one-volume book on hadīth transmitters (tārīkh fi al-rijāl) intended to cover those not mentioned in al-Bukhārī’s dictionary (including some of Maslama’s own contemporaries). 164 Maslama probably heard the story about al-Bukhārī stealing his teacher’s work after his arrival in the Islamic heartlands (i.e. after 320/932) but before his death in 353/964. We can thus assume that it was in circulation by at least the early 300/900s.

This story is almost certainly untrue, since refusing to transmit one’s work to students would be extremely unusual among scholars of hadīth. Maslama’s own preoccupation with al-Bukhārī’s Tārīkh and the fact that the story recognizes that the


163 Maslama was criticized as a weak transmitter, but was defended by others who said that he simply was not very intelligent (da’if al-‘uql). He was also accused of anthropomorphism, but, in light of the controversial material he recorded about al-Bukhārī, these are probably reactionary ad hominem attacks by later commentators; see Muḥammad b. al-Futūḥ al-Ḥumaydī, Jadhwa‘at al-muqtabis fi dhikr wulūt al-Andalus wa asmā’ ruwāt al-hadīth wa ahl al-fiqh wa al-adab, ed. Muḥammad b. Tāwīl al-Ṭanjī (Cairo: Maktubat al-Nashr al-Thaqāfī al-‘Islāmī, 1371/[1952]), 324; al-Dhahabī, Tārikh al-islām, 26:98; idem, Siyar aḥl al-nubalā‘, 16:110 (ed. Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, n.d. Reprint of the Cairo edition published by ’Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1963-4), 4:112 (citations are to the Beirut edition); cf. Ibn Hajar, Līsān, 6:35-6; cf. al-Jazā‘īrī, Tawīl al-nazar, 1:302. Although he visited Baghdad, al-Khaṣīb does not mention him in his history.

164 Ibn Hajar, Līsān, 6:35. Here Ibn Hajar quotes Abū Ja‘far al-Mālikī’s Tārikh. We know that Maslama’s Tārikh included such contemporaries as Abū Ja‘far al-‘Uqaylī (d. 323/934), since this is one of the sources al-Dhahabī relies on for his biography of al-‘Uqaylī in Tadhkira al-nuẓẓā‘.
$Sa$hīh$ was a major accomplishment points to a more subtle motivation. Regardless of the high quality of his $Sa$hīh, al-Bukhārī’s work clashed with the atavistic traditionalism endemic among the *ahl al-hadīth*. For them the community was always in decline as it grew more distant from the Prophet, and students could do no more than try to preserve their masters’ knowledge. The creator of Maslama’s story could only interpret al-Bukhārī’s unprecedented contribution as an act of insubordination.

Maslama’s *Tārīkh*, however, illustrates another important aspect of the community’s reception of al-Bukhārī’s works: for decades after his death, al-Bukhārī was much better known for his *Tārīkh* than for his *Sa$hīh*. In his *Muntaẓam*, Ibn al-Jawzī mentions someone narrating al-Bukhārī’s *Tārīkh* fully a century before the first person is mentioned as narrating his *Sa$hīh*.165 Also, almost seventy years before the first scholar compiled a ḥadīth collection using the *Sa$hīh* as a template, al-Ḥusayn b. Idrīs al-Anṣārī (d. 301/913-4) used the *Tārīkh* as a format for his own biographical dictionary.166 When al-Bukhārī’s student and a compiler of a famous ḥadīth collection himself, Abū ʻĪsā al-Tirmidhī, said that he had never seen anyone with al-Bukhārī’s command of the narrations of ḥadīth and the lives of their transmitters, he was referring explicitly to the scholar’s *Tārīkh al-kabīr*.167 Muḥammad b. ʻAbd al-Ḥamān al-Daghūlī (d. 325/936-7) of Sarakhs, who had studied ḥadīth with al-Bukhārī’s rival al-Dhuhlī, nonetheless said that

al-Bukhārī’s Tārīkh was one of the four books with which he never parted.\(^{168}\) Abū Ja’far al-‘Uqaylī’s (d. 323/934) Kitāb al-du’afā’ al-kabīr (Great Book of Weak Transmitters) relies on al-Bukhārī as the single largest source of evaluations for transmitters. Al-‘Uqaylī frequently refers to al-Bukhārī’s al-Tārīkh al-kabīr, which he calls the scholar’s “great book (al-kitāb al-kabīr),” but never mentions the Sahīh.\(^{169}\) The only occasion on which al-Ramahurmuzi mentions al-Bukhārī in his al-Muḥaddith al-fāḍil is in relation to his Tārīkh.\(^{170}\)

While it was Muslim’s Sahīh that attracted the critical ire of the ḥadīth scholars in Rayy, al-Bukhārī’s Tārīkh became the locus of drama and debate for the Rāzīs. In the first written response to any aspect of al-Bukhārī’s oeuvre, Ibn Abī Ḥātim penned a short book correcting errors he detected in the Tārīkh al-kabīr. The involvement of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, his father and Abū Zur’a with the Tārīkh became even more problematic when a prominent muḥaddith of Naysābūr, Abū Aḥmad Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥākim (d. 378/988), accused them of plagiarizing al-Bukhārī’s work. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, Abū Aḥmad’s friend and student, reports from him that when he was in Rayy once he saw Ibn Abī Ḥātim reading his al-Jarh wa al-ta’dīl to students. He recognized its contents as that of al-Bukhārī’s Tārīkh and inquired as to why Ibn Abī Ḥātim had attributed this work to his father and Abū Zur’a. A student replied that al-Bukhārī’s Tārīkh had so impressed Abū Ḥātim and Abū Zur’a that they had taken it as the basis of their work, sitting with

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\(^{168}\) The others were al-Muzani’s Mukhtašar, Khalīl b. Aḥmad’s dictionary Kitāb al-ʿsyn, and the cultured political treatise Kalīla wa dimna; al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz, 3:30.


\(^{170}\) Al-Ramahurmuzi, al-Muḥaddith al-fāḍil, 310.
Ibn Abī Ḥātim so that he could record some modifications to the work and then ascribe it to them.  

III.10. Conclusion

As the next chapter will demonstrate, the Sahihayn, and Muslim’s Sahih in particular, quickly became objects of study and imitation in Khurāsān, Eastern Iran and eventually Baghdad. We have seen, however, that during their lives and in the immediate wake of their deaths al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Sahīhs met with rejection and scorn among important elements of the hadith scholarly community. The tradition of hadith collection and study rested on a veneration for the past as the repository of the Prophet’s sunna and the only authentic source for interpreting Islam. Although they had developed a methodology for distinguishing between authentic and forged hadiths, for transmission-based scholars the Prophet’s charismatic authority rendered even weaker hadiths legitimate tools for understanding the faith. For scholars like Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī, a collection limited to purely authentic hadiths unnecessarily delimited the potential application of the Prophet’s sunna in Muslim life and debate. Furthermore, hadith scholars cultivated a worldview in which later generations could at best struggle to preserve their predecessors’ transmission of the normative past. During al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s lives and the century after their deaths, hadith scholars’ native perception of

171 Al-Khaṣībī, Müdīḥ awhām al-jam‘ wa al-tafrīq, 2 vols (Hyderabad: Dā‘īrat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1378/1959), 1:8-9; Yāqūt al-Hamawī, Mu‘jam al-buldān, 2:799; cf. al-Dhahabī, Tadhkira al-
hufrā‘, 3:124. Yāqūt and al-Dhahabī’s reports are taken from al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī, but al-Dhahabī’s lacks the last concluding statement that Ibn Abī Ḥātim attributed the book to his father and Abū Zur’a al-
Rāzī. Abū Āhmād al-Hākim also voices his accusations in his own Kitāb al-kunā‘, which al-Dhahabī quotes in his biography of al-Bukhārī and which is also partially and lazily quoted in al-Khāliqī’s al-Irshād; see al-
their tradition viewed them as merely two experts among many, placing them in positions junior to their teachers. Al-Bukhārī in particular was also tainted with scandal and accusations of heresy. For Abū Zur'a, for his colleagues in Rayy and for whomever first circulated accusations of al-Bukhārī's plagiarism, the Sahīhayn were acts of insubordination by students seeking to supplant their teachers and defy tradition. For common Muslims and scholars alike the collection and transmission of ḥadīths through living isnāds back to the Prophet remained a dominant pious and legally significant activity for centuries after the sahīh movement. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim would prove insignificant in the continued transmission of ḥadīths, but their Sahīhs became institutions that soon rivaled it.
IV.

A 'PERIOD OF INTENSE CANONICAL PROCESS':

IMAGINATION AND THE STUDY OF THE ȘAḤĪḤAYN IN THE LONG
FOURTH/TENTH CENTURY

IV.1. Introduction

With the exception of Deuteronomy's revelation to the court of King Josiah in II Kings, canonical texts do not fall intact from the heavens. Whether scriptural or literary, they pass through phases of use and study within a community before their canonization. Scripture must earn the devotion of a congregation before priests can declare it authoritative, and a body of critics must first study and explore literary works before dubbing them classics. Books are thus not written as canons. This status is bestowed upon them by a community engaged in a process of self-identification or authorizing institutions. The books of the New Testament were not all written as scripture, a role already played in early Christian communities by the Greek edition of the Hebrew Bible. What became the canonized New Testament was a diverse selection of writings used in services that eventually became widely recognized guides to Christian devotion. The usage of the word canon as 'list' in the first centuries C.E. originated in this roster of familiar books.¹ The books of the New Testament canon had therefore already proven

effective at conveying a particular understanding of Christ’s mission to a certain audience.

This process of use and familiarization was not limited to passive reception. Paul’s canonical epistle to the Corinthian congregation (2 Corinthians) probably originally consisted of at least two separate letters written at different times and later pasted together for circulation amongst Paul’s churches.² Such editorial activity highlights the role of clerics or scholars in molding proto-canonical texts after they have left the hands of their authors. In the words of James Sanders, this “period of intense canonical process” between the crafting of a text and the stabilization of a discrete canon represents a crucial interaction between text and audience. It is in these periods that audiences “shaped what they received in ways that rendered [the texts] most meaningful and valuable for them.”³

Periods of intense canonical process are thus periods of intensive study. Before the emergence of a canon, texts must receive critical attention from scholars who catalog their contents, detail their merits and build around them that edifice of oral or written scholarship that distinguishes the familiar and valued from the banal or unknown. Beyond the valorization that a scholarly class bestows on written works, in pre-modern times intense study was required merely to produce a coherent text. The folkloric tradition of the Trojan War thrilled multitudes of small Greek audiences for most of the first millennium B.C.E. Yet as a scattered and diverse body of oral epic the Iliad and

³ Sanders, 30.
"Odyssey" could never have become classics of Hellenistic literature or cornerstones of the Western literary canon. The first 'edition' of the Homeric epics was produced by Antimachus of Colophon (fl. 410 B.C.E.) after centuries of fermenting as an oral-formulaic tradition. In the great Hellenistic Library of Alexandria, scholars like Zenodotus of Ephesus (fl. 270 B.C.E.) initiated the first studies of the Homeric epics, editing and collecting manuscripts, creating lexicons and producing a standardized vulgate tradition. Alexandrian scholarship on Homeric works continued unabated in the following decades, with great writers and critics such as Apollonius of Rhodes and Rhianus of Crete debating and producing critical editions. It was these relatively standardized texts that Hellenistic scholars declared the 'canons' of Greek language worthy of imitation.

Certain Muslim scholars recognized that an intensive familiarization with a text was a prerequisite for its canonization. Shāh Waḥī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1176/1762) felt that the treatment a book received after its composition was a crucial characteristic of a mainstay authentic ḥadīth collection. In addition to its author purposing a work of authentic ḥadīths and succeeding in that task, such a book must be studied, its rare or difficult (gharīb) words explained and its legal implications derived. It must be edited and refined (tahdhīb), and historians must identify all its transmitters as well as their death dates. Thus in the century after al-Bukhārī's death, scholars strove painstakingly to understand his methodology, identify his obscure transmitters (sometimes only

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5 Shāh Waḥī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, 1:133.
referred to by their first names) and locate all the narrations of one Prophetic tradition scattered throughout his work.

Yet periods of intense canonical process do not only involve this requisite study and familiarization with a text. Separately, they involve the community developing the conceptual ability to endow texts with some binding authority. For a canon to form, a community must imagine texts that have transcended the normal status of books as objects of study or usage and are able play some loftier role. Periods of intense canonical process are times in which communities' conception of the authority a text can acquire leaps forward due to real and pressing needs.6

Although the *Sahīhayn* met with resistance during the lives of their authors and in the wake of their deaths, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works quickly emerged as formative texts in certain areas of the Nile-Oxus region. Beginning in Muslim’s home city of Naysābūr and later in Jurjān and Baghdad, scholars began viewing the *Sahīh* not as threats to the living transmission of the Prophet’s sunna but rather as vehicles for expressing their personal link to his authority and interpreting his teachings according to their own local agendas. Ḥadīth scholars began using the *Sahīhayn* and the methods of their authors as templates for their own Ḥadīth collections. These *mustakhraj* books, however, required a detailed mastery of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters, the permutations of the Ḥadīths they included as well as their requirements for authenticity. The *mustakhraj* cults that formed in Naysābūr around Muslim’s *Sahīh*, in Jurjān around al-Bukhārī’s, and finally in Baghdad around the conjoined *Sahīhayn* thus sparked a flurry

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6 Sanders, 32-33.
of studies on the two books and their constitutive elements. Scholars not only detailed al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works, they also interacted with their methodologies. Just as Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī had questioned Muslim’s right to delimit authentic traditions, so did later scholars apply their own requirements for authenticity to the Sahihayn, identifying what they considered errors and questioning why other ḥadīths had not merited a place in the collections.

As we shall see, the network of scholars who devoted themselves to employing and studying al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Sahih between the last quarter of the third/ninth century and the first half of the fifth/eleventh was distributed with remarkable geographic and chronological consistency. Equally important, however, was their ideological makeup. The study of the Sahihayn fell to neither the über-Sunnis who had ostracized al-Bukhārī nor the historically ḥadīth-wary Ḥanafis. It was a more moderate group of transmission-based scholars belonging to the nascent Shāfi’ī school that forged the proto-canon.

In this chapter we will examine this network of scholars and their accomplishments during what one might term the long fourth century, that period between the deaths of the Shaykhayn and the widespread acknowledgment of the canon in the mid-fifth/eleventh century. In the context of the Sahihayn’s saga this periodization is not merely heuristic. As we shall see, it reflects the uniqueness of a time characterized by fleeting genres and an often frustrating liminality in Islamic intellectual culture.

The long fourth century also proved a period in which important elements of the broader Muslim community began articulating the notion of a ḥadīth collection acting as
a locus of communal consensus. Whether as common ground between different schools of thought or simply common references in an increasingly diverse ḥadīth tradition, this period of intense canonical process left the Muslim community with the imaginative capability of endowing ḥadīth works with a new epistemological status.
Chart 1.1 The *Ṣahiḥayn* Network Chart

**Ṣahiḥayn Network Chart:**
**Study and Usage in the Long Fourth Century**

**Key:**
- : Personal study relationship / teacher-student relationship
- : Transmission of a scholar's books to another scholar
- : Transmission or transmitter of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣahiḥ*
- : Transmission or transmitter of Muslim's *Ṣahiḥ*

The opposing chart describes the location, dates, written works and scholarly relationships of the network of scholars who studied and employed the *Ṣahiḥayn* between 270 and 450AH. When required, some later figures are included with their death dates noted. For references, see Appendix I.
IV.2. The Mustakhraj Genre

The phenomenon of the mustakhraj forms a bizarrely short and circumscribed chapter in the history of Islamic religious thought. These works were produced from about 270/880 to 480/1085 in the Nile-Oxus region and then exited the stage of cultural expression. They mark a transitional period between the time when one could realistically cultivate one's own isnāds to the Prophet and the time when books of ḥadīth replaced this direct connection. A scholar produced a mustakhraj by compiling a book of hadīths based on an existing collection that he used as a template. For each of the hadīths in the template book the author would use his own narration of the hadīth, with the isnād extending from him back to the Prophet. The very term mustakhraj connotes 'seeking to include' certain narrations from the Prophet. Isnāds in these mustakhrajs would generally join with the isnāds of the template collection at the teacher of the original collector, following the same isnād from that point to the Prophet.8

Mustakhrajs could vary in the degree to which they adhered to the format and contents of the template collection. Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahāni’s (d. 430/1038) mustakhraj of Muslim’s Sahih is remarkably faithful to the contents of the original, generally replicating them down to the details of each narration. Abū Bakr Almad b. Ibrāhīm al-

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7 There may be one exception to this. Al-Dhahabī says that ‘Abd al-Ghānī b. ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203) wrote a 48 juz’ book entitled al-Miṣbāḥ fi ‘sīyān aḥādīth al-sīḥāḥ in which he reproduced the hadīths of the Sahihayn with his own isnāds. This is the only mention of this book, however; al-Dhahabī, Siyār, 21:446-7.

Ismā’īlī’s (d. 371/981-2) mustakhraj of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, now lost, appears to have been so faithful that if he could find no other transmission of a ḥadīth he would narrate it through al-Bukhārī and his student al-Firabī, the transmitter from whom al-Ismā’īlī received the Ṣaḥīḥ.9 Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Ḥirī of Nāṣībūr (d. 311/923-4) spent years working on a mustakhraj meeting Muslim’s requirements for authenticity to the extent that he voyaged to Iraq and the Ḥijāz for a few ḥadīths needed to complete it.10 Other mustakhrajs were far more lenient. Ya‘qūb b. Ishaq Abū ‘Awāna al-Isfārāyīnī’s (d. 312/924-5) work departs from Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ on many occasions in both content and structure.11 Although the great Moroccan ḥadīth scholar of the early twentieth century, Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kattānī (d. 1927), asserts that Ibn al-Jārūd al-Nāṣībūrī’s (d. 307/919-20) al-Muntaqā is a mustakhraj of Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ, it is less than a fifth of the Ṣaḥīḥ’s size and bears only the most superficial structural similarities.12 Joint mustakhrajs of the Ṣaḥīḥayn were also more lax in following the format of the template collections, generally just listing ḥadīths found in the works and noting how al-Bukhārī or Muslim included them.

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11 It is interesting to note that the great Muslim analyst of the ḥadīth tradition, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) notes that although Abū ‘Awāna’s book has been dubbed a mustakhraj of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, it deviates from it a great deal, and that even the author notes that on some occasions; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 67.

A genre of hadith literature similar to the mustakhraj is that of atrāf, or an index of hadiths by the key components of their matns. A book of the atrāf of the Sahīhayn would list all their hadiths by the beginning of the matn or its key component, and then provide all the transmissions of that tradition found in the two works. Unlike mustakhrajs, which are organized along the chapter structure of the template book, atrāf books usually present the hadiths according to the Companion at the beginning of the isnād.

From a modern standpoint it seems difficult to discern the purpose or utility of producing a mustakhraj. Why reproduce a copy of an existing hadith collection? Why not boast one’s own corpus of hadiths or express one’s own legal or doctrinal vision? Mustakhrajs certainly did not replace original hadith collections. Many hadith scholars from the long fourth century, such as al-Māṣarji, produced gargantuan personal musnads alongside mustakhrajs of the Sahīhayn.

The motivation for producing a mustakhraj lies on two levels. First, we must remember that for transmission-based scholars a hadith collection could not simply be opened up and cited; one needed to have heard it from an authorized chain of transmitters who in turn had heard it from its author. Abū Muḥammad Qāsim b. Aṣbagh al-Mālikī of Cordova (d. 340/951) traveled east in 274/887-8 to study in Iraq and access the wealth of transmitted material in the heartlands of Islam. When he discovered that he had “missed” his chance to hear the Sunan of Abū Dāwūd from its author, he produced a mustakhraj of

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the work.\(^{14}\) Abu Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī states that he composed his *mustakhraj* of Muslim for the benefit of those who had “missed” hearing that book.\(^{15}\) When Qāsim b. Aṣbagh realized he had missed his opportunity to be incorporated into the chain of transmitters of Abū Dāwūd’s book, he reconstructed his own version of his *Sunan*. Abu Nu‘aym, who died about 170 years after Muslim, similarly offered his own version of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* to his contemporaries with his own intact link to the Prophet. Yet how could a scholar “miss” his chance to hear a book when all he had to do was find an authorized transmitter of the work?\(^{16}\) As we shall see, this would entail relying on an unappealingly long chain of transmission back to the Prophet, an act that a ḥadīth scholar was loathe to do.

### IV.3. Mustakhraj: The Ṣaḥīḥayn as Formative Texts

The second level on which the *mustakhraj* attracted ḥadīth scholars of the long fourth century was the manner in which the template collection served as a formative text through which scholars could engage the Prophet’s authoritative legacy. Formative texts are those works that serve as textual fora for members of a community to express their own relationship with the source of authority in their tradition. In Judaic law, the


\(^{16}\) We must certainly acknowledge the possibility that a scholar in the fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh century may not have been able to find an authorized transmitter for a work, especially a more obscure ḥadīth collection. While in Baghdad in 478/1085, for example, Abū Bakr Muhammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 520/1126) could not find a transmitter for a small ḥadīth folio (*ṣaḥīfa*). In the case of Qāsim b. Aṣbagh, who associated with Abū Dāwūd’s students, and works as widely studied as the Ṣaḥīḥayn at the time of Abū Nu‘aym, this seems unlikely. See al-Silāfī, “*Muqaddimat al-hujjāj al-kabīr Abī Tāhir al-Silāfī*,” in Ḥamīd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī, *Ma‘ālim al-sunan*, 4:358-9.
elaboration of ritual law or its adaptation to the new challenges of the day takes place through the rabbi's interpretive interaction with the Torah, Mishna and Talmud. They provide the formative texts through which he establishes a relationship between the Lawmaker and the needs of his community. Formative texts thus do not simply embody the authority of the Lawmaker, they serve as a vehicle for the believer to extend that authority into his own context.

The potential for a ḥadīth collection to function as a formative text stems from the essential magnetism that the ḥadīth medium exerted on Muslims. A direct transmission from Muḥammad, the living isnād to his legacy, tied Muslims to the Prophetic charisma. The isnād incorporated the transmitter into the chain of hermeneutic interpreters. They could then draw on the Prophet's normative precedent and manifest it in their daily lives, where his exemplum dominated the arenas of law and social mores. The Prophet's message had moved out from Islam's epicenter in space and time through generations of interpreters who had inherited and transformed his teachings, and the isnād was the tie that bound the scholar to that one true source of authority. At its most basic, the mustakhraj was a collection of these transmissions, a vehicle for expressing and establishing one's relationship to the source of hermeneutic authority.

Scholars of the Islamic tradition thus placed great value on proximity to the Prophetic legacy. In the face of Abū Zur'ā's barbed critiques, Muslim defended his use of flawed narrations in his Sahīḥ by asserting that they had shorter isnāds than more reliable but longer versions of the same Prophetic traditions. Muslim's aspiration for elevated isnāds echoed his senior contemporary Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba's (d. 235/849)
exhortation that “seeking elevated isnāds is part of religion (talāb al-isnād al-ʿāli min al-dīn).”¹⁷ Mustakhrajīs represented a forum in which ḥadīth scholars could display the elevation or quality of their personal narrations from the Prophet. Abū Nuʿaym ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥaddād (d. 517/1123) of Isfahan once faced criticism from an opponent who faulted him for not having an elevated isnād to Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ. Al-Ḥaddād replied that while he did not have an elevated isnād for the book itself, he had heard Abū Nuʿaym al-Ḥsahānī’s Mustakhraj of the Ṣaḥīḥ from his father. He boasted that:

If you heard [the Mustakhraj] from my father it would be as if you had heard [Muslim’s ḥadīths] from Ṭabr himself (a famous transmitter of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ); and if I wanted I would say: as if you had heard them from al-Julūdī (an earlier transmitter of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ); and if I wanted to say: it would be as if you had heard them from Ibn Sufyān (who transmitted the Ṣaḥīḥ from Muslim) – I would not be lying. And if I wanted I would say: it was as if you had heard them from Muslim himself. [The Mustakhraj] has some even more elevated isnāds, so that if you heard them from my father it would be as if you, al-Bukhārī and Muslim had all heard them from the same teacher.¹⁸

Here al-Ḥaddād used Abū Nuʿaym al-Ḥsahānī’s Mustakhraj of Muslim’s collection to assert his own proximity to the Prophet. This conversation occurred in the sixth/twelfth century, long after the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and al-Ḥaddād uses the two icons as benchmarks for rating his own link to the Prophet. Abū Nuʿaym’s Mustakhraj features such elevated isnāds, al-Ḥaddād implies, that by reading it even in his own time one could become al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s equal. When Qāsim b. Ṭabīb “missed” his opportunity to hear Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan from its author, what he had missed was the chance to transmit the work with a respectably short isnād to the Prophet.

¹⁷ Al-Khaṭīb, al-Irshād, 6.

¹⁸ Al-Dhahābī, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 4:43.
When faced with hearing the work from one of Abū Dawūd’s students, and thus adding another transmitter between himself and the Prophet, he felt it was more appealing to reconstitute the work with his own, shorter isnāds.

Mustakhrajs, however, did not merely afford an opportunity to prove isnāds’ elevation. They also provided a stage for demonstrations of their authenticity. For twelve out of the thirty-six known mustakhrajs of the Sahihayn we have explicit evidence that the authors attempted to meet certain requirements for authenticity (ṣiḥḥa), often imitating those of al-Bukhārī or Muslim. This sometimes became a cause of much concern and tension for scholars. Abū Bakr ʿAbdāl-Muṭṭam al-Barqānī (d. 425/1033-4), a premier student of the Sahihayn, admitted with regret to having used one person in his mustakhraj who was not up to al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s standards.19 Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad al-Sarraj (d. 313/925) generally tried to stand by Muslim’s standards, but was lax in order to get more hadiths from ’Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.20

Yet the mustakhraj was not simply a vehicle for demonstrating the quality of one’s link to the Prophet. It served as a stage for interpretation according to the specific needs and leanings of the scholar who produced it. The narrations that scholars chose as counterparts to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s hadiths often differed in significant ways from those of the Sahihayn, expressing the authors’ own stances on the topic. The compilers of these mustakhrajs could also alter the organization or chapter titles of their works in addition to adding their own commentary. The following examples demonstrate the

manner in which the Šaḥīḥayn served as formative texts that enabled later scholars to interpret and apply the Prophetic legacy according to their own specific needs.

IV.3. a. Al-Ḥarīdī: Rationalist Muḥaddith

Abū Bakr al-Ḥarīdī (d. 371/981-2) built up his corpus of ḥadĪths in Baghdad, Rayy and Khurāsān before returning to his native Jurjān and becoming a local institution of ḥadīth study.21 Along with a vast musnad, he displayed his legal acumen by composing a work on Shāfīī legal theory (uṣūl) called Tahdīb al-nāzar and writing a rebuttal of the Ḥanafī legal theorist al-Jassās (d. 370/982). Al-Ḥarīdī seems to have shared a great deal in common with what would emerge as Ashʿarī doctrine in the decades after his death. The Muʿtaṣilite Buyid vizier al-Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995) sent him a very complimentary letter, an honor usually reserved for those scholars the vizier considered acceptably rationalist.22 It is thus not surprising that al-Ḥarīdī, like Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī himself and later Ashʿarites, found it necessary to publicly affirm his identification with the ahl al-sunna. Al-Dhahabī provides a transmission in which al-Ḥarīdī upholds what he calls the ahl al-ḥadīth creed, including the duty “to accept without deviation what God spoke in His book and what has been transmitted authentically (ṣahḥat bihi al-riwāya) from His Messenger (ṣ).” In line with the standard

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Sunni creed, he also describes God “by those attributes by which He has described Himself and His Prophet described Him… with no question as to how (bi-lā kayfa).”

Al-Isma‘ili’s insistence on such matters belies an aversion to anthropomorphism consistent with the more rationalist traces we have of his personal leanings. His mustakhraj of al-Bukhari’s Sahih reveals how he used the work as a forum to argue his own stances on hadiths dealing with subjects traditionally problematic for Muslim rationalists. In a hadith describing the Day of Judgment, al-Bukhari narrates from Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī:

I heard the Prophet say: Our Lord [will] reveal His shin (‘an sāqihi) and every believing man and woman will prostrate to Him. But he who prostrated in the worldly life for the sake of reputation, he will go to prostrate, but his back will merely straighten again.

Al-Isma‘ili notes that in the Qur’ānic verse to which this hadith alludes, “[God] will reveal a shin, and they will be called to prostrate but will not be able to (Qur’ān 68:42),” features the indefinite, “a shin (‘an sāq)” rather than the narration’s definite “His shin (‘an sāqihi).” Al-Isma‘ili then provides another narration with the original Qur’ānic wording “yukshafu ‘an sāq,” which he favors because of “its agreement with the wording of the Qur’ān in that sentence.” Ibn Hajar, one of our best sources for al-Isma‘ili’s work, explains the scholar’s stance, “He does not think that God is possessed of members and limbs due to what that entails of resemblance to created beings (mushābahat al-makhlūqin).” Al-Isma‘ili was not the only scholar of his time to feel discomfort with al-Bukhari’s narration. His contemporary Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd al-Khatibī (d. 388/998)

wrote in his commentary on al-Bukhārī’s work that this ḥadīth refers metaphorically to God revealing His power (*qudra*).\(^{25}\)

Al-İsmā‘īlī’s rationalist streak reveals itself elsewhere in his *Mustakhraj* to the extent that he even questions the authenticity of one of al-Bukhārī’s ḥadīths. Describing how Abraham will throw his polytheist father into Hellfire on the Day of Judgment, the Prophet says, “Abraham [will] throw his father and say, ‘O Lord, indeed you promised not to humiliate me (*tukhzīn*) on the day they are all resurrected.’ God [will] reply, ‘Indeed I have prohibited Heaven to the disbelievers (*al-kāfīrīn*).’”\(^{26}\) Ibn Ḥajar notes that al-İsmā‘īlī found the very basis of this ḥadīth problematic (*istashkala ... hādhā al-ḥadīth min ašlihi*) and criticized its authenticity (*siḥḥa*) after he included it in his *Mustakhraj*.

Al-İsmā‘īlī notes that:

This ḥadīth contradicts the evident meaning (*zāhir*) of God’s words that “Abraham’s praying for his father’s forgiveness was but the fulfillment of a promise he had made to him, and when it became clear to him that [his father] was an enemy of God he disassociated himself from him... (Qur’ān 9:114).”\(^{27}\)

Al-İsmā‘īlī thus concludes:

There is some question as to the authenticity of this report from the standpoint that Abraham knew that God does not renege on His promises (*lā yukhlīfu al-mī‘ād*), so how could he consider what happened to his father humiliation when he knew that [God would punish him on the Day of Judgment for his disbelief]?\(^{28}\)


\(^{26}\) Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, #4768-9; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: *kitāb al-tafsīr*, sūra 26, bāb 2. This ḥadīth is a narration of another ḥadīth found in *Fatḥ* #3350; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: *kitāb aḥādīth al-anbiyā‘*, bāb 8, which discusses the story in more detail. See also Qur’ān, 26:87.

\(^{27}\) “Wa mā kana isrīḥjar Ibrāhīm li-abīhi illā ‘an maw ḍa wa‘adahā iyyāhu fa-lammā tabayyana lahu annahu ‘aḏawwun li-Allāh tabarra ‘a minhu...”

IV.3. b. Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī and Shiite-Sunni Polemic

Muslim’s Šahīḥ includes a subchapter on “Proof that loving the Anṣār and ‘Alī (r) is a part and indication of faith and that hating them is a sign of hypocrisy (al-dalīl ʿalā anna ḥubb al-anṣār wa ‘Alī (r) min al-īmān wa ṣalāmātihi wa bughdahum min ṣalāmāt al-nifāq).” This subchapter includes five narrations about the importance of loving the Anṣār, four of them using the love-believer vs. hatred-hypocrite distinction. It ends with one narration in which the Prophet details the importance of loving ‘Alī using exactly the same construction. In his Mustakhraj, Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) provides ḥadīths that perfectly mirror the layout and content of Muslim’s chapter, with five for the Anṣār and one for ‘Alī. The significant difference appears in the subchapter title, which Abū Nu‘aym lists as “On Love for the Anṣār as a Sign of Faith (ʿayat al-īmān).” There is no mention of ‘Alī. 29

This small difference might seem unimportant until one views it in the context of Abū Nu‘aym’s other writings. Most importantly, he cultivated an ongoing interest in debating the Imāmī Shiites using ḥadīths. Abū Nu‘aym’s Kitāb al-imāma wa al-radd ʿalā al-rāṣīda (Book of the Imamate and a Rebuttal of those who Reject the Caliphates of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar) provides a manual for debating the Shiite claim that ‘Alī should have been the first caliph. The book is organized along dialectic lines, with the structure “if your opponent says... then you say.” Many of the debates in the work revolve around the tensions between the different ḥadīths used as proof texts by Shiites and Sunnis. Abū Nu‘aym tells his opponent that “if you use reports (akhbār) as proof then it follows that

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you must accept them from your opponents...; reports (*akhbār*) are thus for you and against you.”

One of the main proof texts employed by Shiites was Muslim’s above-mentioned ḥadith about the believers’ duty to love ‘Alī and the hypocrites’ disregard for him. Abū Nu‘aym rebuts this proof text by alerting his opponent to the other reports in which the Prophet says the same thing about the Anṣār. The pro-‘Alī ḥadith thus has no probative force in issues of succession, for “if [the opponent] says, ‘That has been narrated from so and so and so and so,’ let it be said to him, ‘[Material] opposing that has [also] been related. So if you use reports (*akhbār*) as proof, since [all] the reports contest one another, [the reports] fail (*saqa.tat*).’”

The subtle polemic embodied in Abū Nu‘aym’s subchapter title in his Mustakhraj now becomes evident, since it buries the pro-‘Alī ḥadith in the folds of a chapter he defines as strictly addressing love of the Anṣār. For Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, minimizing the importance and visibility of this ḥadith and highlighting the similar compliments paid the Anṣār is a critical part of his anti-Shiite polemic.

IV.3. c. Abū ‘Awāna and an Independent Legal Path

Abū ‘Awāna Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 312/924-5) studied the legal scholarship of al-Shāfi‘ī at the hands of the latter’s two most renowned Egyptian students,


31 For a modern example of the polemical use of this ḥadith, see Muḥammad Ṣādeq Najmī, *Sayrī dar Sahīhayn*, 77.


Abū ‘Awānā’s *al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-musnad al-mukharraj ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (The Authentic *Musnad* Collection Based on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*), however, reveals an independent legal mind unconstrained by rigid loyalty to Muslim’s book or al-Shāfi‘ī’s opinions. On the famous issue of what invalidates prayer if it passes in front of one, al-Shāfi‘ī had rejected a Prophetic ḥadīth stating that a black dog, a woman or a donkey invalidates prayer. We know from a source that predates Abū ‘Awānā, Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazi’s (d. 294/906) *Ikhtilāf al-fuqahā‘* (The Differing Opinions of Jurists), that al-Shāfi‘ī based his opinion on a report from ‘Ā’isha where she objects to this notion, angrily telling the Companion who narrated the ḥadīth that “you’ve compared us to dogs!” Three narrations of ‘Ā’isha’s objection appear in Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, yet Muslim also includes a lengthy section of ḥadīths that support the idea that these three things do indeed invalidate prayer. In Muslim’s work these conflicting reports are buried among a range of other topics, such as ḥadīths enjoining physically obstructing people who refuse to stop passing in front of someone engaged in prayer. Other ḥadīths in this subchapter state that one can protect oneself by building up a small mound or placing something the size of the

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36 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: kītāb al-ṣalāt, al-i’tirād bayn yaday al-muṣallī. 
back of a saddle in front of oneself while praying. The material that Muslim puts forth thus offers the reader no concrete conclusion, while al-Shafi‘i acts definitively on ‘A‘isha’s report.

In Abū ‘Awāna’s Mustakhraj, this issue is greatly simplified. Moreover, the author adheres to a stance opposing al-Shafi‘i. He includes a chapter called “The Size of the Barrier [by which] Nothing that Passes in Front of Someone Praying Can Harm Him (miqdār al-sutra allati lā yudirru al-muṣallī man yamurrū bayn yadayhi).” He states immediately after the chapter heading that if one does not have this barrier then a black dog, a woman or a donkey does indeed violate prayers if it passes in front of one, and that a line drawn in the dirt is not sufficient protection (as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal claimed). He then provides seven narrations backing up his point, most of which also appear in Muslim’s Sahih. They instruct the reader to build these saddle-back-sized barriers in front of himself to prevent his prayer from being broken.

Here we see that Abū ‘Awāna has taken a large, assorted and ultimately legally inconclusive chapter of Muslim’s Sahih and compressed it into a treatment of one problem: women, black dogs and donkeys invalidate prayer. To this he supplies an immediate solution: placing something in front of you while you pray. As we have mentioned earlier, it was the often inconclusive character of Muslim’s Sahih that diverted

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37 Sahih Muslim: kitāb al-ṣalāt, qadr mā yustaru al-muṣallī.


39 Abū ‘Awāna, Musnad, 2:30-1.
legal attention from the work. Abū 'Awāna’s mustakhraj not only greatly simplifies this topic, it also transforms it into a legal text expressing the author’s independent thought. Despite his ties to al-Shāfi‘ī, Abū ‘Awāna breaks with him on other salient issues as well, such as al-Shāfi‘ī’s insistence on saying “In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate (bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm)” aloud in certain prayers. As Wael Hallaq has demonstrated, in this period madhhabs were not yet rigid sets of legal stances. They were common hermeneutic traditions still being elaborated by the scholars who followed them. Al-Shāfi‘ī himself was thus only primus inter pares among the jurists who followed his tradition. Abū ‘Awāna’s work demonstrates how a mustakhraj could function as an independent hermeneutic expression of the Prophet’s legal authority within the nascent Shāfi‘ī school.

IV.4. Ital and Iżāmāt: Interaction with the Standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim

When Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī read through Muslim’s Sahīh, he criticized the lines its author had drawn in compiling his collection. He found flaws in some of the narrations Muslim had declared authentic and criticized his failure to include other worthy material. Abū Zur‘a’s reaction to the Sahīh foreshadowed the emergence of two closely related genres of hadīth literature addressing the Sahīḥāyn during the long fourth century: books of ītal (flaws) and ilżāmāt (recommended additions).

40 Abū ‘Awāna, Musnad, 2:133-5.

Books detailing the obscure flaws of transmission, or ʿilal, represented the third tier of ḥadīth criticism discussed in the previous chapter. They had thus existed since at least the early third/ninth century. The long fourth century, however, saw the appearance of ʿilal works devoted specifically to weeding out such flaws from the Sahihayn. These works illustrate the multiplicity of approaches existing in the ḥadīth-critic community; a scholar critiquing the Sahihayn was effectively juxtaposing his methods and standards of ḥadīth criticism with those used by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, critically applying his definition of ‘authentic’ to their works. We have two surviving criticisms of the Sahihayn from this period. The earliest is Muḥammad b. ʿAmār ʿAbd al-Shahīd’s (d. 317/929-30) ʿilal of Muslim’s Sahih. The most famous and comprehensive work, however, is the Kitāb at-tatabbuʿ of the dominant Baghdad ḥadīth scholar ʿAli b. ʿUmar al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995).

As the third tier of ḥadīth criticism, the study of ʿilal had always targeted two categories of flaws: independent and comparative. Critics first focused on flaws that independently undermined the strength of an isnād. A sahīh ḥadīth should possess an uninterrupted chain of trustworthy and competent transmitters that reached back to the Prophet.42 Ḥadīth critics thus searched for weak or error-prone transmitters as well as breaks between links in the isnād (inqiṭāʿ). Broken transmissions included reports that someone who had never met the Prophet attributed directly to him (termed mursal) or

42 For appropriate expressions of this definition, see Muslim, Sahih, 1:23; Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih Ibn Khuzayma, 1:3; Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, Sahih Ibn Ḥibbān, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, [1952]), 1:112.
that were actually the statements of the Prophet’s Companions (termed *mawqif*). This stage of criticism was subjective, as different critics applied different standards to their material. Muslim’s decision to consider two narrators joined by the vague phrase “from / according to (*īn),” provided they were contemporaries, proved controversial for later scholars who upheld more rigid standards for transmission. Al-Bukhārī’s inclusion of a ḥadīth narrated by the extremist Khārijite ‘Imrān b. Ḥītān, who praised the caliph ‘Alī’s murderer in poetry, would prove similarly problematic for critics less forgiving of such ‘heresies.’

The second breed of flaws on which *īla* criticism focused was comparative. Scholars acknowledged two comparative signs of unreliable narrations: disagreement (*khilāf*) and a lack of corroboration (*tafarrud*). These two concepts existed in relative space, for both rested on the critic gathering all the available narrations of a ḥadīth and examining which were the most well-established. If a specific narration differed with the bulk of other transmissions or with that of a master ḥadīth scholar, it was generally deemed weak. If one student transmitted a narration of a ḥadīth without the corroboration of his classmates, it was similarly declared unreliable.

A central theme in this comparison of *isnāds* was the layered notion of ‘Addition’ (*ziyāda*), a concept that Muslim scholars of this period commonly considered unified but which actually subsumed three very different phenomena. The first can be termed *Isnād Addition*, which occurred when one narration of a ḥadīth added a transmitter not found in the other *isnāds*. The second, termed *Literal Matn Addition*, involved one narration

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43 For examples of these flaws in our earliest extant *īla* work, see ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *al-Īla*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Aẓamī ([n.p.]: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1392/1972); 81, 104, 110.
of a ḥadīth adding material to the text of the report. Finally, Normative Matn Addition occurred when one narration of a report that was generally considered to be the statement of a Companion (mawqūf) was elevated and attributed to the Prophet.44

This comparison of narrations was also a subjective process. If, out of a selection of ten narrations of a tradition from reliable transmitters, only one was attributed to the Prophet while the others were the words of a Companion, most ḥadīth critics would consider the exception defective. This tradition would thus not be saḥīḥ, since it had been established as not extending back to the Prophet. Another critic, however, might trust the lone transmitter and choose his as the correct narration of the ḥadīth, declaring it an authentic Prophetic statement. Muslim often seems to have been more lax on such matters than his fourth/tenth-century critics. In the introduction to his Ṣaḥīḥ he states that he accepts a transmitter’s uncorroborated material provided he not deviate blatantly from his cohorts.45 As Ibn ʿAmmār and al-Dāraquṭnī’s work demonstrates, on many occasions it seems that Muslim’s desire to locate a reliable, uninterrupted narration to the Prophet led him to ignore the often better-established but flawed versions of the ḥadīth.

Many of the flaws that Ibn ʿAmmār identifies in Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ thus revolve around demonstrating how the most well-established version of one of Muslim’s ḥadīths is actually a broken or weak transmission. Out of a total of thirty-six criticized narrations from the Ṣaḥīḥ, Ibn ʿAmmar locates thirteen instances of inappropriate Addition (4 Isnād

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45 Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 1:6.
Addition, 4 Literal *Matn* Addition, 5 Normative *Matn* Addition), and nine instances of a break in the *isnād* (*inqīṭā*). Ibn ‘Ammār also reveals other areas in which he differs with Muslim’s methodology. He finds fault with one narration because an earlier ḥadīth scholar could find no trace of it in the transmitter’s personal notebooks.46 For another narration Ibn ‘Ammār explains that an error occurred because the transmitter had buried his books and begun narrating from memory. Here we see that Ibn ‘Ammār adhered more to al-Bukhārī’s school of thought, which appreciated written sources as an invaluable bulwark against error despite the emphasis that the ḥadīth-scholar community placed on oral transmission.47

While Ibn ‘Ammār’s relatively early ‘ilal work tackled only Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, fifty years later al-Dāraquṭnī critiqued both the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. His *Kitāb al-tatabbu* criticizes two hundred and seventeen narrations, one hundred from Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, seventy-eight from al-Bukhārī’s and thirty-two shared by both collections.48 Like Ibn ‘Ammār, al-Dāraquṭnī’s comments frequently involve instances of inappropriate Addition, especially in Muslim’s work. Unlike Muslim, he only accepted Addition, either *Isnād* or *Matn*, when it enjoyed the support of a preponderance of experts.49 Al-Dāraquṭnī also reveals a

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47 Al-Bukhārī states that “books are more accurate (*ḥafiz*) for the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ʿilm*), since a person could transmit something and then return to a book and [it turns out] that it is as in the book”; see his *Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn fi al-ṣalāt*, 82.

48 For a more exact breakdown of these narrations, see Brown, “Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon,” 11.

49 For more on al-Dāraquṭnī’s stance on Addition/ziyāda, see Brown, “Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon,” 31-4.
stringency absent in al-Bukhārī’s method. The Baghdad scholar chastises al-Bukhārī for narrating a ḥadīth from the arch-Khārijite ‘Imrān b. Ḥīṣṭān, citing his deviant beliefs (ṣū’ iʿtiqādihi).50

Unlike Ibn Ḥanbal, Ḥamd al-Khaṭṭābī, as well as later ḥadīth critics such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and Mullā ‘Alī Qārī (d. 1014/1606), neither Ibn ‘Ammār nor al-Dāraquṭnī criticized any ḥadīth found in the Ṣaḥīḥayn for ideological or polemical reasons.51 In only one instance does either scholar even directly address the legal implications of any ḥadīth. Ibn ‘Ammār rejects a narration from Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ stating that the Prophet did not perform ṭumra after the battle of Ḥunayn because it contradicted another authentic ḥadīth asserting that he did.52 In fact, al-Dāraquṭnī demonstrates astonishing objectivity in his critique: although he had compiled an entire book of ḥadīths devoted to affirming that God would grant the believers a vision of Himself on the Day of Judgment, al-Dāraquṭnī explicitly rejects a unique narration in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim supporting exactly that belief.53

The second genre of ḥadīth literature closely related to ṣilal was that of ilzāmāt.

These works listed ḥadīths that the authors believed al-Bukhārī and Muslim should have

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52 Ibn ‘Ammār, 93.

included in their two collections. Only four *ilzāmāt* works, also known as *mustadrak*, were produced, all of them based on both al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥs* in tandem. The remarkable *Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī will receive sufficient attention in the next chapter. ʿAbdallāh b. Abū Dharr al-Harāwī’s (d. 430/1038) one-volume *mustadrak* of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* appears not to have survived. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī al-ʿAwālī of Naysābūr (fl. 420/1030?) made a *ṣaḥīḥ* selection of ḥadīths from his teacher Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Balawī (d. 410/1019) that met the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim (*ʿalā shart al-shaykhayn*). The only other extant work from this genre comes from al-Harāwī’s teacher, al-Daraquṭnī. Scholars have closely identified his *Kitāb al-ilzāmāt* with his above-mentioned *Kitāb al-tatabbu*; and they have often been transmitted as one unit.

*Ilzāmāt* works applied al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s own standards to ḥadīths left out of their works. Unlike *ḥadīl* works, this entailed a further application of the *Shaykhayn’s* methods and not a juxtaposition with the methods of later critics. As with his critique of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, al-Daraquṭnī did not use his *ilzāmāt* as a means for advancing his own legal or doctrinal positions. There is an almost total separation between the ḥadīths that al-Daraquṭnī added to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and those that he selected for his own legal reference, his *Sunan*. At no point, for example, does he claim that one of the narrations included in his *Sunan* should have been featured in the *Ṣaḥīḥs*.

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54 Al-Farīsī, *Tārīkh Naysābūr al-muntakhāb min al-Siyāq*, 607. Here the author states that Abū Dharr produced a *mustakhraj* of both *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Al-Harāwī’s *mustakhraj* of Muslim was criticized for narrating from transmitters unworthy of Muslim’s standards; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, 3:201-3. 244.


56 Brown, “‘Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon,’” 20-21.
What remains slightly unclear is how these scholars understood and articulated al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s requirements for authenticity. Al-Dāraquṭnī’s *Kitāb al-ilzāmāt* implies he considered himself well acquainted with the two scholars’ methodologies, and his student Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī (d. 401/1010-11) confidently refers to Muslim’s “usual methods (*rasm*).”57 The only explicit studies devoted to this subject, however, seem to be al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī’s separate monographs on al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s requirements.58 Both these works, however, have been lost.

Both *ilzāmāt* and *īla*l activities seem to have been fairly informal among scholars of the long fourth century. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s teacher Hibatallāh b. al-Ḥasan al-Lālakāʾī (d. 418/1027-8), for example, noted incidentally in his *Sharḥ usūl iṭiqād ahl al-sunna wa’l-jāmāʿa* (Exposition of the Principles of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* Creed) that a certain ḥadīth met Muslim’s requirements and should have been included in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (*yalzamuhu ikhrājuhu*).59 In addition to his *Kitāb al-tatābbu*; al-Dāraquṭnī criticized at least thirteen other narrations from Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*. These were not set down in any extant books, but have survived in a rebuttal by al-Dāraquṭnī’s student Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī.60

60 See Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī, *Kitāb al-ajwība*; 187, 195, 198, and 203, for examples.
IV.5. Required Study: Clarifying an Unclear Subject

As templates for mustakhrajs, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections served as formative texts for scholars to interpret and implement the Prophet’s normative legacy in new times. Through ʿilal and ilzāmaṭ works, ḥadīth scholars of the long fourth century critically engaged the standards of authenticity established by the Shaykhayn. Both the mustakhraj and the ʿilal / ilzāmaṭ genres required an exhaustive knowledge of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections. Scholars seeking to partially reproduce their isnāds or understand their requirements for authenticity needed to identify all of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s chains of transmission. These genres of scholarly activity thus spurred a myriad of subsidiary studies on the Sahihayn. Mustakhrajs themselves often included elucidations of obscure transmitters. Al-Iṣmāʿīlī’s work, for example, identifies a narrator in one isnād whom al-Bukhārī refers to simply as ‘al-Maqburī as the famous Successor Saʿīd al-Maqburī.61

Those who transmitted al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Sahīhs also contributed to clarifying some of the collections’ indistinct features and deciphering textual vagaries. Ibn al-Sakan (d. 353/964) of Baghdad settled in Egypt after years of travel and became an important transmitter of al-Bukhārī’s Sahīh.62 He received his text of the Sahīh directly from al-Bukhārī’s student al-Firābī (d. 320/932) and attempted to clarify as many of the ambiguous transmitters as possible through his own research. As a result, his recension of the Sahīh became one of the most definitive studies of al-Bukhārī’s

62 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkira al-huffaz, 3:100; idem, Tārikh al-islām, 26:88-9. He transmitted Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī to Ibn Asad al-Juhaṇī, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdullāh b. Mufarrar and Abū Ḥaṣan b. ʿAw. 158
transmitters. Abū Dharr al-Harawī was a Mālikī who settled among the Bedouin near Mecca and visited the city every year for pilgrimage as well as to narrate ḥadíths. He brought together the three disparate transmissions of al-Bukhārī’s Sahīh from Abū ʿĪsāq al-Mustamli of Balkh, al-Kushmīhanī of Merv and Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥamawayh of Sarakhs. These were the three most prominent students of al-Fīrābī, the primary transmitter of the Sahīh from its author. More importantly, al-Harawī noted the variations among the three transmissions and attempted to honestly reconstitute the original text.

Differences between various narrations of al-Bukhārī’s Sahīh occasionally proved noticeable. Besides al-Fīrābī, Ibrāhīm b. Maʿqil al-Nasafi’s (d. 295/907-8) and Ḥammād b. Shākir’s (d. 290/902-3) transmissions of the text also survived for several centuries. Ḥammād b. Shākir’s recension, however, contained two hundred fewer narrations than that of al-Fīrābī, while Ibrāhīm’s was three hundred fewer.

Transmitters could also play more substantial editorial roles. Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī reports that when Abū ʿĪsāq al-Mustamli examined al-Fīrābī’s copy of the Sahīh he noticed that some sections were still in draft form, with a number of chapter headings


65 Ibn Daqqīq al-ʿId, al-Iqtirāf fi bayān al-ʾistīlaḥ, 299.

66 Al-ʾIrāqī, al-Taqyīd wa al-idāh, 26-7. Ibn Ḥajar explains that Ibrāhīm and Ḥammād heard incomplete versions of the Sahīh from al-Bukhārī and that al-Fīrābī’s recension represents the final product (ṣal al-taṣnīf); Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ʿalā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥī, 69. For more information on the details of the transmission of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s Sahīḥs, see Chapter 7 n. 100. For a discussion of the attribution and textual authenticity of the two works, see Appendix III.
lacking ḥadīths, or ḥadīths with no chapter headings. Al-Mustamī states that he and his fellow students attempted to arrange unsorted material in its proper place (fa-aḍafnā baʿḍ dhālik ilā baʿḍ). 67

Most importantly, the long fourth century saw the emergence of studies specifically devoted to identifying and describing al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters. The earliest examples of this genre are limited to identifying al-Bukhārī’s immediate sources. Ibn ʿAbī’s Asāmī man rawā ṭanhum Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-
Bukhārī and Muḥammad b. Ishāq Ibn Manda (d. 395/1004-5) of Isfahan’s Asāmī mashāyikh al-imām al-Bukhārī represent the first two generations of these transmitter studies. Abū Naṣr Aḥmad al-Kalābādī (d. 398/1008) of Bukhara produced the most comprehensive listing of all al-Bukhārī’s transmitters. 68 Yet it was not until the early fifth/eleventh century that a work was compiled on the men of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ: this was the book of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī Ibn Manjawayh of Naysābūr (d. 428/1036-7). Al-
Dāraquṭnī was the first to write a biographical dictionary covering both the Ṣaḥīḥayn. His student al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī and the Baghdad scholar al-Lālakāʾī each repeated this task several years later. 69


68 Although originally titled al-Hidayā wa al-irshād fi maʿrifat ahl al-thiqa wa al-sādād alladīhān akhrajahum lahu al-Bukhārī fil-Ṣaḥīḥihi, this work is often referred to as Rījāl Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.

69 Al-Ḥākīm’s small work is entitled Tasmiyat man akhrayahum al-Bukhārī wa Muslim wa mā infarada bihi kull minhumā, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥāṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfīyya and Dār al-Jīnān, 1407/1987). This genre continued beyond the scope of our long fourth century. Abū ʿAlī al-Jayyānī al-Ghassānī (d. 498/1105) made efforts to complete the task of identifying al-Bukhārī’s obscure transmitters (see above note 63). The Mālikī jurist Abū al-Walīd Sulaymān b. Khalaf al-Bājī wrote a book collecting critical opinions on al-Bukhārī’s men entitled Kitāb al-taḍil wa al-tajrīḥ li-man rawā ṭanhu al-
Al-Dāraquṭnī’s *oeuvre* constituted the first and most impressive holistic study of the *Sahīḥayn* as two complementary texts. He authored no less than eleven books detailing various aspects of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work. In addition to his biographical dictionary of their transmitters, he compiled separate lists of the transmitters after the generation of the Companions who comprised al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s *īnāds.* He emphasized the complementary relationship of the two works in his listing of the Companions featured in both *Sahīḥs* as well as those that each book used exclusively. He also made a study of the different transmissions of the *Sahīḥayn* after their authors’ deaths. The functional nature of these studies reveals itself in the book that al-Dāraquṭnī tailored to his interest in expanding the number of verified authentic ḥadīths through *ilzāmāt* work. He composed a book solely on the Companions through

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whom reliable hadiths were transmitted but were not included in the Șahiḥayn (Dhikr al-
ṣaḥāba alladhīna șaḥḥat al-riwāya ‘anhum wa laysū fī al-Șahiḥayn).\textsuperscript{72}

An examination of the studies devoted to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters
reveals a gradually increasing mastery of the two Șahiḥs as the long fourth century
progressed. Moreover, we are alerted to another central feature of the network of
Șahiḥayn scholars in this period: the serious regional boundaries that still constricted the
movement of texts and information. In Jurjān, Ibn ‘Adī was unable to identify one of al-
Bukhārī’s teachers mentioned in the Șahiḥ, Saʿīd b. Marwān, listing him as unknown (lā
yuʿraf).\textsuperscript{73} Even Ibn Manda, who died some thirty years after Ibn ‘Adī, fails to mention
this Saʿīd b. Marwān in his book on al-Bukhārī’s sources. It is not until Abū Naṣr al-
Kalābādhi, who died a mere three years after Ibn Manda but lived mainly in Bukhara,
that we find a listing for Saʿīd b. Marwān b. ‘Alī Abū ʿUthmān al- Baghdadī (d. 252/866),
who lived and died in Naysābūr.\textsuperscript{74}

Why was neither Ibn ‘Adī nor Ibn Manda able to identify this transmitter? Saʿīd
b. Marwān had narrated hadiths to two major scholars in his adopted home city of
Naysābūr, Ibn Khuzayma and his disciple Ibn al-Jārūd. Ibn ‘Adī, however, never traveled
to the Khurāsān region, and neither he nor his close friend al-Ismāʿīlī had any contact
with Ibn Khuzayma or his student. It is therefore not surprising that Ibn ‘Adī ignores Ibn

\textsuperscript{72} This work remains unpublished, al-Dāraquṭnī, “Dhikr asmā’ al-ṣaḥāba alladhīna șaḥḥat al-riwāya
‘anhum wa laysū fī al-Șahiḥayn,” MS 7159, Maktabat al-Asad, Damascus: fols. 197b-198a.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibn ‘Adī, Asāmī, 110.

\textsuperscript{74} Al-Kalābādhi, Rijāl Șahiḥ al-Bukhārī, 2:872. Al-Ḥākim benefited from al-Kalābādhi; see his
Tasmiyat man akhrājahum al-Bukhārī wa Muslim, 123.
Khuzayma completely in the list of great ḥadīth scholars in his al-Ākīmil. Conversely, Ibn Manda visited both Bukhara and Naysābūr. But we know from al-Ḥākim, however, that he had completed his book on al-Bukhārī’s teachers before staying in Naysābūr and possibly before arriving in Bukhara. It seems that, like Ibn ‘Adī, Ibn Manda never had access to information about Saʿīd b. Marwān of Naysābūr.

IV.6. Regional and Temporal Distribution of the Ṣahīḥayn Network

Ibn ‘Adī and Ibn Manda’s failure to identify Saʿīd b. Marwān illustrates one of the salient characteristics of the study of the Ṣahīḥayn in the long fourth century. Although ḥadīth scholars traversed the Islamic world from Andalusia to Central Asia, resilient regional cults still developed according to material constraints like the availability of certain texts as well as the functionalist and ideological preferences of local scholarly communities. The Ṣahīḥayn Network of the long fourth century revolved around three of these regional schools: Naysābūr, Jurjān and Baghdad.

IV.6. a. Naysābūr and the Hometown Cult of Muslim

Naysābūr was the birthplace of the mustakhraj phenomenon, and it was in this city and its environs that the genre flourished most intensively. From the time of

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75 For a biography of Saʿīd b. Marwān al-Ṭāhirī, see Ibn Khalfūn, al-Muʾīm bi-sīnūk al-Bukhārī wa Musīlim, 514-5. Ibn Khalfūn lists another Saʿīd b. Marwān as well, namely Saʿīd b. Marwān b. Saʿīd Abū ʿUthmān al-Azdī from the Jazīrah. Ibn Wārā and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī narrated from him, and al-Bukhārī notes him in his Tārīkh al-kabīr. It is very unlikely that this was the Saʿīd b. Marwān to which Ibn ʿAdī was referring, since he was very familiar with Ibn Wārā and Abū Ḥātim, both of whom appear in his al-Ākīmil.

Muslim’s death until the close of the long fourth century, scholars devoted mustakhrajs to the Șahîh of the city’s native son. In addition, Naysâbûr scholars crafted mustakhrajs of Abû Dâwûd’s Sunan, al-Tirmidhî’s Jâmi’ and Ibn Khuzayma’s Șahîh. It was only in the mid 300/900s, however, that the city’s scholars developed an interest in al-Bukhârî’s collection.

Naysâbûr was the linchpin of the eastern Islamic lands during the Classical period. Astride the road that ran from Baghdad to Central Asia and beyond, it was an inevitable commercial way station and a bustling center of scholarly activity. The city’s intellectual landscape was sharply divided between the Ĥanafi school, with its strong ties to Mu’âtazilite doctrine, and the transmission-based ahl al-sunnâ, who generally identified with the teachings of al-Shâfi’î. In the decades after the city laid Muslim to rest at the head of one of its major squares, Naysâbûr’s transmission-based legal culture was dominated by Muhammâd b. Ishâq Ibn Khuzayma. Declared “imâm of the imâms,” Ibn Khuzayma was described by al-’llâkîm al-Naysâbûrî as “the foremost [scholar] by agreement of all of his age,” an authority on the teachings of al-Shâfi’î and a source of religious rulings (fatwâs). He studied with al-Shâfi’î’s most illustrious students, al-Rabi’î and al-Muzânî, and was relied upon greatly by Ibn Surayj (d. 305/917-18), the Baghdad scholar around whom the Shâfi’î legal school coalesced more concretely. Ibn Khuzayma rigidly upheld the über-Sunni stance on the nature of the Qur’ân, stating that

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78 Al-’lâkîm al-Naysâbûrî, Tarîkh Nishâbûr, 120; Bulliet, Patricians, 62.
anyone who believed it to be created was an unbeliever. A poem by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Yahyā of Naysābūr testifies to Muslim’s and Ibn Khuzayma’s stations in the city’s pantheon of scholars:

So set aside all thought of Jūrjān, for indeed our scholars
In the land of Naysābūr are more illustrious by far; so why the sadness?
No one can be compared to Yahyā b. Yahyā. If tested his glory would suffice you.
And his student Ishaq [b. Rāhawayh], how great he is (li-illāh darruḥu)!
Indeed, along with al-Ribāṭī, their virtue is not hidden.
Abū al-Azhar al-Mifdāl, then Ibn Ḥāshim,
And Muslim, they are the lords of ḥadīth so do not deny it.
And who is their equal in prodigious memory and station?
...
And from us, too, Ibn Ishaq the Khuzaymī, our shaykh,
Our source of pride, shaykh of all shaykhs in his time.
Indeed he was for Islam a pillar and pivot.
May God water well a grave with such a shaykh buried within.

One of Ibn Khuzayma’s colleagues also exercised a tremendous amount of influence in Naysābūr. Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ishaq b. Ibrāhīm al-Sarrāj (d. 313/925) was one of the city’s leading scholars. A student of Ishaq b. Rāhawayh and a teacher of Ibn Khuzayma, both al-Bukhārī and Muslim studied ḥadīth with al-Sarrāj. He was an inveterate critic of the Ḥanafī school and active prosecutor of those who upheld the created wording of the Qur’ān. Al-Sarrāj also produced one of the earliest mustakhrajs of Muslim’s Sahīh.

80 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz, 2:205.
81 Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā b. Yahyā al-Tamīmī al-Naysābūrī (d. ca. 220/835); see Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib al-tahdīḥ, 11:259.
82 Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, Tārikh Nīshābūr, 177-8.
Scholars in Naysābūr began using Muslim’s collections as a template for mustakhrajs almost immediately after his death. Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī mentioned that Abū Bakr al-Faḍl b. al-‘Abbās al-Ṣā‘igh of Rayy (d. 270/883) had done so during Muslim’s lifetime. Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Rajā’ (d. 286/899) studied with many of Muslim’s teachers but nonetheless produced a mustakhraj called al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-mukharraj ‘alā kitāb Muslim. Abū al-Faḍl Ahmad b. Salama al-Bazzār (d. 286/899), Muslim’s companion to whom he had dedicated the Ṣaḥīḥ, also wrote a mustakhraj. As the Ṣaḥīḥayn Network Chart demonstrates, scholars studying or living in Naysābūr and its immediate environs continued to produce waves of mustakhrajs on Muslim’s collection. Fully ten had been compiled before Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb Ibn al-Akhram (d. 344/955) finally produced one of the Ṣaḥīḥayn together. Almost two decades later al-Māsarjisī (d. 365/976) devoted another mustakhraj to the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Yet in the century after Ibn al-Akhram’s death, Naysābūr produced eight more mustakhrajs of Muslim and four of the combined Ṣaḥīḥayn, but only one devoted solely to al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ.

Although al-Bukhārī was not a native of Naysābūr like Muslim, he resided in the city for approximately five years, during which time he narrated his Ṣaḥīḥ to circles of

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85 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyāsat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 89; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkiraṭ al-huffaz, 2:186; idem, Tārīkh al-islām, 21:288.

86 Al-Dhahabī states that people like Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī also called the work Ṣaḥīḥ Ahmad b. Salama; al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdād, 4:408; cf. al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-islām, 21:59-60; idem, Tadhkiraṭ al-huffaz, 2:156.


hadith students. Why then did scholarly activity in the city seem so oblivious of al-
Bukhārī’s work until Ibn al-Akhram’s and al-Māsarjī’s writings? The answer lies in the
qualitative preference Muslim enjoyed in his hometown as well in the accusations of
heresy that had tainted al-Bukhārī’s name. When Abū al-‘Abbās b. Saʿīd Ibn Uqda (d. 332/944),
who taught many Naysābūrīs, was asked who was more knowledgeable, al-
Bukhārī or Muslim, he eventually replied that al-Bukhārī occasionally made mistakes
with reports transmitted from Syrians because he had only received these in written form.
He thus sometimes thought that a person mentioned once by his name and once by his
patronymic was two people. Conversely, he notes, Muslim rarely made errors
concerning transmission (ṣilal) because he avoided al-Bukhārī’s practice of including
additional hadiths with incomplete isnāds. Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī (d. 349/960), who had
traveled widely in areas such as Egypt, Jurjān and Merv, concluded that “there is not
beneath the heavens (taḥt adīm al-samāʾ) [a book] more authentic than the book of
Muslim.” Ibn Manda heard this directly from Abū ‘Alī; see Ibn Manda, Shurīt, 71; Ibn
Majār, Tiḥār, 3:80. Ibn Ḥajar suggests that Abū ʿAlī may not have ever seen al-Bukhārī’s Saḥīḥ, but this is unlikely since the work was certainly in circulation in the regions
he visited; Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 13.

89 We know from al-Kalābādhī that al-Bukhārī had been narrating his work to students since at least
248 AH. He arrived in Naysābūr in about 250 AH; al-Kalābādhī, Rijāl Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 1:24.

90 Al-Ḥākim Naysābūrī, Tiḥār Nishābūr, 101; Ibn ‘Asākir, Tiḥār madīnat Dimashq, 58:90.

91 Ibn Manda heard this directly from Abū ʿAlī; see Ibn Manda, Shurūt, 71; al-Khāṣīb, Tiḥār
Baghdād, 8:70-2; cf. al-Dhahabī, Tadhkīr al-ḥuffāz, 3:80. Ibn Ḥajar suggests that Abū ʿAlī may not have
ever seen al-Bukhārī’s Saḥīḥ, but this is unlikely since the work was certainly in circulation in the regions
he visited; Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 13.
many visits to Baghdad, of al-Bukhārī’s works he only transmitted the Tārīkh al-kabīr, to
the exclusion of his Ṣaḥīḥ.\textsuperscript{92}

This delayed attention to al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ also stemmed from the scandal of the

deaf of the Qur’ān. Two of the most influential transmission-based scholars in the city,
Ibn Khuzayma and al-Sarrāj, both aggressively attacked anyone who upheld a belief in
the created wording of the holy book. Even Ibn al-Akhrám, who composed the first joint
al-Bukhārī/Muslim mustakhraj, did so only after responding to al-Sarrāj’s request to
complete one based solely on Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ.\textsuperscript{93} Abū al-Walīd Ḥassān b. Muḥammad al-
Umawī (d. 344/955) expressed a desire to craft a mustakhraj of al-Bukhārī’s work, but
his father instructed him to follow Muslim due to al-Bukhārī’s scandal.\textsuperscript{94} It is thus no
surprise that, with the exception of Ibn al-Akhrám and al-Māsarjīsī, all the conjoined
Ṣaḥīḥayn mustakhrajs in Naysābūr and the only one devoted solely to al-Bukhārī
appeared only after the generation of scholars who had studied with Ibn Khuzayma and
al-Sarrāj had died (see Ṣaḥīḥayn Network Chart). Only at that point could scholars like
Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥākim (d. 378/988), a judge who worked in Naysābūr’s environs and
whom al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī calls one of most knowledgeable concerning the
requirements of authenticity (ṣhrūṭ al-ṣaḥīḥ), state, “May God bless imām Muḥammad
b. Ismā‘īl [al-Bukhārī], for it was he who set forth the foundations (al-uṣūl) [of ḥadīth]

\textsuperscript{92} Al-Muzakkī must have visited Baghdad more than once, since at the time of his recorded visit in
316/928-9 both al-Dāraqūtnī and al-Barqānī would have been too young to have heard from him; al-
Dāraqūtnī never voyaged east from Iraq. See al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdad, 6:165-7; al-Dhahabī,
Tārīkh al-islām, 26:289-90.

\textsuperscript{93} Al-Dhahabī, Tadbirrat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:55; idem, Tārīkh al-islām, 25:312-3.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 90; al-Dhahabī, Tadbirrat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:75; idem Tārīkh al-
and elucidated them to the people. All those who have come after him, like Muslim b. al-
Hajjaj, have taken from his book (the Șahihi).  


On a map, the small province of Jurjän on the southeast coast of the Caspian Sea does not seem far from Naysâbûr and its satellite cities of Tûs, Juvayn and Isfarâyîn. The intimidating Elborz Mountains, however, separate Jurjän’s littoral marshes and thickly forested mountainsides from these Khurâsâni centers as well as from the great city of Rayy. Yet during the mid-fourth/tenth century, Jurjän constituted an important center of ḥadîth study in its own right. More specifically, it was home to three friends who formed a bastion of scholarly interest in al-Bukhârî’s Șahiîh. The region produced no mustakhrajs of any other ḥadîth work. Two of these scholars in particular emerged as extremely influential figures in the historical development of ḥadîth literature. We have already relied on ʿAbdallâh Abû Aḥmad Ibûn ʿAdî (d. 365/975-6) as the earliest significant source on al-Bukhârî’s life and work. He gained renown, however, for his voluminous dictionary of problematic ḥadîth transmitters, ʿal-Kâmil fi duʿâfâ’ al-rijâl, that became the foundation for many later works in that genre. The Kâmil enjoyed immediate popularity and quickly spread among scholarly circles in major cities like Baghdad. Ibn ʿAdî’s younger contemporary in Baghdad, al-Dâraquṭnî, said that the work sufficed for all needs in that genre.  96 Ibn ʿAdî traveled widely in Iraq, Syria, the Hijâz and Egypt and


was deeply versed in the school of al-Shafi'i. He wrote a juridical manual called *al-Intiṣār* based on the chapter structure of al-Muzani’s *Mukhtasar*, the most famous abridgment of the Shafi‘i tradition’s formative text, al-Shafi‘i’s *Umm* (The Motherbook). Ibn ‘Adi not only served as an important transmitter of al-Bukhari’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* from al-Firarbi in Jurjān, he also wrote the aforementioned first work on al-Bukhari’s sources.

When Ibn ‘Adi died, his close friend and colleague al-Isma‘ili (d. 371/981-2) led his funeral prayer. As we have noted in the preceding discussion of al-Isma‘ili’s *Mustakhraj*, this scholar adhered to al-Shafi‘i’s transmission-based legal tradition and also exhibited marked rationalist tendencies. Al-Isma‘ili was so well-respected that several ḥadīth scholars, including al-Daraquzī, felt that he should have compiled his own *ṣaḥīḥ* instead of following in al-Bukhari’s footsteps. It was reported that when news of his death reached Baghdad, over three hundred ḥadīth scholars, merchants and jurists from both the Shafi‘i and Ḥanbalī schools gathered in the main mosque to mourn him for several days. Although al-Isma‘ili produced no independent study of al-Bukhari’s

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work, his Mustakhraj remained an indispensable reference for students and scholars of the Ṣaḥīḥ, even late ones such as Ibn Ḥajar.

Abū ʿAbd Allāḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāḥ al-Ghīṭrī (d. 377/987-8) was one of the least accomplished of the Ḥurūfī scholars. He was a very close associate of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAṣim and also his son’s tutor. Like his friend, al-Ghīṭrī composed a mustakhraj of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ. Although his father was from Naysābūr, he lived almost his entire life in Ḥurūfī. He visited Rayy and Baghdad, and was the only Ḥurūfī scholar to have heard from Ibn Khuzayma in Naysābūr.

Why did this cluster of Ḥurūfī scholars prove such redoubt partisans of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ to the exclusion of Muslim’s and the other major fruits of the Ṣaḥīḥ movement? This phenomenon may have partially resulted from a limited exposure to Muslim’s work. As the Ṣaḥīḥayn Network Chart demonstrates, there were almost no personal links between Ḥurūfī and Naysābūr, where the cult of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ matured. Ibn ʿAdī thus excludes both Muslim and Ibn Khuzayma from his list of noteworthy hadith scholars and does not seem to have had access to valuable information about al-Bukhārī’s Naysābūr sources. As with Muslim’s collection in Naysābūr, however, the Ḥurūfī scholars also considered Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī to be a more accurate representation of the Prophet’s legacy. Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAṣim argues in the introduction to his Mustakhraj (his Madkhal) that al-Bukhārī’s book is superior to Muslim’s because the latter “set out to do what [al-Bukhārī] sought to do, and took from him or from his books, except that he did not

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101 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-huffāẓ, 3:120.
102 Al-Dhahabī, Tarīkh al-islām, 26:614-5.
restrict himself [in what he included] as much Abū ʿAbdallāh [al-Bukhārī] did, and he
narrated from a large number from whom Abū ʿAbdallāh would not deign to narrate (lam
yataʿarrad... liʾl-riwāya ʿanhum).” He adds that al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ also bested Abū
Dāwūd’s Sunan because the former had higher standards for selecting ḥadīths as well as
better explanations of their legal implications. Al-Bukhari’s Sunan also bested Abu
Dawud’s Sunan because the former had higher standards for selecting hadiths as well as
better explanations of their legal implications. 103 Abū al-Qāsim Ḥamza b. Yūsuf al-Sāhmī
(d. 427/1035-6), author of the local history of Jurjān (Tārīkh Jurjān), relies on al-Bukhari
ten times in his history for information about hadith transmitters. 104 Although al-Sāhmī
interacted with several scholars who cultivated equal interests in al-Bukhari and Muslim,
including al-Dāraqūṭnī, Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, he never
mentions Muslim in his work. He does, however, note two people as hearing Sahih al-
Bukhari.

IV.6. c. Baghdad: Inheriting the Study of the Sahihayn Among the Baghdad Knot

As the Sahihayn Network Chart demonstrates, Baghdad inherited the study of al-
Bukhari’s and Muslim’s collections from both Jurjān and Naysābūr. From the mid-
fourth/tenth century to the mid-fifth/eleventh, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate hosted
a knot of scholars who pioneered the study of the two works as complementary units.
The genesis of this close association of experts lay in the seminal work of ʿAlī b. ʿUmar
al-Dāraqūṭnī, whose eleven treatises on the Sahihayn have proven some of the most

103 Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥadīy al-sāri, 11; al-Jazāʾirī, Tawjīḥ al-nazar ilā usūl al-athar, 1:305. For a short
summary of this, see Muḥyi al-Dīn al-Nawawī, Tahdhib al-asmāʾ wa al-lughāt, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-

104 Al-Sāhmī, Tārīkh Jurjān, 488. Al-Sāhmī is connected to al-Bukhari by the isnād of Abū Bakr
Ahmad b. ʿAbdān ← Muḥammad b. Saḥī al-Bukhari.
influential books on the subject. In particular, his joint critical study, *Kitāb al-ilzāmāt wa al-tatabbuʿ*, has attracted scholarly attention up to the present day. Al-Dāraquṭnī brought these two previous centers of study together through his personal scholarly relationships with Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥāḍīrī, Ibrāhīm al-Muzakki, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and Ibn Dhuḥl of Naysābūr, and Ibn ʿAdī of Jurjān. He also interacted with scholars from farther afield in Central Asia, such as al-Kalābādhī. He received at least two transmissions of Muslim’s *Ṣahīh*, one from Ibn Māhān in Egypt and one from Ibrāhīm al-Muzakki. He heard *Ṣahīh al-Bukhārī* from Abū Saʿīd Aḥmad Ibn Rumayḥ (d. 357/967-8) and most probably from others as well.105

Al-Dāraquṭnī mentored another of the most influential scholars on the *Ṣahihayn* in the long fourth century. Originally from Khwarazm in Transoxiana, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqānī, (d. 425/1033-4) traveled extensively throughout Khurāsān before settling in Baghdad, accompanied by a massive personal library. It was al-Barqānī who set down and assembled one of al-Dāraquṭnī’s most famous and voluminous works, his prodigious *Kitāb al-ʿilal*.106 Unlike his teacher, however, al-Barqānī managed to study extensively with al-Iṣmāʿīlī and became the most important transmitter of his *Mustakhraj*.107 Al-Barqānī’s interest in the *Ṣahihayn* led him to compile a *musnad* version of the two works as well as a joint *mustakhraj*.108 Al-Barqānī fell into the gray


108 The first part of this *mustakhraj* has been published as al-Juṣʿ al-awwāl min al-takhrij li-ṣaḥīḥ al-ḥadīth ‘an al-shuyūkh al-thiqāt ‘alā sharṭ kitāb Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī wa kitāb Muslim b. al-
area of the transmission-based tradition that was gradually separating into the über-Sunni Ḥanbalī school and the more moderate Shāfī‘ī strain. He was later identified as a Shāfī‘ī, no doubt due to his apprenticeship with al-Dāraquṭnī but more probably because of his role as a teacher to three of the most prominent Shāfī‘ī scholars of the fifth/eleventh century: Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083), Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī and al-Kaṭīb al-Baghdādī (who relies heavily upon him as a source for his history of Baghdad). Yet al-Barqānī also had strong ties to the tradition evolving around Ibn Ḥanbal: he studied with Abū Bakr b. Mālik al-Qaṭī‘ (d. 368/978-9), the main transmitter of Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad from his son ‘Abdallāh.109

Another important member of the knot of Baghdad ḥadīth scholars studying the two Sahihīs was al-Dāraquṭnī’s student Abū Mas‘ūd Ibrāhīm al-Dimashqī (d. 401/1010-11). Al-Khaṭīb describes him as having a “strong interest in the Sahīhayn,” which he expressed in his famous Atrāf of the two works.110 Although this book exists today in only partial and unpublished form, ḥadīth scholars as far-flung as Abū ‘Alī al-Jayyānī al-Ghassānī (d. 498/1105), who never left Andalusia, and the ninth/fifteenth century Cairene Ibn Ḥajar regularly drew on it.111 In addition to the Atrāf, the only book of Abū Mas‘ūd to have reached us alludes to an interesting tension between the author and his teacher, al-

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110 Al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdād, 6:170-1.

Daraquṭnī. Abū Masʿūd's Kitāb al-ajwība ‘ammā askala al-shaykh al-Daraquṭnī ‘alā Șaḥīḥ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (Book of Responses to what al-Daraquṭnī Criticized from the Șaḥīḥ of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj) contains rebuttals to twenty-five narrations that al-Daraquṭnī points out as problematic as well as to several ilzāmāt the latter suggested.\footnote{112} In addition, Abū Masʿūd rejects al-Daraquṭnī’s referral to Abū Zur’a’s criticism of four of Muslim’s narrators.\footnote{113} Although we know little about his legal stances, Abū Masʿūd clearly cultivated a close personal relationship with the scholar later considered the third reviver of the Šafi’ī school, Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarayīnī (d. 406/1016).\footnote{114} When Abū Masʿūd died, Abū Ḥāmid led his funeral prayer and managed his will (as his waṣāyā).\footnote{115}

One of Abū Masʿūd’s colleagues, Khalaf. Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 400/1010) also produced a three- or four-volume atrāf of the Șaḥīḥayn (one volume, seven juzʾs, of which has survived in manuscript form).\footnote{116} He studied with al-Ismāʿīlī as well as many scholars in Baghdad but eventually abandoned scholarship and devoted

\footnote{112} These ilzāmāt do not appear in al-Daraquṭnī’s Kitāb al-ilzāmāt wa al-tatabbū; see Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwība, 287-303.

\footnote{113} See Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwība, 331. These criticized narrators are Asbāb b. Naṣr, Qaṭān, Ahmad b. ʿĪsā al-Miṣrī, and Jaʾfar b. Sulaymān, three of whom Abū Zur’a mentioned in his criticism of Muslim’s Șaḥīḥ.


\footnote{115} Al-Khaṭīb, Tāriḵ Baghdaḏ, 6:170-1; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkiraṭ al-ḫuffār, 3:180. Reports that Abū Masʿūd studied with Ibn Khuzayma seem difficult to believe, since the latter died in 311/923.

\footnote{116} Al-Kattānī, al-Risāla al-mustatrafā, 125.
himself to business. Nonetheless, prominent experts such as al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and Abū Nuʿaym al-Īṣbahānī studied at Khalaf’s hands.117

The last noteworthy scholar of the Baghdad knot was Hibatallah b. al-Ḥasan al-Lālakāʿī (d. 418/1027-8). Born in Rayy, he studied ḥadīth there before moving to Baghdad, where he studied with the city’s pillar of the Shāfī’ī tradition, Abū Ḥāmid al-Īsfarāyīnī. Al-Lālakāʿī compiled a biographical dictionary of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, which has since been lost, but his most famous work was his Kitāb al-sunna.118

Along with Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Khallāl, (d. 439/1047), who wrote a mustakhraj of the Ṣaḥīḥayn,119 these scholars constituted a relatively close-knit society characterized by an adherence to the Shāfī’ī tradition and a shared interest in al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works. Three of the five studied directly with al-Dāraquṭnī, the progenitor of an approach to the Ṣaḥīḥayn as complementary texts. Al-Barqānī describes the close scholarly association among this cluster in the following manner. One day al-Lālakāʿī approached him because he had heard Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī mention that Muslim had included a certain narration of the ḥadīth “the signs of a hypocrite are three...,” and he wanted al-Barqānī to find it for him in the Ṣaḥīḥ. Al-Barqānī looked through his combined musnad of the Ṣaḥīḥayn and discovered that the narration did not


exist. This vindicated al-Lālakā’ī’s suspicion that Abū Mas‘ūd had mixed up one of the names in the īsnād. Al-Barqānī recalls how Khalaf al-Wāṣīṭī was also mistaken about this narration.\textsuperscript{120}

\textbf{IV.6. d. Other: Isfahan and Central Asia}

Not all studies of the \textit{Ṣaḥīhayn} during the long fourth century emerged from Naysābūr, Jurjān or Baghdad. Several important scholars worked independently of these regional camps. Al-Kalābādhi (d. 398/1008) traveled to Khurāsān and Iraq, but he spent most of his life in Transoxiana.\textsuperscript{121} The first scholar to produce a commentary on one of the \textit{Ṣaḥīhayn}, that of al-Bukhrān, was Abū Sulaymān Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī of Bust (d. 388/998). Although he studied in Baghdad and narrated ḥadīths to Abū Ḥāmid al-İsfarāyīnī, Abū Dharr al-Harawī and al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, he remained a relative outsider in the main regional centers of study. He spent most of his time in Bust, in the far east of Khurāsān. Even there his pietistic inclinations kept him far from public life. In one poem he wrote, “Indeed I am a stranger among Bust and her people... though my family and kin are there.”\textsuperscript{122} Al-Khaṭṭābī’s primary ḥadīth interest lay in the \textit{Sunan} of Abū Dāwūd, on which he wrote a famous commentary. It was only after some of his students in Balkh pressured him to write a commentary on al-Bukhrān’s work that he

\textsuperscript{120} Al-Khaṭīb, \textit{Tārīkh Baghdād}, 14:71-2.


composed his *A‘lam al-ḥadīth fi sharḥ Šaḥīh al-Bukhārī*. Al-Khaṭṭābī also wrote a work on the vocabulary of al-Muzani’s *Mukhtasar*, and his opinions on legal theory became a source for later Shāfī’i scholars.\(^{123}\)

Several important scholars from the *Šaḥīhāyn* Network also hailed from Isfahan. In addition to his being one of the most influential hadīth scholars of his time, we have already noted Ibn Manda’s contribution to the study of al-Bukhārī’s sources. Before him Abū Bakr Ahmad b. ‘Abdān al-Shirāzī (d. 388/998) moved between Khurasan and the western Iranian cities of Ahwāz and Isfahan. He produced a joint *mustakhraj* and also narrated al-Bukhārī’s *al-Tārikh al-kabīr*.\(^ {124}\) Abū Bakr Ahmad b. Mūsā Ibn Mardawayh (d. 416/1025-6) wrote a *mustakhraj* of al-Bukhārī,\(^{125}\) and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī’s separate *mustakhrajs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim have already been discussed. As the *Šaḥīhāyn* Network Chart demonstrates, however, Isfahan never became a united camp or developed a local tradition of studying al-Bukhārī or Muslim. Its scholars lived at different times and were more connected with the centers of Naysābūr and Baghdad than with each other.

IV.6. e. An End to Regional Cults After 370AH

The study of the *Šaḥīhāyn* in the long fourth century thus breaks down along clear chronological and geographical lines. The initial popularity that Muslim’s work enjoyed

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as a template for *mustakhrajs* in his home city of Naysābūr later developed into a more diverse interest that subsumed al-Bukhārī’s collection as well as other products of the *sahih* movement. The cluster of colleagues in Jurjān remained relatively isolated from Khurāsān and thus cultivated an exclusive interest in al-Bukhārī. Beginning with al-Dāraquṭnī, the network of Baghdad scholars inherited the legacies of both regions and thus pioneered the study of the two works as a pair.

By the 370/980s, however, the regional cults of al-Bukhārī and Muslim had disappeared. After the death of al-Ghiṣṭrī, Jurjān faded into geographical and historical obscurity. The Baghdad knot was built on the study of the two works together, and by 370 AH in Muslim’s native Naysābūr a study of the conjoined *Sahihayn* as well as other major products of the *sahih* movement eclipsed the strict focus on his *Sahih*.

IV.7. The *Sahihayn* Network: A Shāfi‘ī Enterprise

The *Sahihayn* Network of the long fourth century exhibits another striking characteristic: study of the two works seems to have been an exclusively Shāfi‘ī endeavor. Although the profound work of George Makdisi, Wael Hallaq and Christopher Melchert has shed light on the formation of the Sunni *madhhab*, discussing trends in legal and ritual identification still proves very difficult in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The inchoate intellectual landscape of this period resists attempts to apply the construct of the clearly defined Sunni *madhhab*, in part because it preceded institutions like the *madrasa* that would later play important roles in their expression. Hallaq
therefore describes this period as one of “indistinguishable plurality.” This period retains the startling diversity of early Islam, as schools of law usually dismissed as phenomena of the second and third centuries survived. It was only in 347/958-9, for example, that the last muftī of the Awzā‘ī school died in Damascus. One of the most important transmitters of Muslim’s Şahîh, al-Julûdî (d. 368/979), followed the moribund madhdhab of Sufyân al-Thawrî.

Indeed, the undeniable presence of the regularized four Sunni schools marks the end of the long fourth century. With a cadre of scholars such as Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083), for example, we can for the first time feel totally at ease discussing a broad and unshakable guild-like loyalty to a Şafi‘ī school. Only in the ample wake of the long fourth century can we rely on the well-worn stereotypes that al-Ḥasan b. Abī Bakr al-Naysābûrī spoke to in 536/1142 when he told a congregation, “Be Şafi‘ī but not Ash‘arī, be Ḥanafī but not Mu‘tazili, be Ḥanbalī but not anthropomorphist.”

In the long fourth century the arena for the study of the Şahîhayn extended from Transoxiana to the Ḥijāz. There the enduring distinction between “the two sects (al-farîqûn)” of the transmission-based and reason-based scholars still ruled. The Ḥanafîs/ahl al-ra’y were developing a keener interest in ḥadîth, but the school retained its

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126 Hallaq, Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61.

127 Abū Zahra, al-Shāfi‘ī, 339.

128 This according to al-Ḥajîm al-Naysābûrî. See, Ibn al-Şalāh, Şiyānat Şahîh Muslim, 107; al-Dhahabî, Siyâr, 16:302.

link with the Mu’tazilite doctrine so anathema to the ahl al-hadīth. The doyen of the Ḥanafī hadīth tradition, Abū Ja’far al-Ṭahāwī of Egypt (d. 321/933), seems to have been in a minority with his distance from Mu’tazilism. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ubaydallāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Karkhī (d. 340/952), the most prominent Iraqi Ḥanafī of his time, is also described as a leading Mu’tazilite (kāna ra’san fī al-i’tizāl).\(^\text{130}\) Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Tanūkhī, who learned fiqh from al-Karkhī, was from a “house of hadīth” but was nonetheless Mu’tazilite.\(^\text{131}\) ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Tanūkhī (d. 342/953) was also a Ḥanafī hadīth scholar knowledgeable in Mu’tazilite kalām.\(^\text{132}\)

It was the monolithic construct of the ahl al-hadīth that was becoming increasingly insufficient for describing the divisions among transmission-based scholars. Two distinct strains were emerging. Al-Bukhārī’s persecution at the hands of fellow hadīth scholars illustrated a break between the conservative über-Sunni interpretation of Ibn Ḥanbal’s legacy and a more moderate transmission-based approach, which Melchert has dubbed “semi-rationalist.” These two strains would later emerge as two competing parties in the Sunni Islamic heartlands, the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni school and its rival Shāfi‘ī/Ashʿarī camp. In the long fourth century, however, these two budding schools shared a common heritage. Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī heard the entirety of al-Shāfi‘ī’s oeuvre from Rabī’, yet he is claimed as a Ḥanbalī.\(^\text{133}\) Ibn Abī Ḥātim devoted a work to the


\(^{131}\) Ibn al-Muṭṭadā, Tabaqāt al-muṭtažila, 108.

\(^{132}\) Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntazam, 14:90.

\(^{133}\) See Abū Zahra, al-Shāfi‘ī, 148; Henri Laoust, “Ḥanābila,” Et\(^{2}\).
virtues of al-Shāfi‘ī but is similarly claimed by Ḥanbalīs.\footnote{Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, Ṭabaqāt al-banībila, 2:47-8.} This ambiguity was deeply rooted in the career of Ibn Ḥanbal himself, for it is reported that he considered al-Shāfi‘ī to be his century’s reviver of the faith.\footnote{Abū Zahra, Ibn Ḥanbal, 29.} The Mālikī school, based in Egypt and the lands of the Maghrib, proves tangential to the Sahihayn Network. Only Qāsim b. Aṣbagh of Cordova and Abū Dharr al-Harawī belonged to the Mālikī school.

Identifying the porous boundaries between the emerging Ḥanbalī and Shāfi‘ī strains is challenging in the long fourth century. In the early stages one cannot yet consistently identify legal schools through telltale shibboleths like the Shāfi‘ī insistence on the voiced basmala. An early scholar like Abū ‘Awāna is considered the person who brought the Shāfi‘ī school to Isfarāyīn, but he broke with what became important madhhab stances such as the basmala and the issue of what invalidates prayer.

The distinction between the two transmission-based strains becomes more evident in their attitudes towards rationalism in perennial controversies such as the lafz of the Qur‘ān and the use of speculative theology (kalām). Melchert describes how by the early fourth/tenth century a “vague Shāfi‘ī school” had emerged that “comprised both a particular system of jurisprudence and a particular theological tendency.” “It was a compromise,” he states, espousing traditionalist tenets but very often defending them rationally.\footnote{Melchert, The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 70.} In the early 300/900s this distinction is problematic, since an incontrovertibly Shāfi‘ī scholar like Ibn Khuzayma proved one of the most ruthless critics.
of those who upheld the created wording of the Qurʾān. Yet by the time of al-Khaṭīb al-
Baghdādī in the mid-400/1000’s, this intransigence on questions of rationalism had
become a hallmark of the Ḥanbalī school, not the Shāfiʿī. Al-Khaṭīb began his scholarly
career as a Ḥanbalī, but moved to the Shāfiʿī camp after his Ḥanbalī cohorts relentlessly
criticized his indulgence in Ashʿarī rationalist discourse. Ibn al-Jawzī, a later Ḥanbalī
openly offended by al-Khaṭīb’s defection, notes how the newly christened Shāfiʿī began
mocking Ibn Ḥanbal’s legendary intransigence on the issue of the created Qurʾān.137 An
incontestable Shāfiʿī, al-Dāraquṭnī distrusted a reliance on reason and rejected famous ḥadīths praising it. Yet he also evinced an appreciation for the use of kalām. He
reportedly told Abū Dharr al-Harawī that one of the founding members of the Ashʿarī
school, Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 403/1013), was “the imām of Muslims and the defender
of the religion (al-dhābb ‘an al-dīn).”138 Despite his personal aversion to speculation, al-
Dāraquṭnī had himself written a refutation of the Muʿtazila and probably understood its
utility in defending against rationalist opponents.

Perhaps the most effective way to identify the two strands, however, is through
personal relationships and textual transmission. Daphna Ephrat asserts that even after the
dawn of the madrasa and the distinct Sunni madhhabs in the late fifth/eleventh century, it
was the bonds of personal loyalty between teachers and their students that proved the
most cohesive.139 In the long fourth century both the emerging Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī camps

139 Ephrat, A Learned Society in a Period of Transition, 88. For a fascinating study on the tight links
between the development of Sufism in Khurāsān and the Shāfiʿī tradition, see Margaret Malamud, “Sufi
expressed themselves most clearly through the teachings of specific individuals with strong attachments to the legacies of the two eponymous founders. The nascent schools extended out from these individuals, whom Melchert refers to as "local chiefs,"\textsuperscript{140} through teacher/student relationships and through the study of formative texts.

At the epicenter of the Shāfi‘ī pedagogical and textual tradition were his most prominent students, Rabī‘ and al-Muzanī. Their student Ibn Khuzayma became a bastion of the Shāfi‘ī tradition in his native Naysābūr. Another student of Rabī‘, Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī (d. 294/906) of Samarqand, became one of the first scholars to discuss the "madhhab" of al-Shāfi‘ī and elaborate his stances on legal theory.\textsuperscript{141} Later Baghdad scholars such as Ibn Surayj and Abū Ḥāmid al-İsfārāyīnī also served as pivots for the Shāfi‘ī tradition during the long fourth century. In addition to scholarly relationships with these pillars, the Shāfi‘ī tradition propagated itself through the transmission of its formative text, al-Muzani's \textit{Mukhtār} of al-Shāfi‘ī’s Umm. While the Shāfi‘ī scholar al-Ismā‘īlī produced an independent treatise on legal theory, many of the nascent school’s adherents preferred to write commentaries or studies on the \textit{Mukhtār}.

The tradition of Ibn Ḥanbal likewise propagated itself through a network of scholars tied closely to the school’s two formative texts, Ibn Ḥanbal’s \textit{Musnad} and what developed as the definitive collection of his legal opinions. Ibn Ḥanbal’s son ‘Abdallāh

\textsuperscript{140} Melchert. \textit{The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law}, 87.

served as the most committed transmitter of his teachings, crafting a finished draft of his father’s *Musnad*. Abū Bakr al-Qāṭī‘ī transmitted the *Musnad* from Ibn Ḥanbal’s son and became a central figure in disseminating his teachings. The earliest extant collection of Ibn Ḥanbal’s legal and doctrinal responsa, the *Kitāb al-masā’il*, was the work of Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī.142 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī also collected a selection of Ibn Ḥanbal’s responsa, and later the school claimed his son Ibn Abī Ḥātim as a member. Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923-4) traveled extensively in a quest to unite Ibn Ḥanbal’s legal legacy and compiled a massive collection of his opinions as well as other works, such Ibn Ḥanbal’s *ʿīlal*. He also compiled the first roster of Ḥanbalīs. Al-Khallāl’s student Abū al-Qāsim al-Khiraqī (d. 334/945-6) edited his master’s work and produced the school’s formative legal text, the *Mukhtasar*.143

The intellectual landscape of Iraq and Iran in the long fourth century thus consisted of three dominant schools: the Ḥanafi *ahl al-ra’y*, the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnīs and the nascent Shāfī‘ī tradition. In order to place the network of *Ṣaḥḥayn* scholars in this milieu, we can identify Shāfī‘īs as exhibiting three major characteristics. Firstly, they are not Ḥanafi. Secondly, they tend to be more moderate than their über-Sunni counterparts. Finally, they exist within a network of personal and textual relationships with bastions of the school such as Ibn Khuzayma and al-Muzanī’s *Mukhtasar*.

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142 This work has been published as Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb masā’il al-imām Aḥmad*, 16 vols. (Beirut: Muḥammad Ṭāhir Damaj, [197-]).

Oddly, not a single scholar from the Sahihayn Network is claimed as Hanafi in the definitive rosters of the school. While Hanafi scholars did not participate in the study of al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s works, they did play noted roles in the transmission of the two texts. According to Ibn al-Salah, the critical transmitter of Muslim’s Sahih, Ibn Sufyan, was probably Hanafi. Abû al-Khayr Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ṣaffār (d. 471/1078-9), one of the most prolific transmitters of Sahih al-Bukhari from al-Kushmīhanī, was Ḥanafi. Abû Ṭalib al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥāshimi (d. 512/1118-1119), one of the main transmitters of the Sahih from the famous Meccan female student of al-Kushmīhanī, Karīma al-Marwaziyya, was also Ḥanafi.

It is perplexing why Ḥanafis would actively and enthusiastically transmit al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s Sahihs but not study the works. One possible explanation lies in the function of the mustakhrajs that sparked the flurry of interest in the Sahihayn. Mustakhrajs were interpretations of formative texts that allowed transmission-based scholars to express and elaborate their relationship with the source of hermeneutic

144 The most comprehensive is the Jāwāhir al-mudīyya of Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ (d. 775/1374). For an earlier list, al-ʿAbbādī’s Tabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ al-shāfiʿīyya includes a lengthy list of scholars whom this fifth/eleventh-century scholar considered Ḥanafi; al-ʿAbbādī, Tabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ, 2 ff.

145 Here we must note the work of Abū al-Layth al-Nabī Muhammad al-Samarqandi (d. 373/983-4 or 393/1002-3), a Ḥanafi jurist and exegete of Transoxiana. One of his lesser known works, al-Latāʾif al-mustakhraja min Sahih al-Bukhari (Useful Niceties Derived from Sahih al-Bukhari), would seem to have been small collection of the author’s musing on elements from the Sahih but could not have qualified as either a commentary on the work or a study of its hadith science dimensions. The unique manuscript of the Latāʾif was in the rare books library at Istanbul University, and was “lost” after the terrible 1999 earthquake. Some Turkish scholars debate whether the work ever existed.


148 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffaz, 4:32.
authority in Islam. For Ḥanafīs this role was already played by the school’s formative legal texts. For them the chain of legal scholars emanating from Abū Ḥanīfa and his students provided that link to the Prophet’s message.

Neither did the network of Sahīhāyn scholars identify with the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni tradition. Only one member of this group, Ibn Manda, is listed as Ḥanbalī in Ibn Abī Ya’lā’s Tabaqāt al-ḥanābīla.149 The Ḥanbalī school seemed to prefer critics of al-Bukhārī or Muslim such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and his son Ibn Abī Ḥātim.150 None of the well-known Ḥanbalīs of the period, such as Abū Bakr al-Najjād (d. 348/959-60) of Baghdad, Abū Bakr al-Ājurri (d. 360/971) and al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid al-Warrāq (d. 403/1012-13), appears in the Sahīhāyn Network. Given al-Bukhārī’s pariah status among über-Sunnis, it is not difficult to understand why they did not participate in the study and transmission of his Sahīh. We have already discussed how the dominant scholarly presence in Naysābūr of the über-Sunnis Ibn Khuzayma and al-Sarrāj played a central part in preventing the study of al-Bukhārī’s collection in that city. The attitude of über-Sunni members of the Baghdad scholarly community did not differ. Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Barbahārī (d. 329/940-1) was one of the Ḥanbalī tradition’s most outspoken advocates in Baghdad. He never mentions al-Bukhārī in his manifesto of the ahl al-ḥadīth creed, the Sharḥ al-sunna (Explanation of the Sunna), but he does assert that anyone who says that the lafat of the Qur’ān is created is a heretic (mubtadiʾ).151 Although he did not officially

149 Ibn Abī Ya’lā, Tabaqāt al-ḥanābīla, 2:142-3.

150 Laoust, “Ḥanābīla,” EI².

belong to the Ḥanbalī madḥhab, Abū Ḥāʾiṣ ʿUmar b. Ahmad Ibn Shāhīn (d. 385/996) provides another interesting example of this scholarly strain in the Abbasid capital. Ibn Shāhīn heard from many of the same teachers as his contemporary al-Dāraquṭnī, whom he enlisted at least once to review his ḥadīth corpus. Yet Ibn Shāhīn is completely absent in the network of Sāḥīḥayn scholars. In his Sharḥ madhāhib ahl al-sunna wa maʿrifat sharāʿiʾ al-dīn wa al-tamassuk biʾl-sunan (Explanation of the Ways of the Ahl al-Sunna, Knowledge of Religious Law and Clinging to the Sunna), he echoes al-Barbahārī by narrating that anyone who says that the lafz of the Qurʾān is created is Jahmī, or worse.

Still, how do we explain the absence of über-Sunni interest in Muslim’s Sāḥīḥ? Unlike al-Bukhārī, he was not tainted by the lafz scandal. It seems most likely that in the first half of the fourth/tenth century Muslim’s collection was simply not well-circulated in the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni bastion of Baghdad. We do know that the work had limited circulation in places like Jurjān and seems to have been relatively unknown in the Ḥijāz through the first half of the fourth/tenth century. Al-ʿUqaylī (d. 323/934) of Mecca knew al-Bukhārī’s al-Tārīkh al-kabīr intimately but never refers to Muslim in any form in his Kitāb al-ṣuʿafāʾ. That al-ʿUqaylī totally rejects a ḥadīth found in Muslim’s Sāḥīḥ without mentioning the work reinforces the notion that he was ignorant of it. Another notable


154 This ḥadīth is, “If two caliphs receive allegiance kill the second of them... (idhā būyiʿa li-khalifatayn fa-ṣulū al-akhir minhumā...), and al-ʿUqaylī criticizes it in his biography of Fadāla b. Dīnār, saying: “Narration on this topic is not sound (wa al-riwāya fī hādīḥa al-bāb qhayr thābit).” We know this
non-Khurasānī ḥadīth scholar of the mid 300/900s, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Rāmahurmuzī, likewise makes no mention of Muslim.

Unlike the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnis, members of the Shāfiʿī tradition actively accommodated al-Bukhārī and Muslim. In their treatises on the Sunni creed and proper *ahl al-sunna* stances, both al-Barbahārī and Ibn Shāhīn had implicitly condemned al-Bukhārī for his stance on the *laʃz* issue. The later Shāfiʿī al-Lālakāʾī, however, affirms both al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s worthiness as commendable Sunnis. His *Kitāb al-sunna* focuses overwhelmingly on the controversial sectarian issues of the nature of the Qurʾān and the definition of faith (*iḥān*). Yet he cites al-Bukhārī as one of a small set of exemplary figures who upheld the Sunni definition of faith as including both a profession of belief and proper practice (*qawāʾil wa ʿamāl*). Al-Lālakāʾī lists al-Bukhārī in the company of al-Awzāʾi, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Shāfiʿī and al-Muzanī, even including two quotations from him.155 He also lists both al-Bukhārī and Muslim as two of the scholars who upheld the uncreated nature of the Qurʾān, along with Abū Zurʿa, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Dāwūd.156 Al-Lālakāʾī’s book, in fact, represents the first work in the Sunni creed genre to accept al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The Ṣahīḥayn Network proved fairly accommodating to rationalists as well. Both Abū Nuʿaym al-Īṣbahānī and Abū Dharr al-Harawī were Ashʿarīs, and al-ʿĪṣmāʿīlī had marked rationalist tendencies.

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Of the forty-four scholars in the network who composed works on the *Sahihayn*, fully fourteen (32%) directly studied with or instructed Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfārāyīnī, Ibn Khuzayma, Ibn Surajy, Rabī’ al-Murādī or al-Muzanī. Six (14%) of them either wrote books based on al-Muzanī’s *Mukhtasar* or composed their own works on al-Shāfi‘ī’s legal method. Ten (23%) are later explicitly referred to as Shāfī‘īs by al-Dhahabī. He calls Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī (d. 344/955) “shaykh al-shāfi‘īyya,” which should not surprise us since he studied extensively with Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī in Samarqand.¹⁵⁷ Abū al-Walīd Ḥassān b. Muḥammad al-Umawī of Naysābūr (d. 344/955) studied *fiqh* in Baghdad with Abū al-ʿAbbās Ibn Surajy and composed legal rulings (*ahkām*) for the madhhab. He even had a ring patterned after Rabī’ b. Sulaymān’s and al-Shāfi‘ī’s rings.¹⁵⁸

IV.8. Intense Canonical Process: Imagining a New Epistemological Status for Ḥadīth Books

The long fourth century had not simply seen a profound interest in the *Sahihayn* among a relatively limited network of scholars. In this period before the canonization of the two works, we also see the appearance of what Frank Kermode called a “canonical habit of mind” in the Muslim community in general.¹⁵⁹ For the first time Muslim scholars began discussing the hadīth tradition in terms that endowed certain books with a sense of


communal and epistemological preeminence. Among hadith scholars this derived from personal convictions about the broad acceptance and overwhelming utility of certain books. For legal theorists this resulted from an increased application of the notion of the community’s authoritative consensus, *ijma*; to the hadith corpus. What lay behind both these perceptions, however, was a new conception of what kind of authority certain hadiths and specific hadith collections could exercise. It was in this period that the Sunni community imagined a new epistemological status for hadith works.

The notion of authoritative consensus (*ijma*) has ancient origins in Islam. In addition to functioning as one of the primary means of justifying decisions during the time of the Companions and their followers, it arose quickly as a tool in debates between the early schools of law in cities like Kufa. By the time of the eponymous founders of the four madhhabs, hadiths were circulating that established the consensus of the community as a source of legal and doctrinal authority. One of the most famous was the tradition in which the Prophet says, “My community will not agree on error (lā tajtami ’ū ummatī ’alā al-ḍalāla).” In correspondences between al-Awza’ī and Abū Ḥanīfa’s chief disciple Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), each contested the other’s claim that his stances

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enjoyed the consensus of the Muslim community.\textsuperscript{162} Later, al-Shafi‘i and Ibn Ḥanbal grew very skeptical of such claims about \textit{ijmā‘}. Although they acknowledged that it existed as a source of authority among Muslims, they limited it to fundamental issues, such as the ordination of the five daily prayers, that truly enjoyed total communal consensus. Their skepticism was well-founded, as the later Shafi‘i jurist Abū Ishaq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) estimated that “the questions on which \textit{ijmā‘} has been invoked (\textit{masā’il al-ijmā‘}) number more than twenty thousand.”\textsuperscript{163}

By the time of al-Shafi‘i in the early third/ninth century the notion of universally agreed-upon precedent from the Prophet was manifesting itself in scholarly discourse. Al-Shafi‘i placed “\textit{sunna} on which consensus has been achieved” on the same level of legal compulsion as the Qurʾān. As opposed to ḥadīth with limited attestation (\textit{khāṣṣ}), those who knowingly rejected such reports must repent immediately.\textsuperscript{164} Even later in the thought of the Ibn Surayj, however, this articulation remained primitive.\textsuperscript{165}

Al-Ṭabarī discussed these most authoritative instances of the Prophet’s sunna in the more technical terms of ḥadīth study. These were reports so widely transmitted (\textit{mustafid qāti ‘an}) that they are epistemologically certain. Indeed, rejecting them places


\textsuperscript{163} Al-Zuḥaylī, \textit{Uṣūl al-fiqh}, 1:489.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibn Surayj, “al-Waḍii‘i li-manṣūṣ al-shara‘i‘,” ed. Šāliḥ al-Duwaysh (unpublished manuscript), 2:672-3. Here Ibn Surayj states that the consensus of the umma on a report is merely one way in which a ḥadīth is established as legally compelling. I am totally indebted to my friend and colleague Ahmed El Shamsy of Harvard University for this citation and for providing me with the text itself.
one outside the pale of Islam. These include reports such as the ḥadīth ordering stoning as a punishment for adultery.¹⁶⁶ More importantly, however, on two occasions al-Ṭabarî refers to certain reports that are not massively transmitted (aḥād) but nonetheless convey a great deal of certainty. Al-Ṭabarî describes a ḥadīth in which God states that He will remove certain people from Hellfire after they have been appropriately punished for their sins as coming from “someone whose transmission prohibits error, oversight or lying and yields certainty (ilm)....”¹⁶⁷ We thus see nascent in al-Ṭabarî’s thought the idea that certain transmitters or collectors could themselves guarantee the authenticity and epistemological yield of non-massively transmitted (aḥād) ḥadīths.

The concept of universally agreed-upon ḥadīths extended beyond Sunni circles. The Muʿtazilite Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī writes in his Qubūl al-akhbār that the ultimate test for determining a good narrator or report is its accordance with the Qurʾān, the sunna “agreed upon by consensus (mujmaʿ alayhi),” the ijmaʿ of the umma, the ways of the early community and the Muʿtazilite slogans of justice (ʿadl) and God’s unicity (tawḥīd).¹⁶⁸

Although Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī lived a century later than these scholars, his work nonetheless affords an interesting glimpse into the place of ḥadīth consensus in

¹⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarî, al-Ṭabsīr, 161.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarî, al-Ṭabsīr, 185. For the other instance, see 212. Although he does not cite it from any sources, this ḥadīth appears in the Sahihayn. See Sahih al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-riqāq, bāb sifat al-jamma′ wa al-nār, Sahih Muslim: kitāb al-imān, bāb ihbāt al-shafaʿa wa ikhrāj al-muwahhidin min al-nār. Another ḥadīth he cites in this context appears in the collections of Ibn Ḥibbān and Ibn Khuzayma.

¹⁶⁸ Al-Balkhī, Qubūl al-akhbār, 1:17. Even earlier, al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/868-9) had mentioned a report accepted by consensus (khabar mujtamaʿ ‘alayhi) as one of the four sources of knowledge, citing the founder of the Muʿtazilite school, Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭāʾ (d. 131/750), as the originator of this idea; Marie Bernard, “la Notion de ‘ilm chez les premiers Muʿtazilites,” Studia Islamica 36 (1972): 26.
sectsarian debates. One of the chief impediments he faced in his dialectical handbook for debating Imāmī Shiites was the different repertoires of ḥadīths from which the two sides drew proof texts. As a solution to this lack of common ground, al-ʿIṣbahānī proposed that “the recourse at that point is to what the umma has agreed on after the Prophet (ṣ), and those authentic (sahīḥ) reports (akhbār) from him that the scholars have transmitted and are uncontested (lā dāfiʿ laḥā).”169 Abū Nuʿaym is not admitting any parity between Sunni and Shiite ḥadīths; quite the opposite, he maintains that Sunnis actually uphold standards for using ḥadīths as proof texts, while Shiites use forged reports.170 But here we see the notion of shared and commonly accepted material that neither camp can contest.

The epistemological status of these universally accepted reports and their role in deriving law also began receiving more attention in the long fourth century. Unlike al-Shāfiʿī and Ibn Ḥanbal, who believed āḥād traditions of the Prophet could be used to determine issues of dogma and abrogate Qur’anic verses, the Ḥanafī tradition remained very wary of endowing these relatively uncorroborated reports with such authority. The concept of universally accepted ḥadīths, however, emerged as a common ground acceptable to Ḥanafīs. Like al-Ṭabarī, the early Ḥanafī legal theorist Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Jaṣṣāṣ of Rayy (d. 370/982) acknowledged that there exists a category of reports that lack massive transmission (tawātur, istifāḍa) but nonetheless convey epistemological certainty.171 For these āḥād ḥadīths to yield such knowledge and function in abrogating

169 Al-ʿIṣbahānī, Kitāb al-imāma, 244. Although he does not cite any collections, the ḥadīths he then presents are all found in either al-Bukhārī or Muslim, with one in al-Tirmidhī’s collection.

170 Al-ʿIṣbahānī, Kitāb al-imāma, 241.

Qur’anic verses, for example, certain indications (*dalāla*) must accompany them assuring their authenticity. These include reports that enjoy the consensus (*ijmā‘*) of the *umma*’s scholars, such as the report denying members of a family guaranteed a portion of the deceased’s estate from receiving additional inheritance (*lā waṣṭyya *li-*wārīth*).

Following the earlier Ḥanafī scholar ʿĪsā b. Abān, al-Jaṣṣāṣ states that *āḥād* reports that are used in important issues of dogma and ritual (*umūr al-diyanat*) must be widespread (*shāʿiʿa *mustafīda*) in the *umma*, which accepts (*taqqāqathā*) and acts on them.

Among Ḥadīth scholars, this new epistemological status attainable by Ḥadīths is evident in a revised historical conception of the Ḥadīth tradition. This new vision viewed the *sahīḥ* movement in general and certain collections in particular as loci of scholarly consensus. While previously we have seen that scholars such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim identified the pinnacle of the Ḥadīth tradition with the greatest generation of Ibn Ḥanbal and ignored the existence of the *sahīḥ* movement, Ibn Manda’s perspective is very different. Like Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn ʿAdī and Ibn Ḥībān, he lists the generations (*tabaqāt*) of Ḥadīth scholars up to the generation of Ibn Ḥanbal, ʿAlī b. al-Madini and Ibn Maʿin. In a novel step, however, he then mentions the “four *imāms*” who produced the *sahīḥ* books: al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasāʾī. He notes other, less impressive installments of the

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173 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Uṣūl*, 1:548. Such reports include the Ḥadīth of the Prophet accepting the word of one Bedouin that the new moon of Ramaḍān was visible.
sahih movement as well, such as the works of al-Dārimī, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Khuzayma and Ahmad b. Abī ‘Āṣim al-Nabīl. Although they followed in the footsteps of the four imāms, “they were less skilled.”174 This generation that Ibn Manda describes as studying at the hands of Ibn Ḥanbal and his cohort, however, has achieved an unprecedented station. “Al-Bukhārī, al-Ḥasan b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḫulwānī, al-Dhuhlī, Abū Zur’a, Abū Ḥātim, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Nasā’T... make up the generation (tabaqa) accepted [by all] by consensus, and their knowledge trumps all others (wa bi-‘ilmihim yuḥtajju ‘alā sā’ir al-nās).”175 Ibn Manda thus articulates the notion that the generation of al-Bukhārī and Muslim represents a compelling concentration of knowledge agreed upon by all. More importantly, this mastery is articulated in the sahih collections of four scholars who embody the authority of their age.

Implicit in Ibn Manda’s genealogy of the hadith tradition is the same problem that Abū Nu‘aym faced in his polemic: the vast corpus of hadiths had become too broad and diverse to be succinctly studied and employed. Specific outstanding collections that embody the utility of the hadith tradition should thus be viewed as common references. Ibn Manda echoes a statement attributed to the Egyptian hadith scholar and transmitter of al-Bukhārī’s Sahih, Ibn al-Sakan (d. 353/964). Disturbed by the great number of hadith collections flooding the book markets, a group of hadith scholars gathered at Ibn al-Sakan’s house asking him to direct them to what books they should study at the expense of others. Ibn al-Sakan entered his house and reemerged with four books, saying “these

are the foundations (qawā'id) of Islam: the books of Muslim, al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasā'ī.¹⁷⁶ These four collections are thus not only the most important for students of ḥadīth, they also provide the common references to be shared by all. Ibn al-Sakān’s own saḥīḥ work, in fact, may have been little more than a digest of these four books.¹⁷⁷

The notion that a ḥadīth collection can serve as the locus for consensus and as legal and doctrinal common ground appears even more clearly in the work of Ibn Manda’s contemporary, al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998). He states in the introduction of his commentary on Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan that the collection is:

a noble book unique in the science of religion... approved by all people. It has become the ultimate recourse for differences of opinion amongst the various sects of the learned and the generations of scholars... the people of Iraq, Egypt, the lands of the West, and still more from among the cities and regions of the Earth, rely upon it.¹⁷⁸

Acknowledging the Khūrāsānī cradle of the Sahihayn Network, he notes that the scholars of that region preferred those two works and books based on their requirements, although he personally considers Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan more legally useful.¹⁷⁹ Al-Khaṭṭābī describes al-Bukhārī’s Sahih in language similar to but less grandiose than his accolades of the Sunan, with an emphasis on authenticity as opposed to legal utility:

It has become a treasure for [our] religion, a mine for [its] sciences. It has become, due to the quality of its criticism (naqdihi) and the severity of its


¹⁷⁸ Al-Khaṭṭābī, Ma‘ālim al-sunan, 1:6.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Khaṭṭābī, Ma‘ālim al-sunan, 1:6.
articulation (sabk) a judge (hakam) in the umma in what is sought out from among hadiths as authentic or weak.\textsuperscript{180}

Ibn Manda, Ibn al-Sakan and al-Khaṭṭābī provide no extensive or concrete explanations for their evaluations of these works as loci of consensus in law and hadith. Neither do they articulate their specific authority or epistemological yield. What is nonetheless clear, however, is that the community of transmission-based legal scholars was beginning to see a proto-canon of hadith collections as extant and necessary.

**IV.9. Why the Ṣaḥīḥayn?**

When examining the mustakhraj and ḥalal / ilzāmāt phenomena, one cannot help but ask why these fleeting genres focused so predominantly on the Ṣaḥīḥayn. The resilient regional barriers of the first half of the long fourth century cannot provide a full explanation for the nature of the mustakhraj genre, since the Ṣaḥīḥayn were not the only collections used as templates even within one region. Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ enjoyed favored status in his home city of Naysābūr, but the city and its environs also saw the production of three mustakhrajs based on Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan, two on al-Tirmidhī’s Jāmi’, and one mustakhraj of Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ (with Ibn al-Jārūd’s Muntaqā a possible second). Scholars in Naysābūr thus could and did see other collections as attractive and available formative texts.

Having exhausted the path of material constraint, we must ultimately turn to matters of functionalism and scholarly preference. As al-Iṣnāḍī, Ibn ‘Uqda and Abū ‘Alī

al-Naysābūrī’s testimonies prove, many scholars of the Șahīhayn Network simply felt that a specific work was the most accurate and useful presentation of the Prophet’s legacy.  Al-İsmāʿīlī favored al-Bukhārī’s collection over Muslim’s Șahīh, Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan and the Sunan of al-Ḥulwānī (d. 243/857-8) because in his eyes it provided a more authentic selection of ḥadīths and a better analysis of their legal content. Conversely, Ibn ʿUqda felt Muslim’s work outshone al-Bukhārī’s because it was more purely a collection of ḥadīths without the incomplete narrations and commentary added for legal elucidation. Al-İsmāʿīlī and Ibn ʿUqda were attracted to the differing functional methodologies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, but why did Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī favor Muslim’s work above all others? Such matters of scholarly preference lie beyond our ken.

Certainly, if ḥadīth scholars of the long fourth century hoped to prove the quality of their isnāds by composing mustakhrajes, it seems logical to choose the most rigorous collections as templates. This explains why all the template collections were products of the sahīḥ movement and not earlier works like Mālik’s Muwattā’.

In fact, the only work one might call a mustakhraj of the Muwattā’, the Kitāb al-tamhīd of Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), was effectively an attempt to place Mālik’s work on equal footing with other sahīḥ books. Because the Muwattā’ is replete with ḥadīths lacking complete isnāds, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr set out to collect complete narrations. As Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr makes clear in his introduction, one of his goals in the Tamhīd is to establish Mālik’s book according to the language and requirements of the sahīḥ movement.181

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The nature of the Sahihayn also partly explains why they were the only works to prompt ilal or ilzāmāt studies in this period. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim were two of the only scholars to purpose works devoted solely to sahih hadiths. Others such as Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī acknowledged that they relied on weak or lackluster narrations when necessary. Consequently, as al-Khaṭṭābī noted, the Sahihayn and the notion of their authors’ “conditions (shart, rasm)” proved attractive targets for study. Only with works that set uniform standards could one apply these standards elsewhere. Only with authors who claimed to include only authentic material could one object that certain hadiths fell short of this measure.

Yet even in this matter, we cannot escape the aesthetics of critical preference. Ibn Khuzayma also sets up a clear requirement for authenticity (siḥha) on the first page of his Sahih. But despite the arguably unparalleled accolades al-Ḥākim grants him, al-Ḥākim found Ibn Khuzayma an unsatisfactory judge of authentic reports (siḥha).\(^{182}\) Although some scholars like al-Khaṭṭābī said that Ibn Khuzayma’s work deserved mention alongside the Sahihayn, his collection never accumulated critical studies.\(^{183}\)

IV.10. Conclusion: The Eve of Canonization

Having explored the Sahihayn Network of the long fourth century, we find ourselves on the eve of their canonization. Among Muʿtazilites, hadith-minded Sunnis

\(^{182}\) Al-Khāṭṭābī, al-Ishād, 313.

like al-Ṭabarî, the ḥadîth-wary Ḥanafî theorist al-Jaṣṣâṣ and even in the realm of Sunni-Shiite polemic, there had arisen the idea that ḥadîths could enjoy the consensus of the *umma* and thus wield tremendous epistemological authority. Among transmission-based scholars this concept expressed itself in a proto-canon of ḥadîth collections that certain scholars felt provided loci of legal and narrative consensus.

But how did this period of intense study affect al-Bukhârî’s and Muslim’s works? One can best answer this question by referring to *ṣaḥīh* ḥadîth collections that never attained canonical status. In his brief explanation of why *Ṣaḥīh Ibn Ḥibbân* did not become one of the famous Six Books, the Azhar scholar Muḥammad al-Q̣ārî states curtly that Ibn Ḥibbân (d. 354/965) narrated from unknown transmitters (*majāhîl*).  

This negative evaluation of Ibn Ḥibbân’s work originated as early as the writings of his own student, al-Ḥākim al-Naysâbûrî. Yet as our review of transmitter studies has shown, the earliest work on al-Bukhârî’s teachers freely admits that at least one of his sources in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* was also unknown. It was only after another two generations of study that al-Kalâbâdhî discovered the identity of this transmitter. Ibn Ḥibbân died almost a century after al-Bukhârî and lived in an era that he himself bemoaned as a sad time, when people no longer wrote *ṣaḥīh* books. Had his *Ṣaḥīḥ* received the generations of scholarly attention devoted to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* during the long fourth century, it might also have been purged of unknown transmitters. Al-Ḥākim might have read it with glowing approval.

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Indeed, later scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1374) and Zayn al-Dîn al-‘Irâqî (d. 806/1404) did champion Ibn Ḥibbân’s work as an exceptional source for authentic ḥadîth.187 As we will see in the next chapter, they were simply too late.

Conversely, the extraordinary efforts of the Ṣaḥîḥayn Network scholars to produce definitive texts of al-Bukhârî’s collection and identify his methods and transmitters made the work an ideal candidate for canonization. As we shall see in the next chapter, it was claims about al-Bukhârî’s and Muslim’s methods and transmitters that lay at the center of the case for their authority.

We must now also ask: How did this “period of intense canonical process” involve the community shaping and appreciating these texts in ways that made them “most meaningful and valuable?”188 A number of scholars in the long fourth century immediately seized on the Ṣaḥîḥayn as formative texts for engaging the Prophetic legacy and expressing their relationship with it. Their interest spawned the period’s concentrated studies of the two works. It was not, however, the need that drove the mustakhraj genre that would result in the canonization of al-Bukhârî and Muslim. Expressing one’s relationship to the Prophet’s legacy and interpreting his teachings through living isnâds remained the unique obsession of ḥadîth scholars. The canonization of the Ṣaḥîḥayn would have to involve a broader Muslim community.


188 Sanders, 30.
It would be the *ilzāmāt* genre, which extended al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards for authenticity to new ḥadīth, that proved crucial. It was the standards of the two scholars that served as the measure of truth in which the authority of the lawmaker could be deposited and then extended into new territory. It is no surprise that the one scholar of the long fourth century to have dealt exclusively with the standards of the *Shaykhayn* is the one scholar we have conspicuously avoided until now. He is the focal point of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* Network to whom all roads lead. Until al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī’s seminal career, we see that the nexus of canonicity, that of text, authority and communal identification, had not yet coalesced. Transmitters like Ibn al-Sakan, Abū Dharr al-Harawī and the various scholars who produced studies of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* in effect succeeded in producing definitive, fully dimensional texts of the two works. But the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* were not authoritative even for their local *mustakhraj* cults. Unlike most post-canonization critics, al-Iṣmāʿīlī, Ibn ʿAmmār and al-Dāraqūṭnī included no word of apology or explanation for criticizing the two works. Before al-Ḥākim the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* were simply tools and objects of interest for local communities of transmission-based scholars. After him, the canon had formed.
V.

CANON AND COMMUNITY:

AL-ḤĀKIM AL-NAYSĀBŪRĪ AND THE CANONIZATION OF THE ṢAḤĪḤAYN

V.1. Introduction

Around the turn of the fourth/tenth century, the Ṣaḥīḥ collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim first emerged as kanōns of authenticity. Representatives from the two divergent strains of the transmission-based school, the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnis and the nascent Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arī camp, together agreed on the Ṣaḥīḥayn as common references for the Prophet’s authentic legacy. The study and exploration of the Ṣaḥīḥayn took place at the hands of a network of devoted ḥadīth scholars, but the canonization of the two works would result from the activities of a different cadre. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī formed the common link. He both inherited and participated in the study of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections, yet he employed the ʿilm al-ḥadīth genre for a new ideological purpose. Al-Ḥākim’s vision of the critical standards that the two scholars had followed in compiling their works was designed to meet the demands of both Sunni ḥadīth scholars and the ḥadīth-wary Mu‘tazilites who rivaled them. Al-Ḥākim used the “standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” as a measure of authenticity to extend this common requirement to a vast new body of ḥadīths.

In the long fourth century, the broader Muslim community developed a new vision of the authority that Prophetic ḥadīths could attain when validated by communal
consensus. By the mid-fifth/eleventh century, this leap had led legal theorists from the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Muʿtazilite, Ḥanbalī and Shāfī’/Ashʿarī schools to a common belief that ḥadīths accepted by the umma yielded epistemological certainty. It was this principle that two of al-Ḥākim’s close associates, one from the budding Shāfī’/Ashʿarī tradition and the other from the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni school, would use to declare the Ṣahīḥayn a common body of authentic ḥadīths agreed on by these two vying groups.

V.2. The Life and Works of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī

Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī was born in 321/933 in Naysābūr and began studying ḥadīth at the age of nine. Although throughout his career he studied extensively with over two thousand teachers in Kufa, Rayy, Baghdad, Ābādān, Hamadhān, Merv and Transoxiana, approximately half his teachers hailed from his native Naysābūr.¹ His primary mentors in the sciences of ḥadīth collection and criticism were three major members of the Ṣahīḥayn Network: Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī, Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraquṭnī, as well as Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Ibn al-Jiʿābī (d. 355/966).² Al-Ḥākim traveled twice to Baghdad for his studies, once as a youth and again in 368/978-9.³ Throughout his career he and his Baghdad teacher al-Dāraquṭnī had an uneasy and tense relationship. Al-Ḥākim’s student al-Khalīlī mentions that his teacher sat and discussed (nāẓara) ḥadīth with al-Dāraquṭnī and that the latter was

¹ Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 17:163.
² Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 17:165.
³ Al-Khalīlī, al-Irshād, 324.
pleased with the student from Naysabur. In another report, however, it is said that when
al-Ḥākim arrived in Baghdad he asked to see al-Dāraquṭnī's collection of hadiths from a
certain shaykh. When the young scholar looked at the first hadith and saw it was from a
transmitter whom he considered weak, he threw down the papers and never looked at
them again. As we shall see, al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraquṭnī would remain in a continuous
correspondence characterized by serious disagreements over the nature of al-Bukhārī's
and Muslim's methods.

In Naysabūr's rigid division between the Ḥanafi school and the transmission-
based scholars, al-Ḥākim adhered firmly to the latter's moderate Shāfi'i strain. He
studied the Shāfi'i tradition with Abū Sahl al-Ṣu'īlūkī (d. 369/980) as well as others and
even composed a book on the virtues of the school's eponymous founder (Fadā'il al-
Shāfi'i). He complained about the way in which the Ḥanafi Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-
Bawraqī used to forge hadiths for that school, such as a report claiming that the Prophet
said, "There will be in my umma a man named Abū Ḥanīfa, and he will be its lamp...
and there will be in my umma a man named Muḥammad b. Idrīs [al-Shāfi'i] whose strife
(fitna) is more harmful than that of Satan (Iblīs)."

Like many participants in the early Shāfi'i tradition, al-Ḥākim cultivated
relationships with practitioners of dialectical theology. In fact, he studied extensively

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4 Al-Khāṣībī, al-Irshād, 324. Al-Subkī frankly admits that al-Ḥākim and al-Dāraquṭnī were often at
odds; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 4:164.

5 Al-Khāṣībī, Tārikh Baghdad, 3:94. Al-Khāṣībī adds, "Or so he said (aw kamā qāl)."

6 Cf. al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ẓujJa; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 4:156.

7 Al-Khāṣībī, Tārikh Baghdad, 2:379.
with two of the architects of the Ashʿarī school. He attended the lessons of Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), who held him in high regard, and also produced a sizable selection (intakhaba ʿalayhi) of hadiths from the famous Shāfiʿī jurist, legal theoretician and theologian Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyini (d. 418/1027).8

Al-Ḥākim eventually became a leading member of the hadith scholar community in Naysābūr. Not only was he sought out for opinions on the authenticity of hadiths and the reliability of narrators, he also exercised a great deal of authority in the community. One of al-Ḥākim’s main teachers assigned him as the agent for his pious endowment (waqf) and charged him with running a small hadith school called Dār al-Sunna.9 Al-Ḥākim towered over the multitudes of students who flocked to the city to study the Prophet’s legacy. The famous Sufi exegete, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), who was accused of forging hadiths for the Sufi cause, had heard a number of hadiths from the great Naysābūr muḥaddith Abū al-ʿAbbās al-ʿAṣamm (d. 346/957). Only after al-Ḥākim’s oversight had ended with his death in 405/1014 at the age of eighty-four, however, could the Sufi openly transmit what he had heard to students.10

Al-Ḥākim’s interest in hadith dominated his oeuvre. Aside from his book on al-Shāfiʿī, a contribution to the Proofs of Prophecy (Dalāʿīl al-nubuwā) genre, and his landmark biographical dictionary of Naysābūr, al-Ḥākim’s works revolved around the science of hadith criticism. Well before he reached the age of seventy he had written a

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8 Cf. al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 4:162; al-Dhahabi, Tadhkira al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:164; idem, Tārikh al-islām, 28:438.
10 Al-Khaṣib, Tārikh Baghdaḍ, 2:245.
selection of one ḥadīth from each of his teachers (muṣjam al-shuyūkh), a book of 'ilal, and a ḥadīth work called Kitāb al-iklīl about the Prophet’s campaigns for the local military governor (Ṣāhib al-jaysh). 11 Much more important, however, was the introduction to that work, which served to familiarize the lay reader with the types of authentic and defective (ṣaqīm) reports as well as the levels of narrator criticism. 12 He also wrote an introduction to his treatments of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works, called al-Madkhal ilā al-Ṣaḥīḥ (or al-Ṣaḥīḥayn), in which the author gives a tantalizing indication of his vision of the Shaykhayn’s criteria and their range of acceptable narrators. In addition, he states that he wrote one book on each of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s criteria for authenticity as well as a work on those reports that one of the two scholars had included to the exclusion of the other. 13

Probably around the age of sixty-five, al-Ḥākim penned his famous and comprehensive treatise on the sciences of ḥadīth, the Ma’rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth (Knowledge of the Sciences of Ḥadīth). Divided into fifty-two chapters, this book discusses the technical terms used in ḥadīth criticism and transmission, lists the different generations of transmitters, gives brief biographies of major ḥadīth scholars and outlines

11 Al-Khaṭṭār, al-Ishād, 325.

12 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā ma’rifat kitāb al-Iklīl, 51. We know al-Ḥākim had composed the Iklīl, its introduction, his Madkhal ilā al-Ṣaḥīḥ and his Muzakkī al-akhbār well before 389 AH, because we know his Ma’rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth was being transmitted widely as early as that date, and in that work the author refers the reader to the aforementioned mentioned books; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 4:157; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkiraṭ al-buṣūr, 3:162.

13 This last work was titled Mā infasradā kull wāhid min al-imāmān bi-ikhrajīhi. For lists of al-Ḥākim’s oeuvre, see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Ṭabaqāt, 1:199-200; al-Dhahabī, Siyār, 17:170; al-Ḥākim, Ṭārib, Nisābkūr, 38-42 (editor’s introduction); al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 4:156. Al-Ḥākim had other small books on legal matters, such as a work called Kayfyyat saḥārat al-duḥā (How to Pray the Late Morning Prayer), a work called Farā’id al-fawwā’id and a forty ḥadīth collection, which was widely studied in Qazvin; al-Rāʾī, al-Tadwīn fi akhbār Qazwīn; 1:337, 341, 346; 2:45, 58.

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material essential for a ḥadīth student. Al-Ḥākim’s opinions and the chapter structure of his *Marifa* would exercise tremendous influence on the genre of ḥadīth’s technical discipline (*muṣṭalāḥ al-ḥadīth*) for centuries.\(^{14}\)

The work with which we are most concerned in this chapter was evidently one of the last al-Ḥākim composed: a voluminous *ilzāmāt* of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* entitled *al-Mustadrak*. This work differed both qualitatively and quantitatively from the *ilzāmāt* works of al-Ḥākim’s teacher al-Ḍāraquṭnī and his student Abū Dharr al-Harawī. Unlike al-Ḍāraquṭnī’s diminutive *Kitāb al-ilzāmāt*, which consists of only one hundred and nine ḥadīths, and Abū Dharr al-Harawī’s lost *Mustadrak*, which was only one volume, al-Ḥākim’s *Mustadrak* is a multivolume work. Unlike al-Ḍāraquṭnī’s random and incidental collection of ḥadīths, the *Mustadrak* is organized topically in *muṣannaf* form.\(^{15}\)

Al-Ḥākim’s works on the technical discipline of ḥadīth study were widely read even during his own lifetime, and several scholars responded to his work. His student al-Khalīlī notes that al-Ḥākim was sometimes not sufficiently discriminating or clear in his writings. The criticisms of his colleagues thus led him to review and clarify his work.\(^{16}\) ʿAbd al-Ghanī b. Saʿīd of Egypt (d. 409/1019), for example, wrote to al-Ḥākim with some

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\(^{14}\) Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s famous *Muqaddima*, for example, is based on the chapter structure of the *Marifa*, to the extent that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ included a certain chapter (on *afrād*) which he felt was covered elsewhere simply because al-Ḥākim had a chapter on it; al-ʿIrāqī, *al-Taqyid wa al-fiqh*, 95.

\(^{15}\) The Cairo edition of the *Mustadrak* occupies five volumes; al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. Muqbil b. Hādī al-Wādī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1417/1997). See also Brown, “Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon,” 11. The *Mustadrak* has fewer chapters (47) than al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, but seems to be inspired by both works’ ordering. Only 3 chapters appear in the *Mustadrak* that do not appear in either of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (*kitāb al-hijra*, *kitāb qism al-jay* and *kitāb tawārīkh al-mutaqaddimin min al-anbiyāʾ*).

\(^{16}\) Al-Khalīlī, *al-Irshād*, 324.
criticisms of his *al-Madkhal ilā al-Šaḥīḥ*, for which al-Ḥākim thanked him.\(^{17}\) Farther west than Egypt, we know that even within the author’s lifetime (by 389/998-9) some ḥadīth scholars in Andalusia possessed copies of his *Maʿrifā*.\(^{18}\) Al-Ḥākim was well-known enough in the region within several decades of his death for Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), who never left Andalusia, to prominently note his opinion in the debate over who was the most virtuous of the Prophet’s Companions.\(^{19}\) In the Islamic heartlands of Iraq and Iran, al-Ḥākim’s student Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī had a copy of his *Ṭārīkh Naysābūr*, his *Madkhal ilā al-Šaḥīḥ* and probably many of his other books.\(^{20}\) Although al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī never met al-Ḥākim, he relies on information and reports from him extensively through a myriad of intermediaries in his *Ṭārīkh Baghdād*.\(^{21}\)

Yet al-Ḥākim’s adherence to the moderate Shāfī‘ī tradition and some of his interpretive choices in his *Mustadrak* precipitated a clash with more conservative members of the transmission-based community. Specifically, al-Ḥākim’s statement that


\(^{19}\) Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī, *Kitāb al-fīṣal fi al-milal wa al-ahwā wa al-nihal*, 5 vols. in 2 (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, [1964]), 4:111. Ibn Ḥazm notes that al-Ḥākim upheld the unusual position that ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭīb was the foremost Companion of the Prophet. Considering the controversy over al-Ḥākim’s supposedly Shiite views (see below), however, such a report was most likely a product of polemics surrounding his position.

\(^{20}\) See, for example, al-Khaṭīb, *Ṭārīkh Baghdād*, 2:73. See also n. 97 below.

\(^{21}\) Al-Khaṭīb does not refer to al-Ḥākim as such in his biography of him, calling him Ibn al-Bayyī‘ instead. Most of the time al-Khaṭīb refers to him as Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Naysābūrī, but at least once he calls him al-Ḥākim; al-Khaṭīb, *Ṭārīkh Baghdād*, 2:438.
two pro-Alid hadiths known as the hadith al-Tayr\textsuperscript{22} and the hadith of Ghdir Khumm\textsuperscript{23} met the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim led certain hadith scholars to accuse him of Shiism. These accusations are well documented; writing not long after al-Ḥākim’s death, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī notes several reports about the hadith al-Tayr and al-Ḥākim leaning towards Shiism.\textsuperscript{24} Al-Ḥākim’s student al-Khaṭīb alludes to the accusations leveled against his teacher when he writes, “For me he was an ocean, and all that was hurled at him could not detract from that (ra’aytuhu fi kull mā ulqiya ‘alayhi bahr\textsuperscript{25} lā yu’jizuhu ‘anhu).” More extreme reports have also survived, such as stories that hadith scholars blockaded al-Ḥākim in his house and that he disliked Mu‘awiya so much that he could not bring himself to narrate a hadith praising him in order to placate his opponents. Such reports, however, appear only in later sources compiled by al-Ḥākim’s critics, such as Ibn al-Jawzī’s Montazam.\textsuperscript{26}

This accusation of Shiism was probably baseless, resembling the scandal that had earlier tarnished al-Bukhārī’s reputation. Both he and al-Ḥākim were attacked by

\textsuperscript{22} In this hadith the Prophet is eating a fowl and calls on God to “bring me the most beloved of your creation, (kuntu akhdamu Rasūl Allāh (ṣ) fa-quddima li-Rasūl Allāh (ṣ) farakh mashwi...)” at which point ‘Alī enters and eats with the Prophet. See Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī: kitāb al-manāqib, bāb manāqib ‘Alī.

\textsuperscript{23} In this hadith the Prophet says, “Whoever’s master I am, ‘Alī is his master (man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu).” See Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1246), al-Radd ‘alā Abī Bakr al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 129; al-Dhahabi, Syar, 17:168. For these hadiths, see al-Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak: kitāb ma’rafat al-sahāba, bāb ba’id fadā’ī ‘Alī.


\textsuperscript{25} Al-Khaṭīb, al-Irshād, 325. The editor of this text vowels the word ‘yu’jizhu,’ which I think is incorrect.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntazam, 15:109-10.
extreme members of the transmission-based school for their more moderate stances. Al-
Ḥākim’s most vocal critics were all prominent über-Sunnis: the Ḥanbalī Khājaje
ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089), Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 507/1113) and Ibn
al-Jawzī.27 Much like al-Shāfīʿī himself, al-Ḥākim’s Shāfīʿī identity led to accusations of
Shiism. Al-Shāfīʿī had based his legislation on issues of rebellion (al-bughār) on the
premise that ʿAlī had dealt righteously and appropriately with Muʿāwiyah’s uprising
against the caliphate. Combined with his affection for the family of the Prophet, such
thinking led to a trial before the Abbasid caliph in which al-Shāfīʿī had to defend himself
against accusations of Shiism.28 Al-Ḥākim upheld this Shāfīʿī position, quoting the great
Shāfīʿī Ibn Khuzayma as saying that anyone who fought ʿAlī on the issue of the caliphate
was a rebel (bāghin).29

The furor that al-Ḥākim caused with his approval of the two pro-Alid ḥadīths also
seems to have been accidental. The ḥadīths themselves had been verified by earlier
Sunni scholars such as al-Nasāʿī and al-Tirmidhī. In al-Ḥākim’s time, however, the
reports had become anathema to certain elements of the ḥadīth community. Whereas al-
Nasāʿī was only vaguely criticized for not praising Muʿāwiyah sufficiently, when a scholar
of al-Ḥākim’s time, Ibn al-Saqqaʿ (d. 371/981-2), narrated the ḥadīth al-Ṭayr in a mosque
he was expelled, confined to his house, and the place where he sat in the mosque washed

15:110.

28 Al-Dhahabī, Maʿrifat al-ruwāt al-mutakallam fihim bimā lā yājibu al-radd, ed. Abū ʿAbdallāh

29 This is based on the famous ḥadīth in which the Prophet tells ʿAmmār b. Yāṣir that he will be
killed by the rebellious party (i.e., Muʿāwiya); al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿilām al-ḥadīth, 105.
clean. It thus seems probable that the accusations of Shiism resulted from al-Ḥākim’s Shāfī‘ī approval of ‘Alī’s position against Muʿāwiya and his authentication of two ḥadīths that had become touchstones for anti-Shiite sentiment among the ahl al-ḥadīth.

V.3. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim in al-Ḥākim’s Vision of Ḥadīth

As the Sahiḥayn Network Chart in the previous chapter demonstrates, al-Ḥākim acted as a magnet for studies of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work. Like his teacher, al-Dāraqūṭnī, al-Ḥākim’s scholarly activities revolved around the Sahiḥayn and the methods of their authors. Unlike earlier scholars such as al-İsmā‘īlī, however, al-Ḥākim’s appreciation for the Sahiḥayn did not involve their legal merits. For al-Ḥākim, al-Bukhārī and Muslim represented the pinnacle of skill and achievement in the realm of ḥadīth criticism in particular. He writes in his al-Madkhal ilā al-Iklīl, that “All regions testify to the superiority of Khurāsān in the knowledge of authentic ḥadīths... due to the precedence of the two imāms, Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Bukhārī and Abū al-Ḥusayn [Muslim] al-Naysābūrī, and their lone mastery (tafarrudihimā) of that science.”

Unlike the other members of the Sahiḥayn Network who viewed the works only as formative texts or objects of study, al-Ḥākim endowed them with a loftier station. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s books embodied the highest level of critical stringency, and for him they were

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30 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffaz, 3:117. For the accusations of al-Ħasā‘i, see ibid., 2:194-5; al-Ḥasanānī, Tawātir al-aʃkār, 1:199. That these two pro-Alid ḥadīths were particularly controversial in al-Ḥākim’s time is also evident from the fact that scholars of this period devoted specific treatises to these reports. Abū al-ʿAbbās Ibn ‘Uqda (d. 332/944) wrote a work on the ḥadīth of Ghadir Khumm, and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and al-Ḥākim’s student Ahmad b. Ḥamdān (d. ca. 440/1048-9) wrote works on the ḥadīth of al-Tayar; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffaz, 3:206; cf. Ahmad al-Ghumārī, Fath al-malik al-ʿalī bi-ṣīḥrat ḥadīth bāb madīnat al-ḥim ‘Alī, ed. ʿImād Surūr ([n.p.]: [n.p.], 1426/2005), 11-12.

31 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā maʿrifat kitāb al-Iklīl, 72.
key pillars of the science of ḥadīth criticism itself. In the Maʿrifat’s chapter on authentic ḥadīths, al-Ḥākim begins with a description of reports that seem to have authentic isnāds but in fact possess fatal weaknesses perceptible only to master critics. He concludes that if a ḥadīth does not have an isnād found in one of the Sahihayn, one must subject it to thorough examination for such hidden flaws (illa). Inclusion in one or both of the Sahihayn thus tremendously bolsters the credibility of a narrator or his reports. In al-Ḥākim’s chapter on how ḥadīth scholars have treated narrators with non-Sunni beliefs, he uses the Sahihayn to demonstrate that mild heretics are acceptable sources. Abān b. Taghlib (d. 140-1/757-9), for example, was a known Shiite who once narrated a ḥadīth attacking the caliph ‘Uthmān. But al-Ḥākim states that he is nonetheless “trustworthy, with his ḥadīths included in the Sahihayn.” Despite Mālik’s rejection of Ibrāhīm b. Tahmān (d. 168/784) for being a Murjīʿite, al-Ḥākim defends him in the same manner.33

Al-Ḥākim did not, however, consider al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections infallible. He himself criticizes some of Muslim’s selections. He mentions a narration of the famous ḥadīth in which the Prophet states that the best generations are the first three generations of Muslims, adding, “That ḥadīth is included in the Sahih of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, but it has a remarkable flaw (illa ʿajiba).”34 Such critiques come as no surprise, since al-Ḥākim did not feel that al-Bukhārī and Muslim had designed their works to be

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32 Al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, 75.

33 Al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, 168-9. Al-Ḥākim lists Ibrāhīm as a one of the famous trustworthy imāms of his generation; ibid., 308. Al-Ḥākim himself states that one has to be a proselytizer of heresy to be placed outside the pale of ʿadāla; al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, 67.

34 Al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, 52; cf. al-Dāraquṭnī, Kitāb al-ilzāmāt wa al-tatābbu’, 501-2. See also al-Qanabī, al-Sayf al-ḥādd, 137, for more examples.
totally free of error. In the introduction to his Mustadrak, he states that his work will consist of hadiths meeting al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s standards but that “it is not possible to include [only] what has no flaws (illa), for indeed they [al-Bukhari and Muslim] did not even claim this for themselves....” Here we see the first of several inconsistencies in al-Ḥakim’s methodology. If the Sahihayn are secure sources whose isnāds require little critical attention, how can he so readily admit that they contain flawed reports? We will be better able to solve this riddle once we have addressed al-Ḥakim’s purpose in employing the standards of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

V.4. The Shurūṭ According to al-Ḥakim: The Requirements of al-Bukhari and Muslim

Although scholars such as Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī and al-Dāraquḍī regularly refer to the standards (sharṭ/shurūṭ/rasm) of al-Bukhari or Muslim in their extant works, al-Ḥakim seems to be the only scholar of the long fourth century to have devoted specific treatises to this subject. These works have unfortunately been lost, but it appears that they did not succeed in clearly explaining al-Ḥakim’s school of thought on the topic. The scholar’s ambiguous and inconsistent writings on the requirements for saḥīḥ hadiths in general and al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s methodologies in particular have confounded hadith experts from al-Ḥakim’s time to the present day. It is therefore necessary to


establish the most accurate understanding of al-Ḥākim’s stance, which has generally been interpreted in one of three ways. First, al-Ḥākim’s writings have led many scholars to believe that he considered the elimination of unknown transmitters from the isnād of a ḥadīth to be essential for its inclusion in both the general category of sahiḥ and in the Sahihayn. Other scholars have interpreted al-Ḥākim’s vision of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards as requiring what we will define as ‘doubling transmission.’ Finally, the third and most accurate camp has understood that al-Ḥākim intended both the above meanings in his definition of the Shaykhayn’s conditions.

V.4. a. Two Rāwiṣ and the Elimination of Jahāla

The first interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s writings on the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim centers on the qualities of the transmitters they employed. The notion that a narrator needed to be well-established as a transmitter in order to form part of a sahiḥ isnād exerted a tremendous influence among ḥadīth scholars. The presence of an unknown transmitter in a report’s isnād was one of the foremost obstacles to its achieving a sahiḥ rating.37 By the time of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), Sunni scholars had agreed almost unanimously that a person needed at least two established narrators (rāwi) transmitting from him in order to avoid being condemned as “unknown (majhūl).”38

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37 For a discussion of this, see Ibn al-Wazīr, Tanqīḥ al-anzār, 102.

38 Al-Khaṭīb, al-Kifāya, 1:290. Later scholars such as Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr and Abū al-Ḥasan b. al-Qaṭṭān al-Fāṣi (d. 628/1230-1) attempted to qualify this generally consistent rule. For a discussion of such attempts, see Ibn al-Wazīr, Tanqīḥ al-anzār, 192-198; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddima, 296; al-ʿIrāqī, al Taqyīd wa al-idāh, 117-8; al-Laknawi, al-Rafʿ wa al-takmil fi al-jarḥ wa al-ta ḍīl, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 8th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Bashaʾir al-Islamiyya, 1425/2004), 256-60. Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819-20) himself is attributed with the quote that one cannot accept the narration of an unknown; al-Bayhaqī, Maʿrifat al-sunan wa al-ṣīḥ, 1:75, 81.
first explicit formulation of this principle is usually attributed to al-Bukhārī’s great adversary al-Dhuhālī.\footnote{See al-Khaṣīb, al-Kifāya, 1:290; Ibn Rajab, Sharḥ al-Tirmidhī, 1:82. Ibn al-Jawzī, however, traces this requirement back to Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Nūḥ Abū Ishāq al-Zāhīd (d. 295/907-8); Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntaqam, 13:73.} This concept, however, was clearly already applied in practice during al-Dhuhālī’s time. Muslim had dedicated an entire work to listing transmitters who only had one transmitter (rāwī) from them, thus falling short of the requirements necessary for a *ṣaḥīḥ isnād*. Al-Nāṣirī (d. 303/915) also composed a short work on this subject, and al-Ḥākim himself devoted a chapter to it in his *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*. The opposite of unknown transmitters were “well-known (mashhūr)” ones whose testimony and transmission could validate those of others.\footnote{See abroad b. Shuʿayb al-Nasāʾī, *Thalāšt rasāʾ il ʿil ḥadīthiyya*, ed. Mashhūr Hasan Maḥmūd Salmān and Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, 155-200. The technical term mashhūr was already in use during the first half of the third/ninth century and appears in Muslim’s writings; Muslim, *al-Munfaridat wa al-wāḥdān*, 88.}

Al-Ḥākim’s work leaves little doubt that he intended the elimination of anonymity to be an essential feature of a *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* as well as a requirement of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. In the *Madkhal ilā al-Ikhlīl*, al-Ḥākim describes ten levels of *ṣaḥīḥ* ʿḥadīths. He notes how the first five levels are agreed on by all and are found in the collections of established experts used as proof texts (*kutub al-aʾīma al-muḥtajj biha*).\footnote{Al-Ḥākim, *al-Madkhal ilā maʿrifat kitāb al-Ikhlīl*, 107.} The bottom five levels, on the other hand, fail to meet the requirements for authenticity of certain schools of thought. The highest level of *ṣaḥīḥ*, he explains, consists of reports narrated by a Companion whose identity and reputation as a narrator of ḥadīths has been established. This occurs, al-Ḥākim elaborates, when one proves that two known


\[\text{\textsuperscript{40}}\text{See abroad b. Shuʿayb al-Nasāʾī, *Thalāšt rasāʾ il ʿil ḥadīthiyya*, ed. Mashhūr Hasan Maḥmūd Salmān and Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, 155-200. The technical term mashhūr was already in use during the first half of the third/ninth century and appears in Muslim’s writings; Muslim, *al-Munfaridat wa al-wāḥdān*, 88.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{41}}\text{Al-Ḥākim, *al-Madkhal ilā maʿrifat kitāb al-Ikhlīl*, 107.}\]
Successors have narrated hadiths from that Companion, thus freeing him of “anonymity (jahāla).” This report is then narrated from that Companion by a Successor who is equally well established as a transmitter. The same follows for the ensuing generations until al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s teachers. As this last clause suggests, al-Ḥākim concludes by stating that this is the level of hadiths found in the Sahihayn, and that their number does not exceed ten thousand. Al-Ḥākim then proceeds to define the other levels of authentic hadiths, which do not include those featured in the Sahihayn.

In the Marifat ‘ulūm al-hadīth, written long after the Madkhal ilā al-Iklīl, al-Ḥākim provides only one definition for sahih hadiths. Abandoning the multiple levels of authentic narrations, he restates his definition of the highest level: a sahih hadith is narrated from the Prophet by a Companion freed of anonymity by having two upright Successors (tābi‘ ādil) who generally transmit from him. The hadith is then accepted and transmitted widely among (yatadwaluhu... bi‘l-qubūl) scholars from that point on. He likens this mass transmission to continuous levels of testimony by witnesses in court (shahāda). Invoking this analogy between bearing witness and transmitting hadiths on the topic of eliminating anonymity was odd for a Sunni muḥaddith, although it was

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42 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā ma‘rifat kitāb al-Iklīl; 73, 78. Scholars like al-Laknawī have admitted that this passage and the following description of ṣiḥṭa from the Ma‘rifat could support the notion of doubling transmission. See al-Laknawī, Za‘far al-amārī, 69-71.

43 Again falling into inconsistency, al-Ḥākim notes that al-Bukhārī and Muslim include one narration each that belongs in the fourth level of universally accepted hadiths; see James Robson, trans., An Introduction to the Science of Tradition (London: Luzac and Co., 1953), 19.

44 Al-Ḥākim, Marifat ‘ulūm al-hadīth, 77.
especially common among Mu‘tazilites. The reason for this bizarre comment will became clear when we discuss al-Ḥākim’s target audience.

Support for this interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s vision of the Šāhīhayn’s criteria comes from one of his senior students, Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī. He held that al-Bukhārī and Muslim demanded that each narrator in the isnād have the two transmitters required to eliminate anonymity. Although this close student of al-Ḥākim should have provided more productive insights into his school of thought, al-Bayhaqī’s comments are frustratingly brief. In his al-Sunan al-kubrā he states definitely that al-Bukhārī and Muslim did not narrate from a Companion or Successor with only one transmitter. Thus, he states that they therefore did not include ḥadīths from one Mu‘āwiya b. Ḥida because only one person ever narrated material from him. Another scholar very familiar with al-Ḥākim’s works as well as the Šāhīhayn, Abū ‘Alī al-Jayyānī al-Ghassānī of Andalusia (d. 498/1105), states that Ḥākim’s definition of sahiḥ aimed at the elimination of majhūls. He therefore required each Companion and Successor to have two narrators establishing him as a viable transmitter.

This definition of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s criteria and the requirements for authentic ḥadīths in general, however, was very controversial. Even during his own

45 The invocation of the notion of witnessing (shahāda) was more common in the context of establishing the upstanding character (‘adāla) of a transmitter; see Muslim, Sahīḥ, 1:7 and al-Khaṭīb, al-Kifāya, 1:285. For an excellent discussion of rejecting the analogy with regards to the number of transmitters needed to eliminate jahāla, with references to all the Ash‘arī theorists who rejected this analogy as the basis for requiring two transmitters, see al-‘Irāqī, al-Taqfīd wa al-tazkī‘, 116-17. For a Ḥanāfī rejection, see al-Jassāṣ, Usūl, 1:567-8.

46 Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, al-Sunan al-kubrā, ed. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1420/1999), 4:176. See also see Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib al-tahdhib, 10:187. It is interesting to note that this Mu‘āwiya is not included in Muslim’s Munfarīdāt.

lifetime, al-Ḥākim’s colleagues attempted to correct his understanding. In fact, in his own Mustadrak, al-Ḥākim quotes the text of a letter al-Ḍāraquṭnī sent him debating his claim that al-Bukhārī and Muslim included ḥadīths only from narrators with two transmitters from them. Al-Ḍāraquṭnī objects, “Indeed al-Bukhārī, God bless him, included a ḥadīth from... Qays b. Abū Ḥāzm from Mirdās al-ʿAslamī (r) from the Messenger of God..., and Mirdās has no transmitter other than Qays.” Al-Ḍāraquṭnī provides three more cases in which al-Ḥākim’s rule fails to apply, but the scholar gives no response.48

V.4. b. Doubling Transmission: 1 → 2 → 4

A second interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s writings on the requirements of the Ṣaḥīḥayn revolved around the transmission of the actual report and not the status of its transmitters. This school of thought interpreted the same passages mentioned above as requiring what we can term ‘doubling transmission,’ namely a report whose narrators doubled at each stage of transmission: one Companion narrated to two Successors, who together narrated to four from the next generation, and so on. Al-Ḥākim’s colleague and student Ibn Manda upheld this criterion, calling for two to three narrators at the level of Successor. He added that al-Bukhārī and Muslim based their books on this requirement, falling short on only a few occasions (illa ʿahruf49). Abū al-Faḍl b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, who

wrote the first comprehensive book on the requirements of the Six Books, believed that this was the proper interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s description of the ultimate level of ṣaḥīh ḥadiths and those found in the Ṣaḥīḥayn.⁴⁹ The great Andalusian scholar and traveler Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1145) also explicitly states in the introduction to his commentary on Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ that the author required doubling transmission for each ḥadīth.⁵⁰ Abū Bakr al-Ḥāzīmī (d. 584/1188-9) similarly interprets al-Ḥākim’s definition in the Madkhal ilā al-ʿIdāl.⁵¹ Majd al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr explains ṣaḥīḥ narrations by replicating al-Ḥākim’s list of the five universally accepted levels, echoing him further by adding that fewer than ten thousand reports meet the highest level. He considers the possibility that al-Ḥākim meant the requirement of eliminating unknowns, but ultimately deems the doubling transmission interpretation more likely. Many scholars, Ibn al-Athīr explains, did indeed require this for authenticity (ṣiḥḥa). He adds that this is the highest standard of authenticity, “so who is more deserving of it (ajdar) than al-Bukhārī and Muslim?”⁵²

We can appreciate these scholars’ interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s definition of the Ṣaḥīḥayn’s requirements by examining an underappreciated source for al-Ḥākim’s

⁴⁹ Al-Maqdisī, Shurūṭ al-aʿīma al-sitta, 15.

⁵⁰ Although it seems that Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī’s commentary is lost, his statement was repeated by Ibn Rushayd in his rebuttal of this opinion based on the example of the ḥadīth, “Actions are by intentions (inna maʿaṣṣ al-ʿāmīl biʿl-niyyāt)”; Ibn Ḥajar, Nuzhat al-nazār fi tawdīḥ nukhbat al-fikr fi musṭalāh ahl al-athar, ed. ‘Abd al-Samī al-Anṣāṣ (Amman: Dār ‘Īsām, 1419/1999), 23-24.

⁵¹ Al-Ḥāzīmī, Shurūṭ al-aʿīma al-khamsa, 24.

⁵² Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmiʿ al-ʿusūl fi ahādīth al-Rasūl, 1:161-3. Ibn al-Athīr adds that this requirement would be impossible to meet in his own time, since ḥadīth transmissions had become far too diffuse. Here he echoes al-Ghazālī a century earlier; Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmiʿ al-ʿusūl, 1:70; al-Ghazālī, al-Manṭāq, 255.
thought: a question and answer session recorded by his student Mas'ūd b. 'Alī al-Sijzī of Naysābūr (d. 438-9/1046-8). It goes as follows. When al-Ḥākim is asked why al-Bukhārī and Muslim narrated from Ḥamīd al-Ṭawīl ← Anas and not from Yazīd [b. Ṭahmān] al-Raqāshī ← Anas, he replied that other men corroborated Ḥamīd’s narrations from Anas while Yazīd was on his own.53 In this work al-Ḥākim is also mentioned as saying that, for al-Bukhārī, “ḥadīths do not become well-known except by being narrated by two trustworthy transmitters who agree on the narration (al-ḥadīth lā yastahārus indahu illā bi-thiqatayn yattafiqān ʿalā riwāyatihī).”54 Finally, al-Ḥākim’s description of a sāḥīḥ ḥadīth as being transmitted like a series of testimonies (shahāda) leaves little doubt that he intended doubling transmission as a criterion. Islamic law required the testimony of two upstanding males in most legal matters. It thus seems clear that al-Ḥākim felt that al-Bukhārī and Muslim required ḥadīths to be transmitted by the same number at every stage of transmission.

With the exception of Ibn Manda, Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī and Ibn al-Athīr, later commentators who followed this interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s work vehemently rejected it as an inaccurate expression of the Sāḥīḥayn’s criteria. Al-Maqdisī exclaims that doubling transmission was an admirable ideal, but one that totally fails to describe the reality of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s books. Al-Ḥāzīmī says that he has been shocked how this palpably false notion had become so widespread, demolishing al-Ḥākim’s claim


54 Al-Ḥākim, Suʿālāt Masʿūd b. ‘Alī al-Sijzī, 209.
with a long list of examples. These scholars note that the very first ḥadīth in al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ has only one transmitter for the first three levels of the isnād. Ibn Hajar roundly rejects all scholars who interpret al-Ḥākim’s explanations as meaning doubling transmission. He believes that al-Ḥākim’s Madkhal ilā al-Iklīl, where he identifies the top level of Ṣaḥīḥ with al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and his Maʿrifā, which universalizes this definition, both clearly intend the elimination of anonymity. Like earlier scholars, he rejects both these standards as patently inaccurate representations of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s criteria.

Ibn Hajar’s teacher, Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqi, invokes the authoritative testimony of al-Ḥākim’s senior disciple al-Bayhaqī to disprove the notion of doubling transmission. He quotes a letter in which al-Bayhaqī skeptically mentions that one Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 438/1047) had cited a ḥadīth scholar who had required doubling transmission for authenticity. No scholars of the ahl al-ḥadīth, al-ʿIrāqi asserts, ever upheld that opinion.

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55 Al-Ḥāzimī, Shurūṭ; 15, 24.

56 Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmiʿ al-asūl, 1:161-3. Ibn al-Athīr acknowledges these criticisms, but retorts that al-Ḥākim knew what he was doing and must have come to this conclusion after intensive study. Turning to principles of Islamicate logic, he argues that whoever objects to al-Ḥākim’s position could certainly have delved no deeper than he did. A critic is thus merely negating al-Ḥākim’s statement. Invoking the principle that the affirmative supersedes the negative (al-muḥbīt muqaddam ʿalā al-nāfī), he concludes that al-Ḥākim’s position prevails. In any case, it may be that al-Ḥākim had more information at his disposal, so later scholars should assume the best of him.

57 Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ʿalā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 110.

58 Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ʿalā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 41-42.

V.4. c. A Standard for Authenticity and a Standard for the Sahihayn

In my opinion, the most accurate interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s definition of the Sahihayn criteria comes first from a scholar that many later commentators underestimated. The North African ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Mayyānī (d. 583/1187) recognized that al-Ḥākim distinguished between the requirements for authentic reports in general and the standards employed by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in particular. Al-Mayyānī’s definition for a sahih ḥadīth quotes al-Ḥākim’s Marifa verbatim, even citing him clearly as the source. As for the criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, al-Mayyānī states (obviously) that they limited their works to authentic ḥadīths, namely reports narrated from the Prophet by two Companions, four Successors etc. Here the scholar provides an unmistakable description of doubling transmission.

Al-Mayyānī’s younger contemporary, Ibn al-Jawzī, also understood that al-Ḥākim had intended two separate definitions. First, he required the elimination of majhūl narrators for sahih ḥadīths in general. Second, he defined the Sahihayn’s criteria as doubling transmission, with the ḥadīth being relayed by “two upstanding narrators from two upstanding narrators (ʿudlayn ʿan ʿudlayn).” Like al-Maqdisī, al-Ḥāzimī and Ibn Ḥajar, however, Ibn al-Jawzī deems both these standards reprehensible (qabīḥ) assessments of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards. Instead, Ibn al-Jawzī says that al-

60 ʿUmar al-Mayyānī, “Mā lā yasaʿu al-muḥaddith jahlahu,” in Khams rasāʾil fi ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmīyya, 1423/2002), 266. The text of al-Mayyānī’s work seems to have been corrupted slightly at some crucial point in the transmission process, since it reads “and four Successors from each one of the Companions (wa mā naqalahu ʿan kull wāḥid min al-sahāba arbaʿa min al-tābiʿīn).” Doubling transmission would entail four Successors from every two Companions. All later scholars reacting to this passage gloss it as meaning 1 → 2, not 1 → 4. It thus seems possible that some copyist mistakenly added “from each one” to the text; cf. al-Mayyānī, Mā lā yasaʿu al-muḥaddith jahlahu, ed. Subhī al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Sharikat al-Ṭabʿ wa al-Nashr, 1387/1967), 9.
Bukhārī and Muslim required simply “a reliable transmitter and a well-known report (al-thiqā wa al-ishtihār).”  

At first glance, the writings of al-Ḥākim’s most well-known student, al-Bayhaqī, present the one opposing piece of evidence to the argument that al-Ḥākim intended two separate definitions. In his al-Sunan al-kubrā al-Bayhaqī clearly states that the Sahīhayn excluded narrators with only one transmitter. This does not necessitate, however, that al-Ḥākim believed that al-Bukhārī and Muslim added no other requirements, such as doubling transmission. Since al-Bayhaqī never provides any systematic discussion of al-Ḥākim’s school of thought or the standards of the Shaykhayn, we cannot dismiss anything due to absence of evidence. Al-‘Irāqī’s reading of al-Bayhaqī’s letter to Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī suggests that al-Bayhaqī questioned whether doubling transmission was an existing requirement for authenticity among ḥadīth scholars. Yet al-‘Irāqī admits that his explanation interpolates a great deal. He cautiously states that “it is as if al-Bayhaqī saw [this requirement] in Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī’s words and was alerting him that it is not known among transmission-based scholars.”

Al-Mayyānishī and Ibn al-Jawzī’s interpretation of al-Ḥākim’s work seems to be the most convincing. Considering the well-established principle of rejecting reports through majhūl narrators, it is very reasonable to conclude that al-Ḥākim considered their elimination to be an essential feature of an authentic chain of transmission. In light of al-Ḥākim’s statements to al-Sijzī and the legion of ḥadīth scholars who upheld the

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62 Al-ʿIrāqī, al-Taqyīd wa al-ʿiḍāḥ, 21.
interpretation of doubling transmission, it seems equally certain that al-Ḥākim also considered this to be part of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s requirements.

V.5. Admitted Exceptions: al-Mustadrak and the Standards of the Shaykhayn as Ideal Rather than Reality

Al-Ḥākim’s writings leave no doubt that he was aware that many ḥadīths from the Sahihayn did not live up to his definition of their authors’ criteria. Indeed, as al-Dāraquṭnī’s letter proves, al-Ḥākim faced criticisms of his definition of their criteria during his own lifetime. He nonetheless retained total faith in his “requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.” What is evident is that al-Ḥākim understood these “requirements” as an ideal that the two masters strove to achieve in their work rather than a consistent reality. In the Mustadrak al-Ḥākim thus admits that al-Bukhārī and Muslim did not always meet their own requirements for eliminating majhūls. In his responses to Masʻūd al-Sijzī’s questions, al-Ḥākim admits that one of Muslim’s transmitters, Fugayl b. Marzūq, did not meet Muslim’s own standards for authenticity and that he should not have narrated from him in his Sahih (fa-ība ’alā Muslim bi-ikhrajīhī fī al-ṣāhiḥ). How could al-Ḥākim compile an entire ḥadīth collection replicating al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s methodologies when he acknowledged that even these two giants could not always meet their own standards? Although al-Ḥākim envisioned the Sahihayn’s

63 Al-Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak, 1:47.
64 Al-Ḥākim, Su‘alat Mas‘ūd b. ʿAbī al-Sijzī, 109. Scholars like al-Nawawi, Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar al-Bulqīnī and al-Sakhawī felt that al-Ḥākim exempted the Companions from the Shaykhayn’s requirement for two rāwīs; see al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, 1:327; ‘Umar al-Bulqīnī, Maḥāsin al-īṣṭilāḥ, in Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ wa maḥāsin al-īṣṭilāḥ, 296-7; al-Sakhawī, Fath al-mughīth, 1:68.
requirements as very restrictive and claimed that the contents of his *Mustadrak* fulfilled them, his actual application of them proved latitudinarian. As he notes in the introduction to his *Mustadrak*, he simply compiled the work from ḥadīths narrated by transmitters that appeared in one or both of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, or those “like” them. He adds haphazardly that Addition by a trustworthy transmitter (*ziyādat al-thiqā*) does not constitute a flaw in ḥadīth (*illa*). As we discussed in Chapter Three, however, selecting reliable * isnāds* only represented half of the critical methodology of ḥadīth scholars; even reports narrated via such transmitters had to be examined for corroboration or irregularities such as inappropriate Addition.

Al-Ḥākim’s vague and lax methods led many later scholars to severely criticize the authenticity of material found in the *Mustadrak*. The consummate Ḥanafī ḥadīth scholar Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abdallāh b. Yūsuf al-Zayla‘ī (d. 762/1361) struck at the heart of al-Ḥākim’s strategy: he had relied on the same transmitters as al-Bukhārī and Muslim, but he did not thoroughly examine his material to sift weak narrations from those enjoying corroboration. “Simply because a transmitter is used in [one of] the *Ṣaḥīḥs,*” al-Zayla‘ī explains, “does not entail that if he is found in another ḥadīth, that ḥadīth meets al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s standards.”66 Al-Dhahabī thus concluded that the *Mustadrak* was

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seriously flawed and detracted from al-Ḥākim’s reputation. According to him, only one-fourth of the work’s contents actually meet the standards of the Sahihayn, with another quarter of its ḥadīths being authentic but not meeting their requirements. The remaining half, he states, is of dubious reliability. Along the same lines, Ibn Ḥajar admits that he cannot comprehend how al-Ḥākim could have included certain material in his Mustadrak. He notes how al-Ḥākim even used transmitters he himself considered weak and had thus consigned to his Kitāb al-du‘afā’ (Book of Weak Narrators). Ibn Ḥajar believes that al-Ḥākim was too skilled a scholar to make such simple mistakes, but if he knew that some material was unreliable and yet included it anyway, then “this is a tremendous betrayal (khiyāna ‘azīma).” Ibn Ḥajar tried to excuse the great scholar by explaining that he wrote the Mustadrak near the end of his life when senility had taken its toll.

V.6. Al-Ḥākim’s Politics: the Expansion of the Authentic Umbrella

The motivation behind al-Ḥākim’s controversial definition of the requirements of the Sahihayn as well as the cause of his inconsistency in applying them become clear, however, when one appreciates the true purpose of the Mustadrak. He did not compose this work as a legal reference, like Abū Dāwūd, or as an expression of the body of ḥadīths

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67 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkira al-huffāz, 3:166. Al-Dhahabi states, “Would that he had not composed the Mustadrak, for his poor comportment in it detracted from his virtues (wa laytahu lam yusannif al-Mustadrak, fa-innahu ghadda min faḍā ‘illi hi bi-sū’ tāṣarrufihi.”

68 Ibn al-Wazir, Tanqih al-anzūr, 38. Al-Bulqini states that approximately one hundred ḥadīths in the Mustadrak are forgeries (mawḍū’i); al-Bulqini, Maḥāsin al-ṭālibīh, 164.

he had personally collected in his career, like al-Ṭabarānī. Rather, al-Ḥākim’s intentions were polemical.

The unbroken thread running throughout al-Ḥākim’s career was his concerted drive to increase the number of ḥadīths considered authentic in the wider Muslim community. Yet this was a matter of great controversy even among Sunni ḥadīth scholars. In the generation after al-Ḥākim, his own student al-Bayhaqī would make an unprecedented declaration that all the reliable ḥadīths of the Prophet had been documented, and thus any previously unrecorded attributions to Muḥammad should be considered *de facto* forgeries.70 Already in al-Ḥākim’s time, prominent scholars maintained that the umma had grown too distant from the Prophet to identify authentic ḥadīths. Al-Ḥākim’s colleague Ibn Manda, for example, thus stated that “anyone who produces (yukharriju) *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths today is either relying on too lengthy an *isnād* (yanzilū) or is lying.”71 On the other hand, many shared al-Ḥākim’s vision of expanding the number of reports considered authentic. Ibn al-Akhram once admitted that he had wasted his life working on his *mustakhraj* of Muslim and regretted having written a joint *mustakhraj* of the Ṣahīhayn (*Mukhtāṣar al-ṣaḥīḥ al-muttafaq ‘alayhi*) because “it is our obligation (*min ḥaqqinā*) to strive in increasing the *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths.”72

Al-Ḥākim’s opponents among the ḥadīth scholars, however, were not his principal concern. Relatively early in his career, he had asked how it was possible that some

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groups believed that the hadiths of the Prophet amounted to no more than ten thousand reports. The Companions, he exclaimed, numbered at least four thousand and spent over twenty years in the company of the Prophet! One hadith scholar alone had memorized over five hundred thousand hadiths. Such ludicrous claims limiting the number of reliable hadiths disconcerted al-Ḥākim terribly, and he thus urged hadith scholars to avoid circumscribing the body of authentic reports. He objected, for example, to his teacher al-Māsarjī’s research on the total number of transmitters in the Sahihayn. A group of “heretics and deniers (mubtadi‘a wa mulḥida),” he explained, were using these statements made by transmission-based scholars against them to defame (yashtumūna) the use of hadiths. Much later in his career, in his very succinct introduction to the Mustadrak, al-Ḥākim reiterated the same complaint. “There has emerged in our time a group from among the heretics (mubtadi‘a) who defame the narrators of traditions, [saying]: the totality of your hadiths that are authentic (yaṣiḥhu) does not reach ten

73 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā ma‘rifat kitāb al-Ikhlīl, 81-3.

74 The term mulḥida here should probably neither be understood in its true technical sense of “atheists” or “religious skeptics,” nor in the later denotation of Ismā‘īllis. As Madelung has discussed, al-Ash’arī described mulḥid as a term encompassing those who deny God’s attributes (mu‘āṣṭir), crypto-Zoroastrians (zanādīqa) as well as other bizarre heresies. In the sixth/seventh century in Iran the term had come to denote Ismā‘īllis. The Māturīdī theologian Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafi (d. 508/1114) thus wrote a refutation of the sect entitled Kitāb al-ifsād li-khudā ‘ahl al-ilaḥād. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) concurs that in this time in Khurāsān Ismā‘īllis were also called mulḥids. Although even in the early fourth/tenth century there was Ismā‘īlī missionary activity in Naysābūr, we should not assume that al-Ḥākim intended this group with his reference. He was not a theologian nor a heresiographer, so his addition of the label mulḥida to mubtadi‘a probably just represents another denigration of his opponents. Considering that transmission-based scholars of Rayy felt that the Mu’tazilites of the city had joined forces with Ismā‘īllis in an uprising in the city in 420/1029, a hadith scholar of al-Ḥākim’s time may not have even distinguished between Mu’tazilites and Ismā‘īllis. See S.M. Stern, “The early Ismā‘īlī missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 23 (1960): 56-90, esp. 76; W. Madelung, “Mulḥid,” EI²; Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntaẓam, 15:196; see also n. 83 below.

75 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā al-Ṣahīh, 112.
thousand, and all these [other] isnāds amount to only about one thousand juz's, all of them weak, not authentic."\(^76\)

Although al-Ḥākim reverently describes the Sahihayn as two works “whose mention has spread far and wide (intashara dhikruhumā fi al-aqtār),” he based his mission to expand the umbrella of authentic ḥadīths on the premise that al-Bukhārī and Muslim had neither intended to nor succeeded in including all of the authentic reports in their works.\(^77\) Thus, someone’s exclusion from the Sahihayn must not be interpreted as a criticism of his reliability.\(^78\) A wide body of ḥadīths and ḥadīth transmitters still existed that met the standards of the Shaykhayn, and al-Ḥākim proved this through an innovative reading of Muslim’s introduction to his Sahīh. He concluded that of the two levels of narrators upon which Muslim said he would draw in compiling his collection, the author had only exhausted the first and had died before he could include ḥadīths from the second level.\(^79\)

Al-Ḥākim’s interpretation of al-Bukhārī’s work is even more creative. That scholar had provided no introduction to his Sahīh, so al-Ḥākim treated al-Bukhārī’s cumulative oeuvre as the key to understanding his requirements. He viewed al-Bukhārī’s biographical dictionary al-Tārikh al-kabīr as the total body of transmitters who comprised the scholar’s ḥadīth worldview. Based on the research conducted earlier by al-

\(^{76}\) Al-Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak, 1:39.

\(^{77}\) Al-Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak, 1:39.

\(^{78}\) Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā al-Sahīh, 114.

\(^{79}\) Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā mafrīfat kitāb al-Iklil, 78; idem, al-Madkhal ilā al-Sahīh, 112; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Sahīh Muslim, 91.
Māsarjisī, he set the number of transmitters in the Tārīkh at about forty thousand. But all the reliable transmitters who narrated authentic material and appear in the Sahihayn amount to only about two thousand. Al-Ḥākim then turned to al-Bukhārī’s list of weak transmitters (his Kitāb al-ḍuʿa’fāʾ), which included about seven hundred names, as a list of those whom al-Bukhārī considered unacceptable. After subtracting the narrators al-Bukhārī used in the Sahih and those he considered weak from the forty thousand transmitters included in the Tārīkh al-kabīr, al-Ḥākim concluded that more than thirty thousand acceptable transmitters “remain between the house and the gate.” By drawing on this untapped body of reliable transmitters and also targeting subjects that al-Bukhārī had omitted in his Sahih, one could thus add to the number of traditions meeting al-Bukhārī’s standards.80

V.7. Al-Ḥākim’s Mubtadi’ū and the Ten Thousand

Who were these “heretics (mubtadiʿū)” whose claim that there existed only ten thousand authentic hadiths so plagued al-Ḥākim throughout his career? Unfortunately, the scholar provides little description of them beyond the brief complaints found in his works. But he does offer two important clues as to their identity. First, he quotes al-Bukhārī’s teacher Aḥmad b. Sinān al-Qtatān (d. 259/872-3) using the term mubtadiʿ ‘to indicate those who oppose ḥadith and transmission-based scholars.81 We could infer from this that during al-Ḥākim’s time mubtadiʿů served as a transmission-based nomenclature.

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80 Al-Ḥākim, al-Madkhal ilā al-Ṣaḥīḥ, 112.

81 “There is not a mubtadiʿ in the world who does not hate the ahl al-ḥadīth, and when a man becomes a mubtadiʿ the sweetness of hadith is torn from his heart”; al-Ḥākim, Maʿrifat ilim al-ḥadīth, 5.
for the reason-based Ḥanafīs or Muʿtazilites who constantly criticized the *ahl al-ḥadīth’s* heavy reliance on *āhād* reports.

Other evidence for usage of the term suggests it denoted the Muʿtazilites more specifically. According to Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), in 408/1017-18 the Abbasid caliph al-Qādir (d. 422/1031) publicly demanded, in the famous Qādirī creed, the repentance of the “mubtadiʿa.” Ibn al-Jawzī elaborates that the caliph was requiring “the Muʿtazilite-Ḥanafi jurists (*fuqahā*) to repent” and disassociate themselves from Muʿtazilism (*al-iʿtizal*), which, like Shiism (*al-rafd*), the caliph called “counter to Islam.”82 In a letter written to the caliph in 420/1029-30, the Buyid amīr Yamīn al-Dawla mentions the twin perils of “the sinful Bāṭinīs (*al-bāṭiniyya al-fajara*)” and “the Muʿtazilite heretics (*muʿtazila mubtadiʿa*).”83 *Mubtadiʿa* thus appears to have indicated Muʿtazilites and not Shiites in these contexts. Ibn al-Jawzī writes that in 460/1067-8 the jurists and ḥadīth scholars (*al-fuqaha' wa ahl al-badīth*) of Baghdad congregated and demanded that the Qādirī doctrine be publicly promulgated once again, because the Muʿtazilite teacher Abū al-Walīd was insisting on teaching his school’s doctrine. One scholar stood up in the gathering and cursed the Shiites (*Rāfīda*), then another rose to separately curse the “mubtadiʿa.”84

Ibn al-Jawzī was writing almost a century and a half after these events, but his *Muntaẓam* often relies on earlier histories such as *Tārīkh Baghdād*. The promulgation of


the Qādirī creed in 408/1017-8 was a well-known event, and Ibn al-Jawzī had
documentary evidence for its wording. Moreover, he was a member of the ahl al-ḥadīth
extraordinaire and was even more vehemently opposed to the ahl al-raʾy than al-Ḥākim
had been. We can therefore safely assume that he understood the term in approximately
the same manner as al-Ḥākim. From this evidence, we can thus deduce that the term
mubtadīʿa frequently denoted the Muʿtazilites.

The second clue that al-Ḥākim provides for identifying these mubtadīʿa is their
claim that there are only ten thousand ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīths. The most obvious candidate for
such a group would be the Muʿtazilites, who cultivated a continuous skepticism about the
flood of āḥād ḥadīths adduced by transmission-based scholars. The Faḍl al-iʿtīzāl
(Virtue of Muʿtazilism) of the Shāfiʿī Muʿtazilite al-Qāḍī `Abd al-Jabbār of Rayy (d.
415/1025) supports this conclusion. He states that he and his Muʿtazilite colleagues are
very critical of those who employ significant numbers of ḥadīths in scholarly discourse. Although he uses such āḥād ḥadīths in debates with his transmission-based opponents, he
does so only so they would not doubt his affection for the Prophet’s sunna. In their own
theology, however, Muʿtazilites limit themselves to epistemologically certain evidence
(adilla qaṭṭ ʿayya) such as the Qurʾān. Al-Qāḍī `Abd al-Jabbār refers to the Muʿtazilites’
discriminating standards in his rebuttal of a serious transmission-based accusation: that

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85 Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntāzam, 15:279-82. The actual wording of the creed as provided by Ibn al-
Jawzī, however, does not include the term mubtadīʿa.

86 Al-Qāḍī `Abd al-Jabbār b. ʿAbd al-Qāsim al-Balkhī and al-Ḥākim al-Jishmī, Faḍl al-iʿtīzāl

87 Al-Qāḍī `Abd al-Jabbār, Faḍl al-iʿtīzāl, 156.
Mu'tazilites use too few ḥadīths. The only reason, he states, that the Mu'tazilites limit their use of ḥadīths is that āḥād reports have too high a probability of being false.  

Ibn al-Jawzī's Muntazam provides similar evidence for this outstanding ahl al-ḥadīth grievance with the Mu'tazilites. In 456/1064 partisans of the transmission-based school physically attacked the Mu'tazilite Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Mu'tāzī (d. 478/1085-6), whom Ibn al-Jawzī mocks as having narrated only one ḥadīth. Ibn al-Jawzī hurls the same accusation at the famous Shāfi'ī Mu'tazilite Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044).

But why did the Mu'tazilites to whom al-Ḥākim refers set the number of authentic ḥadīths at ten thousand and not some other number? This is so because it was the number of ḥadīths considered to be contained in the Sahihayn. Al-Ḥākim's muttadī's opponents told him that this was the number of sahiḥ ḥadīths “in your school (indaḵum),” namely the ahl al-ḥadīth. Al-Ḥākim himself stated that the top level of authentic ḥadīths identified with the Sahihayn did not exceed ten thousand. Al-Ḥāzimī concluded from this that the Mu'tazilites' number was based on estimations of how many ḥadīths the

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89 Conflict between the transmission-based school and their opponents on this matter seems to have extended back to the time of al-Bukhārī and Muslim themselves. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ quotes someone telling Abū Zūr'a al-Rāzī, “Is it not said that the ḥadīths of the Prophet are only four thousand?” He replies, “Whoever says that, may God jar his teeth, this is the claim of the heretic crypto-Zoroastrians (zanādīqa), for who can account [all] the ḥadīths of the Messenger of God (s)...?”; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddima, 494.


91 Ibn al-Jawzī, Muntazam, 15:300.

92 See n. 42 above.
Šahiḥayn contained. This number must indicate the number of Prophetic traditions, since Ahmad b. Salama had counted twelve thousand narrations in Muslim’s Šahiḥ alone, and al-Ḥākim’s teacher al-Jawzaqī had placed the total number of narrations (turūq) in the Šahiḥayn at 25,480. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ placed the number of traditions (uṣūl) in each of the Šahiḥayn at four thousand, amounting to a total of eight thousand. Considering that scholars generally put the number of Prophetic traditions in al-Bukhārī’s book at 3,397-4,000 and in Muslim’s at between 4,000 and 8,000, the average number for the Šahiḥayn combined would be approximately 9,700.

Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī provides further evidence that the Šahiḥayn were an important tool in the Mu‘tazilites’ polemics against the transmission-based school. He reports that someone who “belittles the acceptance of reports” said that al-Bukhārī’s Šahiḥ only uses some two thousand transmitters; all the others are thus clearly unreliable for ḥadīth scholars. Abū Nu‘aym responds with a lengthy quotation from al-Ḥākim’s Madkhal ilā al-Šahiḥ, reiterating al-Ḥākim’s argument that al-Bukhārī’s al-Tārikh al-kabīr contains over thirty thousand acceptable but untapped transmitters.

This Mu‘tazilite attack was a recurring theme in al-Ḥākim’s career and almost certainly served as his primary motivation in composing the Mustadrak. Just as Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī had feared over a century earlier, the Sunnis’ opponents had made use of

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93 Al-Ḥāzimī, Shurūt al-a‘imma al-khamsa, 32.
95 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Šahiḥ Muslim, 101-2.
96 For the wide range of opinions on this, see Chapter 3, nn. 67, 119, 120.
97 Abū Nu‘aym al-Īṣbahānī, Mustakhraj, 1:52.
the esteemed standards set by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in order to object to reports lying outside the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Indeed, al-Ḥākim’s Mu‘tazilite interlocutors condemned the thousands of ḥadīths not included in the two works as defective (ṣaqīma). In order to understand how the Mustadrak embodied al-Ḥākim’s response to this attack, we must trace the history of the Mu‘tazilite treatment of Prophetic traditions until al-Ḥākim’s time.

V.8. Al-Ḥākim’s Target Audience: The Mu‘tazilites and their Criteria for Authentic Ḥadīths

As Josef van Ess has demonstrated, Mu‘tazilites found themselves forced to adjust the place of Prophetic traditions in their legal and doctrinal epistemologies following the Sunni victory in the Baghdad Inquisition (Miḥna). When Dirār b. ʿAmr (fl. 195/810) established Mu‘tazilism as a cosmological system, ḥadīth played no major role. He rejected the āḥād reports adduced as evidence by his transmission-based opponents in favor of the Qur’ān and reason, and this position was taken up by Abū Bakr al-Asāmm (d. 201/816) of the Basran Mu‘tazilite school. Van Ess postulates that in the wake of al-Shāfi’i’s championing the use of āḥād ḥadīths in law as well as the compilation of major ḥadīth collections in the late second/eighth century, Mu‘tazilites found themselves forced to meet the challenges posed by the transmission-based school. Another early member of the Basran school, Abū Hudhayl (d. 200/915), thus tackled the epistemological problem of ḥadīth with numerical requirements. With him we see Mu‘tazilites beginning to limit the use of ḥadīths to those they considered massively transmitted beyond the scope of error (muṭawātīr). For a ḥadīth to be accepted in discussions of dogma, Abū Hudhayl
required twenty separate transmitters to meet the conditions of *tawātūr*. For legal matters, he demanded only four.\(^9\) The Basran Muʿtazilite and polymath al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/869) also required four narrations for a report to qualify as authentic.\(^9\)

With the end of the Baghdad Inquisition (*Mihna*) in 234/848, the Muʿtazilite position against the transmission-based scholars was further weakened.\(^10\) Ironically, it was during the classical period of Muʿtazilism from the late third/ninth century to the early fifth/eleventh that the school had to increasingly compromise with its opponents. In this period Muʿtazilites began serious studies of ḥadīth comparable to those of their transmission-based adversaries. Although Muḥammad b. ʿImrān al-Marzubānī of Baghdad (d. 384/994) was Muʿtazilite, ḥadīth scholars considered him reliable as a transmitter, and he composed a book on the ḥadīth of the Muʿtazila.\(^11\) Abū Saʿīd Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī al-Sammān of Rayy (d. 434 or 445/1042-3 or 1053-4) was one of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s ḥadīth teachers but was a Ḥanafī *imām* of the Muʿtazilites.\(^12\)

In matters of law, both the Baghdad and Basran schools of Muʿtazilism dropped their requirements for authenticating legal ḥadīths to two narrators at each link in the *isnād* – the same doubling transmission that al-Ḥākim required. The doyen of the Basran school, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāṭī (d. 303/915-6) explicitly demanded doubling transmission for

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\(^12\) Al-Dhahābī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 3:213.
āḥād ḥadīths to be admitted in “legal matters (al-shur’īyya).” Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/913), who lived mostly in Naysābūr and whose works gained a wide readership in the region, compromised similarly. In his Qubūl al-akhbār, he still demanded massively transmitted ḥadīths (mutawātīr) for theological doctrine (usūl al-kalām) and “general legal indications (al-amr al-umm).” For deriving laws (furūʿ), however, he believed that one need only provide a report transmitted by two or three people to two or three upstanding (‘adl) people at each level of the isnād. He equates this with the requirements for testimony in court.

The Muʿtazilites’ final compromise to the transmission-based Sunnis occurred during al-Ḥākim’s lifetime. This brings us to the career of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār of Rayy, which represented a major shift in the Muʿtazilite school. While previously Muʿtazilites had generally associated with the ḥadīth-wary Ḥanafī madhhab, al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār retained his loyalty to the Shāfiʿī school after embracing Muʿtazilite doctrine. As a Shāfiʿī, he was obliged to accept rulings from āḥād ḥadīths in matters of

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law even if they lacked the multiple narrations that earlier Mu'tazilites such as al-Balkhī
and al-Jubbā'ī had required. In his al-Uṣūl al-khamsa, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār thus states
that, while discussing issues of dogma and theology (diyāna) requires massively
transmitted reports (mutawātir), deriving law (furūʿ al-fiqh) demands only one or two
narrations. ¹⁰⁷

By the time al-Ḥākim was writing in the second half of the fourth/tenth century,
the Mu'tazilites' standard for authentic ḥadīth admissible in discussions of law thus
generally demanded doubling transmission. Al-Ḥākim's teacher and author of a famous
ṣahīḥ work, Ibn Ḥibbān, had earlier railed against this stance.¹⁰⁸ Responding to those who
rejected āḥād ḥadīths lacking doubling transmission, Ibn Ḥibbān exclaims, "There exists
no report from the Prophet (ṣ) narrated by two upstanding transmitters (ʿadlayn), each
one of them from two upstanding transmitters until it ends at the Prophet (ṣ)!" Those
who uphold such stringent requirements, he adds, "have intended to abandon all of the
sunna (sunan)."¹⁰⁹ Al-Ḥāzīmī says that the Mu'tazila were in fact the only group to
require a certain number of transmitters for the acceptance of āḥād ḥadīths. As al-Balkhī
had stated, they based this on the requirements for court testimony.¹¹⁰

Al-Ḥākim was no doubt extremely familiar with the Mu'tazilite demands for
authentic ḥadīths as expressed by both al-Balkhī and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. Not only
did al-Balkhī reside in Naysābūr for many years just before al-Ḥākim's birth, his writings

¹⁰⁷ Martin, Defenders of Reason in Islam, 108.

¹⁰⁸ For al-Ḥākim's link to Ibn Ḥibbān, see al-Subki, Tabaqāt, 4:156.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Ḥibbān, Ṣahīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān, 1:118.

¹¹⁰ Al-Ḥāzīmī, Shurūt al-aʾīma al-khamsa, 47.

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also enjoyed popularity in the city. Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār lived in Khurāsān at the same time as al-Ḥākim, and several of his students also lived in Naysābūr.¹¹¹ We cannot know exactly where al-Ḥākim encountered the Muʿtazilites whose criticism he noted in his al-
Madkhal ilā al-Iklīl, his al-Madkhal ilā al-Ṣahīh and finally his Mustadrak, but he would have had ample opportunity in his native Naysābūr.

V.9. The Mustadrak as Common Measure of Authenticity

The polemical aim of al-Ḥākim’s Mustadrak and the underlying reason for his inclusion of doubling transmission in al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s criteria now becomes clear. Al-Ḥākim devoted his career to increasing the number of authentic Prophetic traditions in circulation. For him the work of al-Bukhārī and Muslim provided the highest standards of critical rigor, but their two collections had by no means exhausted the pool of sahiḥ hadīths. The threat that worried, and motivated, al-Ḥākim throughout his career was the Muʿtazilite claim that only the Ṣaḥīḥayn were admissible as authentic. For al-Ḥākim, the response to this criticism lay in the standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. By defining their criteria as requiring reports free of transmitters deemed unknown by Sunni hadīth scholars and possessing the doubling transmission that Muʿtazilites required, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards became a measure of authenticity accepted by all. The Mustadrak constituted the fruit of al-Ḥākim’s efforts; it applied standards he believed compelled the acceptance of Sunnis and Muʿtazilites alike to a massive new corpus of Prophetic traditions.

In this new light, al-Ḥākim’s non-sequitur remark that authentic ḥadīths must circulate among scholars like “testimony upon testimony” now also becomes clear. Since the Muʿtazila were a key target audience of his expansion of authentic ḥadīths, his definition of ṣaḥīḥ had to meet their requirements. Ibn Ḥajar alludes to this matter while discussing the doubling transmission requirement of the Muʿtazilite al-Jubbāʾī. He says, “This is what al-Ḥākim was getting at (wa ilayhi yīmū kalam al-Ḥākim).”112 And indeed Ibn Ḥajar was quite justified in concluding that al-Ḥākim’s standards somehow involved the Muʿtazila. As Ibn Ḥibbān had angrily explained, the notion of requiring doubling narration was totally alien to Sunni transmission-based scholars.

We can now better understand why al-Ḥākim conceived of the standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim more as an ideal than a reality, and why he adhered so fiercely to his definition of their requirements in the face of tremendous opposing evidence. For him, the two scholars’ requirements embodied a kanōn of authenticity accepted by the broader community of Sunnis and Muʿtazilites. Unlike ḥadīth collections of the past, the purpose of the Mustadrak was not simply to record al-Ḥākim’s personal corpus of ḥadīths or to compile a legal reference for transmission-based scholars. Al-Ḥākim’s effort was political. It aimed at demonstrating that both the Sahīhayn and material that measured up to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards met the requirements of two opposing scholarly camps. This notion of the Sahīhayn as common ground was to prove central in the two works’ canonization.

112 Ibn Ḥajar, Nuzhat al-naṣar, 23.
Yet how could al-Ḥākim have expected his audience to grasp the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as he defined them if they caused later scholars so much difficulty? Al-Ḥākim’s extant works suggest that the answer lies in the immediacy of his intended audience. Both al-Ḥākim’s responses to Masʿūd al-Sijzī and his elliptical analogy between transmission and court testimony illustrate that the scholar relied more on his personal interaction with others and their familiarity with context than on detailed expositions of his theories. The introduction to the Mustadrak is thus no manifesto; in fact, it consists of slightly more than a single page of disorganized text. Only in another text does al-Ḥākim make his sole reference to his two treatises on the methodologies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.113 But these also appear to have been ephemeral, and not a single later scholar mentions them. This explains why the Mustadrak was never treated as a polemic by later analysts. Only by reconstructing the context of al-Ḥākim’s works and reading them against the grain could a later scholar understand his motivations and target audience. Just as he felt comfortable providing only the most tantalizing references to the dreaded “mubtaddiʿā” and his “standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim,” so must he have assumed that the bustling scholarly circles of Naysābūr would have grasped his intent.

V.10 The Discourse of Legal Theory: The Consensus of the Umma on Ḥadīth

Al-Ḥākim pioneered the notion of the Sahihayn as a commonly accepted measure of authenticity and a tool for extending this authority to hadīths outside the works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The wider acceptance of the Sahihayn in this role, however,

113 See Chapter 4 n. 58.
depended on the status that the various Muslim schools of thought were willing to grant *ahād* ḥadīths. By the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, the broader Muslim community, including transmission-based scholars, Ḥanafīs, Muʿtazilites and even mainstream Shiites had accepted the notion that certain Prophetic traditions had received uniform approval and were above doubt. Shortly thereafter, by the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the major legal schools in Iraq and Iran had acknowledged this class of reports and incorporated it into their epistemological systems.114 A shared conceptual and even linguistic notion of the umma’s “acceptance (*al-talaqqī biʿl-qubūl*)” appeared among later Muʿtazilites, Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs, Ḥanbalīs/über-Sunnis and Shāfīʿis/Ashʿarīs. These agreed-upon reports formed a new middle tier: one that yielded an epistemological certainty below the almost unattainable confidence conveyed by unimpeachable mass-transmission (*tawātur*) but above the mere probability yielded by normal *ahād* ḥadīths. The *ahād* ḥadīths that had received the consensus of the community produced a level of certainty sufficient for such lofty and restricted tasks as

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114 The issue of the epistemological yield of *ahād* ḥadīths and their potential uses in deriving law and dogma is long and complicated. The oldest aspect of the debate centers on whether or not *ahād* ḥadīths are admissible in deriving laws and are legally compelling. This debate raged between Muʿtazilites like Ibrāhīm Ibn ʿUlayya (d. 218/833) and transmission-based scholars like al-Shāfīʿī. Even among those who accepted that *ahād* ḥadīths were legally compelling, however, there was debate over whether or not they yield religious knowledge strong enough to elaborate dogma (*iṭiqād* and/or govern worship (*aʿtābūd*). Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs and transmission-based Shāfīʿī and Ḥanbalī scholars further disagreed over what kind of *ahād* ḥadīths could delineate or specify Qur’ānic rulings such as cutting off the hand of a thief. In addition, scholars debating the subject did not adhere to a rigid set of terminology. In other debates, scholars used the terms *ʿilm al-yaqīn* and *ʿilm al-ṣann* to indicate certain knowledge and probable knowledge respectively. In the debate over the yield of *ahād* ḥadīths and the effect of the community’s consensus, however, the term *ʿilm* denoted certain knowledge (i.e., equivalent to the epistemological strength of the Qurʾān in deriving law and dogma) and *ṣann* meant probable knowledge (i.e., sufficient only for deriving substantive law). For a discussion of the epistemological yield of *mutawwātir*, *mashhūr* and *ahād* ḥadīths as well as the general historical development of these concepts, see Wael Hallaq, “On Inductive Corroboration, Probability and Certainty in Sunnī Legal Thought,” in *Islamic Law and Jurisprudence*, ed. Nicholas Heer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 3-31; idem, “The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: a Pseudo-problem,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75-90, esp. 80-1.
abrogating the Qur'ān and elaborating dogma.115 This widely accepted notion of the epistemological transformation that ḥadīth ūfūth could undergo when agreed upon by all would prove an essential element in the canonization of the Sahīhayn.

V.10. a. The Ḥanafīs

Systematic discussions of the role of ūfūth in the Ḥanafī epistemological system seem to have originated with the writings of the early Ḥanafī judge ʼĪsā b. Abān (d. 221/836). Later Ḥanafī legal theorists such as al-Jaṣṣāṣ regularly quoted his works at length. Our earliest extant works of Ḥanafī legal theory trace their discussions of ūfūth back to Ibn Abān, who originated the tripartite distinction of reports into those massively transmitted (mutawātir), well-known (mashhūr) and ūfūd. Unfortunately, we must depend on later scholars such as al-Jaṣṣāṣ and Muḥammad b. ʻAbd al-Sarakhsi of Khurāsān (d. ca. 490/1096) for explanations of Ibn Abān’s thought. Since these two scholars generally adhered to Ibn Abān’s theories, we can treat their expositions as illustrations of Ḥanafī legal theory in Rayy and Khurāsān during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries.

Al-Sarakhsi states that Ibn Abān believed that mutawātir ūfūth yielded epistemologically certain apodictic knowledge (ʿilm ḍarrūrī); anyone who heard the report

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115 Ibn Taymiyya was the first to collect a list of scholars from various schools who upheld this stance. From the Ḥanafīs he listed: al-Sarakhsi. From the Shāfiʿīs/Asharīs: Abū al-Tayyib al-Tabarī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Īsfarāyīnī, Abū ʻIṣāq al-Īsfarāyīnī, Ibn ʻUmar, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī. From the Ḥanafīs: Abū Yaḥyā b. al-Farāḥī, Ibn ʻAqīl, Abū al-ʻĀṣim b. al-Ẓāḥīrī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Ămīdī, Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Khaṭīb. From the Mālikīs: Abū ʻAṣīr Ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhāb. The list is repeated by later ūfūth scholars such as Abū Ḥanīfah al-Buṣīrī and Ibn Ḥajar with several additions, such as Abū ʻIṣāq al-Shīrāzī and the leading Muʿtazilites: Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ al-Fatwā, 13:351-2; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bāṣīth al-Kathīth, 31; al-Buṣīrī, Maḥāsin al-Ittiḥād, 172; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat al-Ḍāla li-Fiṣāḥ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 113.
was immediately certain, without any consideration, that its contents were authentic. 

*Mashhūr* ḥadīths yielded epistemologically certain acquired knowledge (ʿilm muktasab); only those able to properly contemplate the report’s transmission would grasp its total authenticity.\(^{116}\) *Ahād* ḥadīths provided mere probability (*zann*), which was suitable only for elaborating law in certain circumstances. Al-Sarakhsī, who also upholds this opinion, states that *mashhūr* reports begin as *ahād* ḥadīths but then spread out like *mutawātīr*. Their epistemological strength stems from the fact that the umma has accepted them (*qubūl*). Such ḥadīths include the famous Prophetic tradition allowing believers to wipe water on their socks during ablution instead of having to remove them to wipe their feet (*al-mash ʿalā al-khuffayn*). Because *mashhūr* reports yield certain knowledge, they can be used to abrogate, modify or supplement Qur’ānic rulings in the Ḥanafi school.

Although al-Sarakhsī admits that *mashhūr* reports cannot produce the highest level of certainty that results from *mutawātīr*, scholarly consensus on their authenticity (*talaqqat biʿl-qubūl* endows *mashhūr* reports with “assuring knowledge (ʿilm al-tumaʾīniyya).\(^{117}\)

Although few of his works have survived, we know from later sources that the great Muʿtazilite Ḥanafi master of the first half of the fourth/tenth century, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿUbaydallāh al-Karkhī (d. 340/952), also elevated *ahād* ḥadīths agreed upon by the scholars to a higher level than normal reports. Unlike others, however, he believed that the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the umma, in and of itself, caused no epistemological change in the ḥadīth. It simply indicated the existence of some compelling proof (*hujja*) for the

\(^{116}\) Al-Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl al-Sarakhsī*, 1:292.

authenticity of the report, since consensus would not have occurred in the first place without such evidence.  

Another Ḥanafi legal theorist of the fourth/tenth century follows Ibn Abān in his tripartite distinction. In his brief treatise on Ḥanafi legal theory, Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Shāshī (d. 344/955-6) defines mashḥūr as a report that begins as āḥād and becomes widespread in the second and third generations (ʿaṣr) until, finally, the umma accepts it by consensus (talaqqathu biʿl-qubūl). Mashḥūr reports yield "assured knowledge (ilm al-tumaʾ nīnīyya)," and those who reject them are heretics (mubtādi'). Unlike āḥād ḥadīths, al-Shāshī states, scholars do not differ over whether or not such reports are legally compelling. As examples, he provides the ḥadīth of wiping over the socks as well as the ḥadīth enjoining stoning as a punishment for adulterers.  


119 Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muhammad Niṣām al-Dīn al-Shāshī, Uṣūl al-Shāshī, ed. Muhammad Fayd al-Ḥasan al-Kankuhī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1402/1982), 269-72. For his biography, see Ibn Abī al-Wafā', al-Jawahir al-mufīyya, 1:262. There is significant debate over the identity of the author of this text as well as when he lived. Three editions of the work have been published, each attributed to a different Shāshī. In addition to the above-mentioned work, one is attributed to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm Abū Yaʿqūb al-Shāshī al-Khurāṣānī (d. 325/937), who lived mostly in Egypt (see Ibn Abī al-Wafā', al-Jawāhir al-muḍīyya, 1:364) and has been published as Uṣūl al-Shāshī (Delhi: Kotob-khāne-ye Rashīdeyye, [1963]). Finally, the most recent edition attributes the work to another Niṣām al-Dīn al-Shāshī (fl. 700s/1300s) and is published as Uṣūl al-Shāshī: mukhtasar fi ṣīl al-fiqh al-islāmī, ed. Muhammad Akram Nadwī and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2000). Murteza Bedir has argued that the Uṣūl al-Shāshī cannot have predated the work of the Ḥanafi legal theorist Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Bazdawī of Samarqand (d. 482/1089). The edition used here contains some references to figures (al-Dabāsī [d. 430/1038], for example) who died after the fourth/tenth century, so at the very least we can be sure that additions were made to the text. The bulk of the work, however, seems to be representative of other Ḥanafi uṣūl treatises from the late fourth/tenth to mid-fifth/eleventh centuries, so there is little reason to assume the whole work dates from a later time. Suggestions that Uṣūl al-Shāshī is a work of Shāfīī uṣūl are untenable given the distinctly Ḥanafi contents and format of the book. See Murteza Bedir, "The Problem of Uṣūl al-Shāshī," Islamic Studies 42, no. 3 (2003): 415-36.
We have already discussed al-Jaṣṣāṣ’s opinions on āḥād ḥadīths enjoying the consensus of the umma and on which scholars have acted in law; he admits them as compelling evidence in issues of law and dogma (umūr al-dīyānāt). Al-Jaṣṣāṣ describes such reports as “widespread (mustafīda).” His discussion of reports, in fact, devotes significant space to defending the use of āḥād ḥadīths from groups such as the Muʿtazila who attack them.

A significant development seems to have occurred in the Ḥanafi use of the term mashhūr between the times that al-Jaṣṣāṣ was writing in the mid-fourth/tenth century and al-Sarakhsī in the second half of the fifth/eleventh. While al-Sarakhsī felt that mashhūr reports could abrogate or adjust Qur’ānic rulings, al-Jaṣṣāṣ limited that power to mutawātīr ḥadīths. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Karkhī also maintained that only mutawātīr ḥadīths could abrogate the holy book. Yet it appears that this change involved a semantic shift in the usage of the term mashhūr rather than any revolution in Ḥanafi epistemology. All these scholars believed that the ḥadīth of wiping one’s socks was sufficiently well-attested to abrogate the Qur’ān. But while Abū al-Ḥasan al-Karkhī and al-Jaṣṣāṣ had considered it mutawātīr, al-Shāshī and al-Sarakhsī considered it mashhūr.

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120 See Chapter 4, nn. 171 and 173.

121 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ḫūṣūl, 1:548.

122 See al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ḫūṣūl, 1:560 and 1:568-73. It is interesting to note that al-Jaṣṣāṣ’s treatment of ḥadīth incorporates significant amounts of technical terminology used by transmission-based scholars in their evaluation of reports, such as “approval (taʿālī)” and “accuracy (dabī);” al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ḫūṣūl, 2:25.

123 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ḫūṣūl, 1:449.

124 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ḫūṣūl, 1:467, 518.
V.10. b. The Later Muʿtazilites

Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) was a product of late Muʿtazilism. Like his teacher, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, he espoused Muʿtazilite theology while belonging to the Shāfiʿī school of law. His work on legal theory, the Kitāb al-muṭamad, would become one of the most influential works in that genre and provide a framework for many later Shāfiʿī uṣūl books.  

Abū al-Ḥusayn’s stance on the epistemological yield of āḥād ḥadīths reflected the Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarī position embraced as orthodox among almost all Sunnis: such hadiths yield only probable knowledge (zann), but are nonetheless legally compelling (mūjīb al-ʿamal). The consensus of the umma, however, alters this completely. He explains that, “As for the wāḥid [i.e., āḥād ḥadīth], when the umma has come to consensus as to what it entails (muqtaḍāhu) and deemed it authentic, then its authenticity is epistemologically certain (yuqtaʿu ʿalā sīḥhatihi).”

There does not appear to be any evidence that the later Muʿtazilites endowed the term mashhūr with any technical meaning. In his Faḍl al-iʿizāl, however, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd
al-Jabbar does use the term to describe a "well-known" hadith that he employs as a proof text.  

V.10. c. The Shafi'i/Ash'ari Orthodoxy

Although Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī served as the eponym and inspiration of the Ash'arī school of speculative theology, its tenets and doctrines took shape mainly through the work of three scholars who lived in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh century: the Baghdad Maliki Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Baqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Isfarayini (d. 418/1027) and Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015). The influential Buyid vizier and intellectual al-Ṣāhib Ibn ʿAbbād described these three figures colorfully thus, "Al-Baqillānī is an engulfing sea, Ibn Fūrak a silent serpent (ṣall muṭriq) and al-Isfarayini a burning fire."  

Here we will focus only on Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarayini, the two scholars who played salient roles in the articulation of the Shafi'i/Ash'ari orthodoxy that would compete with the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni orthodoxy for ascendancy in fifth/eleventh-century Baghdad.

Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayini was probably born in 337/949 in the city of Isfarayin, a town nestled in the gateway to the northern mountains of Khurasan and separated from the main road running from Bayhaq to Naysābūr by a grassy valley and a chain of hills. He studied hadith intensively with scholars such as al-İsmā'īlī and also attended the

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128 Al-Qāḍī `Abd al-Jabbar, Fatḥ al-īʿizāl, 195.

lessons of his older contemporary Ibn Fürak. He was sought out as a ḥadīth expert, and among the students to whom he transmitted ḥadīth were al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī and the great Shāfiʿī of Baghdad Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ṭabarī (d. 450/1058). Al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī in particular studied Abū ʿIshāq’s works in depth. Among the other noteworthy figures who studied law, legal theory, ḥadīth and theology at Abū ʿIshāq’s hands were the other great Shāfiʿīs of the age: Abū ʿIshāq al-Shīrāzī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) as well as the famous Sufi systematizer Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). 130

Abū ʿIshāq spent many years studying in Baghdad, but retired to his native Isfārāyīn to teach. He also undertook a visit to the court of Mḥmūd al-Ghaznavī in Ghazna in order to debate the Karrāmiyya. Upon the request of the scholars of Naysābūr, he traveled to that city and taught at a school built there for his use. When he died, his body was carried back to Isfārāyīn for burial.131

In his addendum to al-Ḥākim’s Ṣarīkh Naysābūrī, ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 529/1134-5) says that Abū ʿIshāq’s works “will last until the Day of Judgment, God willing.”132 God’s will was not forthcoming, however, and almost nothing of Abū ʿIshāq’s writings has survived. Al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) said that his books were too vast to be contained in tomes;133 he wrote treatises on legal theory, Shāfiʿī substantive law and the

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133 Al-Nawawī, Tahdhīb al-ʿasmaʿ, 1:170.
art of dialectic, but it seems that he devoted a great deal of attention to attacking the
Mu‘tazila. He penned one work entitled *al-Mukhtaṣar fi al-radd ʿalā ahl al-iṭizāl wa al-
gadar* (Abbreviated Refutation of the Mu‘tazila and Those Believers in Free Will) and
another named *al-Jāmiʿ al-ḥalī fi uṣūl al-dīn wa al-radd ʿalā al-mulḥīdīn* (The
Ornamented Concordance of the Principles of Dogma and a Refutation of the
Nonbelievers). In addition, Abū Ishāq engaged in several debates with the Mu‘tazilite al-
Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār.\(^{134}\)

Despite the fact that none of these works have survived, Abū Ishāq’s scholarly
opinions appear frequently in later Shafi‘ī works on legal theory, and figures like al-
Shīrāzī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ recognized the importance of Abū Ishāq’s role in formulating the
Shafi‘ī/Ash‘arī stances on issues like abrogation and consensus.\(^{135}\) Later Shafi‘ī legal
theorists have thus preserved Abū Ishāq’s stance on the issues of the epistemological
yield of ḥadīths and the effect of consensus. From the works of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-
Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, we know that Abū Ishāq matched the Ḥanafī tripartite division
of reports, identifying ḥadīths as *mutawātir*, āḥād and a middle tier called *mustafīd*
(reminiscent of al-Jaṣṣās’s terminology). While *mutawātir* reports yielded certain
apodictic knowledge (ʿilm darūrī) and āḥād ḥadīths mere probability (zann), these
*mustafīd* reports conveyed “epistemologically certain discursive knowledge (ʿilm
naẓāri‘).” Like the *ʿilm muktasab* that Ḥanafīs attributed to mashhūr reports, this

transcripts or quotations from some of these debates seem to have survived. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4:261;
Mullā ‘Alī Qārī (d. 1014/1606), *Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-akbar*, ed. Marwān Muḥammad al-Sha‘ārī (Beirut: Dār al-
Naf‘īs, 1417/1997), 123.

\(^{135}\) See, for example, Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ al-luma‘*, ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-
discursive knowledge resulted from a consideration of the report’s transmission. Abū Ishāq defined this middle tier as those reports on which the imāms of ḥadīth (a’immat al-ḥadīth) had reached consensus.\textsuperscript{136}

Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāynī’s career mirrors in many aspects that of his senior colleague Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Fūrak, who also belonged to the Shāfī‘ī school. Ibn Fūrak studied in Baghdad, spent a period in the Buyid capital of Rayy and then moved to Naysābūr to teach at a madrasa built specifically for him. There he remained until the last years of his life, when he accompanied Abū Ishāq to the Ghaznavid court to debate the Karrāmiyya sect.\textsuperscript{137} Unlike Abū Ishāq, several of Ibn Fūrak’s writings have survived. Like him, though, the main opponents that he addresses are the Mu’tazila. The most noteworthy is his exposition of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī’s school of speculative theology, entitled \textit{Mujarrad maqālāt al-Ash‘arī} (The Essential Positions of al-Ash‘arī). In addition, he authored a condensed work on \textit{uṣūl} entitled \textit{Kitāb al-ḥudūd fī al-uṣūl} (Definitions in Legal Theory). Finally, he devoted a book to interpreting problematic ḥadīths in a manner that trod a middle path between Mu’tazilite rationalism and über-Sunni anthropomorphism.\textsuperscript{138}


In his *Muğarrad maqālāt al-As'ārī*, Ibn Fürak employs Prophetic traditions very carefully. He admits authentic ḥadīths as evidence in describing God’s attributes if they can convey the requisite epistemological certainty, denying that He is Ḥannān because “there has not been established to that effect an authentic report (*khabar sahih*) on which predicating attributes to Him could depend.”

Ibn Fürak admits the ambiguity in the Ashʿarī stance on the ability of ḥadīths to abrogate the Qurʾān. He states that al-Ashʿarī required that a report be *mutawātir* or have the ruling of *tawātur* in order to abrogate the holy book, although he admits that in its capacity as a restriction or specification of Qurʾānic rulings (*takhsīs*), abrogation can in effect occur with *āḥād* ḥadīths as well. In his *Kitāb al-ḥudūd fi al-usūl*, Ibn Fürak bisects reports into *mutawātir* and *āḥād*; the first conveys epistemologically certain apodictic knowledge (*‘ilm darūrī*), while *āḥād* ḥadīths are all those that do not meet the requirements of *mutawātir* and thus do not yield certain knowledge.

Later sources, however, provide an impression of a more nuanced understanding of reports that allows for the tripartite division present in Abū Isḥāq’s thought. Al-Juwaynī states that Ibn Fürak believed that reports that scholars had accepted with consensus were “of assured authenticity (*mahkūm bi-ṣidqihi*),” even if these scholars did not act on their legal implications. Ibn Ḥajar states that Ibn Fürak believed that if an

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139 Ibn Fürak, *Muğarrad maqālāt al-As'ārī*, 57.
140 Ibn Fürak, *Muğarrad maqālāt al-As'ārī*, 199.
āḥād ḥadīth became “mashhūr” with well-established transmission, it could yield certain discursive knowledge (ʿilm naẓari).\(^{143}\)

**V.10. d. The Ḥanbalī Orthodoxy: Abū Yaʿlā Ibn al-Farrā’**

During the late fourth/tenth and the fifth/eleventh century, in major cities tension between the two increasingly divergent strains of the transmission-based school became more intense. In Baghdad, partisans of the conservative Ḥanbalīs/über-Sunnis and those of the Shāfīʿī/Ashʿarī camp competed with one another for intellectual ascendancy and state patronage. Both were and remain competing orthodoxies in Sunni Islam.

Abū Yaʿlā Ibn al-Farrā’ al-Ḥanbalī (d. 458/1066) of Baghdad served as the pivot for the Ḥanbalī school in the fifth/eleventh century and was the single most influential formulator of its legal theory. He wrote a commentary on the Ḥanbalī formative text, the *Mukhtār* of al-Khiraqī, and authored the school’s first significant *usūl* text, *al-ʿUdda*.\(^{144}\)

Through his writings on issues such as God’s attributes and the fundamentals of doctrine (*usūl al-dīn*), he proved himself an inveterate opponent of the Muʿtazila and the burgeoning Shāfīʿī/Ashʿarī orthodoxy. Among his many works we thus find a rebuttal of Ashʿarism (*al-Radd ʿalā al-Ashʿarīyya*).\(^{145}\) This Ḥanbalī-Ashʿarī disagreement centered on the proper interpretation of Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīths dealing with God’s attributes and movement. Ibn al-Farrā’ believed that true proponents of the Prophet’s legacy accept


\(^{144}\) Ibn al-Farrā’ himself notes that an earlier Ḥanbalī, al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid al-Warrāq (d. 403/1012-13), wrote a work on *usūl al-fiqh*, which seems not to have survived; al-Khaṣib, *Tārīkh Baghdaḍ*, 7:213 (biography of al-Ḥasan).

\(^{145}\) For a list of Ibn al-Farrā’’s works, see Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, 2:175.

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the meaning of such reports at face value, while Ash'arīs deigned to interpret them figuratively. This enmity, however, ironically masked a growing rapprochement between the Ash'arīs and leading elements of the Ḥanbalī school. Ibn al-Farrā'ī, for example, found himself forced to admit that the wording of the Qur'ān was indeed created, and by penning a work of usūl' structured like those of his opponents he was in effect agreeing to join in the discourse established by the Ḥanafīs, Mu'tazilites and Shāfī'īs/Ash'arīs.

In his work on Ḥanbalī legal theory, al-Ūdda fi usūl al-fiqh, Ibn al-Farrā'ī explains that while āḥād ḥadīths convey only probability (zann), when the umma reaches consensus (ijmā') on some piece of evidence such as a ḥadīth (an yatalaqquhū bi 'l-qubūl), the report then yields certain knowledge (ʿilm). According to the general rules of reality (āda), no ḥadīth could enjoy this level of credibility and not be correct. In another work attempting to reconcile Ibn Ḥanbal's contrasting statements on issues of dogma, Ibn al-Farrā'ī reveals that he shares the other schools' view on the special capacity of these consensus-approved āḥād ḥadīths. For an āḥād ḥadīth to be considered as proof on an issue such as seeing God on the Day of Judgment, he explains, the umma must have accepted it with consensus (talaqqathū bi 'l-qubūl).

146 Ibn Abī Ya'la, Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila, 2:179.
149 Ibn al-Farrā'ī, al-Masā'il al-aqdiyya, 70.
Ibn al-Farrā’ does not acknowledge a middle tier of reports, mentioning only āḥād and mutawātir. Interestingly, however, he does refer to the term mashhūr in his effort to translate the jargon used by earlier ḥadith scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal into terms comprehensible in the arena of legal theory. He explains that ḥadith scholars employed mashhūr for “a report whose transmissions have become massively widespread (tawātara).”

V.10. e. The Mālikīs

Although Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī was a Mālikī and later Ashʿarīs such as Abū Dharr al-Ḥarawī also belonged to the legal school, Mālikīs were not as prominent contributors to the discourse on epistemology or legal theory as the Shāfiʿīs. Al-Bāqillānī seems to be the exception in not mentioning any special status for āḥād ḥadiths on which the community had agreed. Nonetheless, Ibn Ḥajar mentions that al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Mālikī of Baghdad (d. 422/1031-2) insisted in his Kitāb al-Mulakhkhās (which has probably not survived) that the authenticity of that which the umma accepted with consensus was absolute. For him tawātur and the consensus of the umma were the only means by which transmitted material could yield epistemological certainty. Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī, another prominent Mālikī of the fifth/eleventh century, also stated


that there are six circumstances in which āḥād ḥadīths can yield ʿilm, one of which is when the umma has accepted the āḥād ḥadīth with consensus (talāqqatu biʿl-qubūl).\textsuperscript{153}

V.10. f. Al-Ḥākim and the Consensus of the Umma

Although al-Ḥākim attended the lessons of Ibn Fīrak, studied closely with Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayinī and transmitted ḥadīths from him, his work bears little trace of this ubiquitous agreement on the effect of consensus on the epistemological yield of ḥadīths. Furthermore, he does not employ the widespread terms mashhūr or mustafīd in the technical sense explored above. Perhaps the closest he comes to acknowledging the role of ījmāʿ or utilizing its associated jargon is his statement that authentic reports must be “circulated with acceptance (biʿl-qubūl)” among ḥadīth scholars.\textsuperscript{154} Such feeble evidence, however, does not establish any link between al-Ḥākim’s methodology and that of the legal theorists of his time. Although al-Ḥākim associated with giants in the fields of law, legal theory and theology, he was ultimately only a ḥadīth scholar. He offered the standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as a kanōn of authenticity binding for ḥadīth scholars and Muʿtazilites alike, but it was his students and colleagues from among the ranks of the legal theorists who truly declared the two works common ground. For them the widely accepted notion that āḥād ḥadīths that had earned the acceptance of the umma could be declared epistemologically certain would provide the key to canonizing the \textit{Sahīḥayn}.


\textsuperscript{154} Al-Ḥākim, \textit{Maʿrifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth}, 77.
V.11. A New Common Ground between the Ḥanbalī/Über-Sunni and the Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arī Schools

The role of the Sahīḥayn as an authoritative common ground between two of the major scholarly camps of the early fifth/eleventh century expressed itself in the careers of two of al-Ḥākim’s close associates: his teacher and colleague Abū ʿIṣḥāq al-Isfārāyīnī (d. 418/1027) and his student Abū Naṣr ʿUbaydallāh b. Saʿīd al-Wāʿilī al-Sijzī (d. 444/1052). A slightly later figure, Imām al-Ḥaramayn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), soon reiterated this new standing for the two books. Beyond their belief in the Qur’ānic revelation and a general Sunni loyalty, a common reverence for al-Bukhārī or the Sahīḥayn constituted the only firm common ground between figures whose relationships with one another were otherwise characterized by bitter enmity.

A discussion of the role of the Sahīḥayn as a common denominator in the scholarly community must begin with three landmark quotations from Abū ʿIṣḥāq, Abū Naṣr al-Wāʿilī and al-Juwaynī.155 Al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) cites Abū ʿIṣḥāq’s statement from his lost Kitāb fi ʿusūl al-fiqh. Abū ʿIṣḥāq asserted:

155 Although we have no extant proof of these quotes from the three scholars themselves, this should not lead us to reject their provenance. Only one of al-Wāʿilī’s works has survived; none of Abū ʿIṣḥāq al-Isfārāyīnī’s books is extant. Furthermore, both al-Wāʿilī’s and al-Juwaynī’s quotes are of a decidedly oral nature (see Appendix on Divorce Oaths), and we should not be surprised not to find the quote in the many works of al-Juwaynī that have survived. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ provides an isnād back to al-Juwaynī for his quote, which suggests at least some documentation. Al-Juwaynī’s contemporary, Abū al-Muẓaffar Manṣūr al-Samʿānī of Naysabūr (d. 489/1096), describes Sahih al-Bukhārī with the statement, “It has been said that the authenticity from the Prophet of what is in it is absolutely certain.” This proves that this claim was known during al-Juwaynī’s lifetime, providing a firm terminus ante quem that is relatively close chronologically to the earliest quote, namely that of al-Isfārāyīnī. In light of these circumstances, we should not equate an absence of documentary evidence for these quotes with evidence of absence. One claim does exist for a declaration about al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works before that of al-Isfārāyīnī, but this lacks credibility: Ibn ʿHajar states elliptically that al-Jawzaqī (d. 388/998) also declared the material in the Sahīḥayn to be absolutely authentic due to the consensus of the umma, but we have no other mention or evidence of this. The quote does not appear in al-Jawzaqī’s al-Muṭtafaq. Furthermore, why would al-Jawzaqī’s student al-Ḥākim never mention his teacher’s statement among his accolades of the Sahīḥayn? 259
The authenticity of the reports in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* is epistemologically certain in terms of their texts (*usūlihā wa mutūnihā*), and no disagreement can occur concerning them. If disagreement does occur, it is over the transmissions and narrators (*ṭuruq wa ruwātihā*). Anyone whose ruling disagrees with a report and does not provide some acceptable interpretation (*taʾwil sāʾigh*) for the report, we negate his ruling, for the umma has accepted these reports with consensus.\(^{156}\)

Abū Naṣr al-Wā’ilī is attributed with the following statement:

Scholars (*ahl al-ilm*), the jurists among them and others, have reached consensus (*ajmaʿa*) that, if a man swears that if anything in al-Bukhārī’s collection that has been reported from the Prophet (ṣ) is not authentic and that the Prophet (ṣ) indeed did not say it he will divorce his wife, he would not be breaking his word and the wife would stay as she was in his custody (*ḥibālatihi*).\(^{157}\)

Finally, al-Juwaynī is quoted as saying:

If a man swore that he would divorce his wife if something in the books of al-Bukhārī and Muslim that they had declared authentic were not [really] from the words of the Prophet (ṣ), I would not oblige him to divorce her and he would not be violating his oath due to the consensus of the Muslim umma on the authenticity of the two books.\(^{158}\)


\(^{156}\) Al-Subki, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4:261.

\(^{157}\) Ibn al-Salāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 168. Abū Naṣr’s statement was echoed later by someone whom Ibn al-ʿĪmād identifies only as Ibn al-ʿĀhdal; see Ibn al-ʿĪmād, *Ṣaddhārat al-ḏahab*, 2:135 (biography of al-Bukhārī). I have found only one instance of the divorce oath trope being used to testify to the authenticity of a hadith collection other than the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, namely the *Muwatta* of Mālik. In his *Tartīb al-maḏārik*, al-Qāḍī ʿIyād quotes Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī as saying, “If a man swore by divorce that Mālik’s ḥadiths that are in the *Muwatta* are all authentic (*ṣīḥāh*), he would not be violating his oath. If he swore by the ḥadiths of another he would be.” Although this source is late, it is entirely possible that this attribution is correct. As we shall see in the next chapter, such statements gave voice to the Mālikī desire to put the *Muwatta* on par with or above the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*; al-Qāḍī ʿIyād, *Tartīb al-maḏārik fī taqriʿ al-mašāliḥ li-maʿrifat aʿlā madḥhab Mālik*, ed. Ahmad Bakir Mahmūd, 5 vols. in 3 (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1387/1967), 1:196.

\(^{158}\) Ibn al-Salāḥ, *Ṣīyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 86.

We are already familiar with the life and career of the great Shāfi‘ī theorist, ḥadīth scholar and Ash‘arī theologian Abū lS̲̄̄q al-Isfarā‘īnī, for the Shāfi‘ī tradition has sufficiently recorded and honored his legacy. Conversely, the Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘ili has never received his due from the school to which he belonged and for which he battled so fiercely. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā devotes no entry to him in the Tabaqāt al-ḥanābīla, although he does respectfully mention a letter Abū Naṣr wrote to Ibn al-Farrā’ī from Mecca praising one of the latter’s books.159 Abū Naṣr’s sole surviving work, however, leaves no doubt as to his allegiances. He was an über-Sunni who viewed Ibn Ḥanbal as the culmination of the Islamic religious tradition. After al-Shāfi‘ī’s convoluted attempts at theorizing Islamic law had left Muslims confused, Ibn Ḥanbal took what he could from al-Shāfi‘ī’s work as well as that of Mālik and Abū Ḥanīfā, and restored the pure tradition of complying with the Prophet’s sunna.160

Abū Naṣr extends the budding Ash‘arī school no mercy. He condemns al-Bāqillānī, Abū lS̲̄̄q al-Isfarā‘īnī and Ibn Fūrak as the “imāms of misguidance (a‘immat al-dalā‘)” of his time. For, although they reject some opinions of the Mu‘tazila, they reject more from the partisans of ḥadīth (ahl al-athar).161 Abū Naṣr is unconvinced by the Ash‘arī use of speculative reasoning to trump the Mu‘tazila, whom he is convinced are a

159 Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, Tabaqāt al-ḥanābīla, 2:173. I have not seen al-Wā‘ili mentioned in any secondary source works on the period or the Ḥanbalī school.


161 Al-Wā‘ili, al-Radd, 223.
spent force. He explains that while Ash'arīs purport to debate the Mu'tazila, they are in fact with them. Indeed, “they are viler than them (akhass ālām).”

Abū Naṣr al-Wā'īlī was born in the Iranian province of Sijistān to a family that followed the Ḥanafi madhhab. He soon split from his father’s school, however, and traveled to Khurāsān and Ghazna. In 404/1014 he undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca, then visited Baghdad, Egypt and Basra before returning to Mecca, where he remained until his death.

Abū Naṣr studied ḥadīth with al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, probably in Naysābūr, and clearly respected him a great deal. He seems to have viewed him as an exemplary ḥadīth scholar. Abū Naṣr would tell a story about his teacher’s encounter with the famous litterateur Bāḍr al-Zāmān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008) upon his arrival in Naysābūr to a crowd of admirers. When al-Hamadhānī awed onlookers by memorizing a hundred lines of poetry after one hearing and then belittled the memorization of ḥadīths, al-Ḥākim decided the time had come to put this bon vivant litterateur in his place. He approached him and asked him to memorize a juz’ of ḥadīths. When he returned a week later to test al-Hamadhānī, he could not remember the specifics of the isnāds. Al-Ḥākim scolded him

\[162\] Al-Wā‘īlī, al-Radd; 81, 222. He considers the last generation of Mu'tazilites to be 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Šāhib Ibn 'Abbād.

\[163\] This is the cause of Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘īlī’s outrageous inclusion in Ḥanafi biographical dictionaries, see below n. 164.

for mocking something more difficult to memorize than poetry and told him, “Know your place (iʿrāf nafsak).”

Abū Naṣr seems to have produced very few works, only one of which has survived. His al-Radd ʿalā man ankara al-ḥarf wa al-ṣawt (Rebuttal of Those who Deny [that God’s Speech Consists of] Words and Sounds), written as a letter to the people of Zabīd in Yemen, is probably a summary of his *magnum opus*, the *Kitāb al-ibāna al-kubrā*. Al-Dhahabī praises both this work and its author, whom he lauds with the unique accolade “the imām of the knowledge of the sunna (imām ʿilm al-sunna).” He explains that the work dealt incisively with questions of the Qur’ān’s nature and God’s attributes. The *Rebuttal* itself addresses numerous topics, such as the nature of the Qur’ān, God’s speech, His sitting on the throne, the beatific vision, and His descending to the lowest heavens at night. The *Ibāna* was read during its author’s lifetime, for Ibn Taymiyya tells us that when Abū Naṣr and the Ashʿarī Abū Dharr al-Harawī were both in Mecca they fell into a serious argument over the nature of the Qur’ān and the *Ibāna*. In addition, later scholars such as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ cite Abū Naṣr’s ḥadīth work on the narration of sons from their fathers as the definitive book in that genre.

166 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-khuffāz*, 3:211.
The *Ibāna* indicates that Abū Naṣr possessed a deep understanding of both Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilite thought as well as the Ashʿarī mission of defending Sunnism using the Muʿtazilites’ rational tools. The Muʿtazila claimed that speech consists of words and sounds, which are created. Since Sunnis believed that the Qurʾān was God’s speech, it must also be created. The Ashʿarīs circumvented this trap by denying that God spoke in sounds; rather, His speech was figurative. His words were “meaning inhering in the essence of the Speaker (*maḥāqaʾim bi-dhāt al-mutakallim*).” Abū Naṣr rejects the Ashʿarī position, stating that it was well-understood amongst Arabs that the term “speech (*kalām*)” denoted actual words. The Ashʿarīs claimed that God “spoke” only in the figurative (*majāz*) sense because, if He actually articulated words, this would be anthropomorphism (*taṣīm, taḥīf*).

Against this, Abū Naṣr defends the über-Sunnis’ literalist interpretation of God speaking or moving in space. He states that his party is the true *ahl al-sunna* “who stand fast on what the early generations (*salaf*) had transmitted to them from the Messenger of God (ṣ) and rely on the traditions of the Companions where God and His Prophet are silent. Reports about God speaking, ascending His throne or descending to the lowest heavens have been bequeathed to the Muslims of the present day by upstanding and trustworthy *imāms* like Mālik through many corroborating reports (*turuq mutasāwiyā*).

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171 Al-Waʿili, *al-Radd*, 82.
Abū Naṣr’s position on the epistemological yield of āḥād ḥadīths reveals an acute and cunning approach to dialectic. He acknowledges that most scholars believe that āḥād ḥadīths are only compelling in law (ʿamal). They do not yield certainty (ʿilm) like massively transmitted reports (mutawātir). He replies using the Ashʿaris’ own position that tawātūr is not defined by a fixed number of reports, but rather by circumstances that lead to the total alleviation of doubt concerning the authenticity of the message. This could occur with one hundred narrations, four or even less depending on circumstances. Most ḥadīths dealing with God’s attributes, he continues, have been transmitted in sufficient number to alleviate doubt and make the heart feel at ease.\[174\] He mocks the Ashʿaris’ attempts to parry the Muʿtazila using rational argumentation without recourse to ḥadīths that are “āḥād and do not yield ʿilm.” How can they say that a ṣaḥīḥ āḥād ḥadīth does not yield ʿilm but their reason does!?\[175\]

Although Abū Naṣr never provides a systematic discussion of the different levels of ḥadīths and their epistemological yields, he employs the notions of consensus and other terminology of the legal theorists of his day. This should not surprise us, for we know that he read Ibn al-Farrā’’s works.\[176\] He describes one ḥadīth as “ṣaḥīḥ mashhūr” and as having been “accepted by the umma (talaqqathu al-umma bi-al-qubūl).”\[177\] In fact, in a brief listing of the different kinds of Prophetic traditions, he lists reports that enjoy

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175 Al-Waʿili, al-Radd, 81, 101.
176 See n. 159 above.
the consensus of the umma as the opposites of those that scholars have abandoned and not acted on.\footnote{178 Al-Wā‘ili, al-Radd, 206.}

As Abū Naṣr’s quotation about the umma’s consensus on al-Bukhārī’s \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} indicates, he respected the work highly. On the controversial issue of God speaking audibly, he cites al-Bukhārī for his inclusion of a ḥadīth in which God calls to the believers on the Day of Judgment with a voice.\footnote{179 “\textit{Istāshhada bihi al-Bukhārī fi kitābihi al-Ṣaḥīḥ}”; al-Wā‘ili, al-Radd, 164. Ḥadīth: \textit{yaḥshuru Allah al-nās yawm al-qiyāma}. . . . For a discussion of this Prophetic tradition, see Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Fath al-bārī}, 13:555-561; \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī}: kīāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 32.} On another occasion he describes a ḥadīth as “occurring in the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ (jā’a fi al-Ṣaḥīḥ)}.”\footnote{180 Al-Wā‘ili, al-Radd, 174. This ḥadīth, “\textit{Yaḥmilu al-samāwāt ‘alā aşba ‘wa al-arḍayn ‘alā aşba}…” appears in the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kīāb al-tawḥīd, bāb qawl Allāh limā khalaqtu biyādī; \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}: kīāb ṣifāt al-munāṣibīn, bāb ṣifāt al-qiyāma wa al-jamā wa al-nār.} His work makes no specific mention of Muslim’s \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ}. When urging Muslims to resort to the ḥadīth collections of those who have stood out as experts on Islam and the Prophet’s legacy, he names as examples the \textit{Sunans} of Abū Dāwūd, Ibn al-Artham, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dārimī (d. 280/894) and Ḥarb b. Ismāʿīl al-Sīrjānī (d. 280/893-4).\footnote{181 Al-Wā‘ili, al-Radd, 223.} Given his esteem for al-Bukhārī’s collection, it seems odd that he does not include his \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ} in this list. But Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘ili was first and foremost a loyal Ḥanbalī, and the four collections that he mentions are all the works of Ibn Ḥanbal’s close associates.

Born in 419/1028 in the constellation of villages called Jovayn astride the winding road from Bayhaq to Isfārāyīn in the hills near Naysābūr, ʿAbd al-Mālik b. ʿAbdallāh al-Juwaynī studied Shāfiʿī law and Ashʿarī theology in Naysābūr until the new Seljuq administrator of the city declared that “[Abū al-Ḥasan] al-Ashʿarī is guilty of innovation in religion (mubtadiʾ) worse than the Muʿtazilites.” 182 Al-Juwaynī thus fled to Baghdad and then to the Hijāz in 450/1058. He became one of the most sought-after masters of his school, teaching in Mecca and Medina and earning the honorary title “imām of the two Sanctuaries (al-haramayn).” When the great administrator Niẓām al-Mulk came to power, al-Juwaynī became one of his favorites. The vizier invited the scholar to return to Naysābūr and teach at his state-sponsored college, the Niẓāmiyya. He remained in the city until his death in 478/1085. 183

Al-Juwaynī produced extremely important works in the fields of legal theory, Shāfiʿī substantive law and Ashʿarī theology. His Waraqāt (The Pages) and his Kitāb al-burhān (Book of Demonstration) have remained two of the most standard texts for teaching the principles of jurisprudence in the Shāfiʿī school. In addition, his massive twenty-volume fiqh work entitled Nihāyat al-maṭlaḥ fī dirāyat al-madhhab (The End of the Question for Knowing the Path) served as the formative text around which all later


legal references in the Shafi‘i school would revolve. Al-Juwaynī also composed a seminal work on Ash‘ari theology entitled al-Shami (The Comprehensive Book) as well as another book rebutting the Mu‘tazilite school.

The study of hadith was certainly al-Juwaynī’s weakest field. He did receive an ijāza from Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī (although as a child) and was very familiar with the Sunan of al-Dāqaqīnī, which he employed as a source of legal hadiths and narrator criticism (jarh wa ta‘dil). We also know that he received a copy of Muslim’s Sahih from Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī (d. 499/1105-6). Al-Dhahabī, however, questioned his mastery of the sahīh collections. He points out that in the Kitāb al-burhān al-Juwaynī describes the hadith in which the Prophet approves of Mu‘adh b. Jabal’s decision to use his own reasoning when no Qur’anic or Prophetic injunctions exist as “recorded in the sahīhs, with its authenticity agreed upon (mudawwan fi al-sīhāh muttafaq ‘alā sihhatihi).” Al-Bukhārī, however, expressly rejects this hadith as unreliable.

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185 Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 5:171, 182.

186 ‘Abd al-Ghaffir al-Farisi, Tārikh Naysābūr al-muntakhab min al-Siyāq, 305.

187 Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 18:471-2; al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt, 19:173; al-Juwaynī, Burḥān, 2:882. Al-Subkī contests his teacher Al-Dhahabī’s condemnation of Juwaynī’s hadith skills, saying that the Mu‘adh hadith is in al-Tirmidhī’s collection; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 5:187-8. This is immaterial, however, since al-Juwaynī had claimed that the authenticity of the hadith was agreed upon – a statement that al-Bukhārī’s dismissal undermines.

188 Al-Bukhārī considered the hadith of Mu‘adh b. Jabal telling the Prophet what steps he would take in deciding the correct course of action (the Qur‘ān, the Prophet’s precedent, then his own reason) to be weak because one of the narrators, al-Ḥārith b. ‘Amr al-Ṭhaqafi, was majhūl; Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib al-tahdhib, 2:139-40.
V.14. The Șahihayn Canon: The Authority of Convention and Common Ground

The above three quotations of al-Isfarāyīnī, Abū Naṣr al-Wāʿīlī and al-Juwaynī provide the first historical evidence for the Șahihayn functioning as texts authorized by a certain community. In these three cases, representatives from the two opposing strains of the transmission-based school affirm a common source for discussing the authentic legacy of the Prophet. For one Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni and two Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarīs, the works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim had authenticated a common tract of the Prophetic past. This agreement authorized the Șahihayn by demonstrating that the three scholars all acknowledged a common body of proof texts that had been guaranteed by a mutually recognized scholarly consensus.

We must note that the quotations of al-Wāʿīlī and al-Juwaynī do not directly identify the authority of the Șahihayn as that of legal compulsion. Rather, they focus on the two works' total authenticity and the authority that this created for the books as a convention within a community of discourse. These two statements took place in a context that was uniquely interactive.189 The formula of swearing to divorce one's wife in order to prove the truth of a statement was a trope among scholars and possibly a wider segment of society in the classical Islamic world.190 It was a rhetorical statement made in a dialectical context. Al-Juwaynī's and Abū Naṣr's statements were responses to stimuli designed to test the conventions to which they subscribed. They made these statements

189 This context should not suggest that these statements were haphazard or hasty. Al-Wāʿīlī's statement contains a cautious distinction between the total contents of al-Bukhārī's work, which contains numerous reports from the Companions as well as the author's commentary, and reports directly attributed to the Prophet.

190 See Appendix on Divorce Oaths.
because some questioner or adversary had elicited them. Perhaps someone had probed
the two scholars for their opinion on the Șahîhâyn or questioned the authenticity of al-
Bukhârî’s or Muslim’s collections. Their responses showed that the scholars
acknowledged a common convention to which both were accountable. They recognized
a new canon regarding sources for the Prophet’s sunna.

This role of drawing inclusive lines for a community that certainly encompassed
the Ḥanbâli/über-Sunnis and the Shâfi‘î/Ash’arîs but also may have included other groups
such as the declining Mu’tazilites was unique to the Șahîhâyn. Al-İsfârâyînî, who penned
polemical works against the Mu’tazilites, felt he could claim the Șahîhâyn as an
authoritative common ground in his work on legal theory. Abû Naṣr al-Wâ’ilî, who
denigrated Abû İshâq al-İsfârâyînî as one of the most destructive religious forces of his
time, nonetheless seconds his evaluation of Șahîh al-Bukhârî’s reliability. Years later, al-
Juwaynî echoed Abû Naṣr al-Wâ’ilî’s evaluation, including Muslim’s Șahîh as well.
What is truly shocking is that al-Juwaynî detested Abû Naṣr both personally and
ideologically. Once while strolling through the book market in Mecca, he found al-
Wâ’ilî’s book Mukhtâsar al-bayân (probably an abbreviation of his Ibâna). In a lost
refutation entitled Naqî kitâb al-Sijzî (Refutation of al-Sijzî’s Book), he describes the
work as dealing with the nature of the Qur’ân and “saying that Ash’arîs are unbelievers
(kuffâr).” Al-Juwaynî states, “I have never seen an ignoramus (jâhiî") more daring in
calling people unbelievers and hastier in judging the imâms....”191 Considering that Abû

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191 Taqî al-Dîn ‘Ali b. ʿAbd al-Kâfî al-Subkî (d. 756/1356), al-Ṣawîf al-ṣaqîl fi al-radd ‘alâ ibn al-
Zaţîl, ed. Muḥammad Zâhid al-Kawthârî and ʿAbd al-Ḥafîz Saʿîd ʿAṭîyya ([Cairo]: Maṣbaʿat al-Saʿâda,
1356/1937), 19-20.
Naṣr and al-Juwaynī viewed each others’ positions as anathema on issues ranging from ritual law to the nature of the Qur‘ān and God’s attributes, the Sahīhayn (or, for Abū Naṣr, Sahīh al-Bukhārī) were one of the few articles on which they actually agreed.

Bridging the chasm between these two strains of transmission-based scholarship was not merely a personal matter. In the fifth/eleventh century, Baghdad was plagued by internecine violence between the Ḥanbali/über-Sunnis and the Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arīs. Throughout 469/1076-7 and 470/1077-8, for example, debates between Abū Ishāq Shīrāzī and his Ḥanbali opponents spilled into the streets, where mobs supporting groups ruthlessly hurled bricks at one another. Only state intervention could end the quarrel. On the level of doctrine and public religious symbolism, the Sahīhayn could serve as one of the few threads joining these two parties, the canon that bound both together as one community.

The notion of consensus (ijmā‘ or talaqqi al-umma bi’l-qubi‘l) provided the authority that could authorize these two works within the expanded boundaries of a widened Sunni hadith canon. As we have seen, the augmenting effect of communal consensus on aḥād ḥadīths enabled a common discourse among the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Muʿtazilite, Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arī and Ḥanbali schools in the first half of the fifth/eleventh century. It was to this epistemological authority that Abū Ishāq, Abū Naṣr and al-Juwaynī turned in order to empower the ḥadīth canon.

Clearly, however, the entire Muslim world did not consider the two works authentic. Imāmī Shiites, for example, would never have subscribed to this opinion.

How, then, should we understand these claims of consensus? *ijmāʿ* is fundamentally self-centered, invoked and defined by scholars attempting to make their beliefs normative by ascribing them to a wider community. This ‘community’ rarely actually applies to the entire Muslim world. Rather, it encompasses those Muslims who uphold correct belief or practice as imagined by the scholar invoking *ijmāʿ* in that moment. As al-Juwaynī states, *ijmāʿ* does not include those Muslim heretics (*mubtadīʿa*) whom “we have declared unbelievers.”

A claim of *ijmāʿ* is thus always ‘accurate’ from the point of view of the scholar invoking it, since anyone who disagrees with it is, according to the claimant, not truly part of the Muslim community at that moment. Claims of *ijmāʿ* are thus inherently subjective, and their efficacy in a debate thus depends entirely on the opponents’ willingness to consider themselves beholden to the same “we,” the same community, and the same terms invoked by the claimant.

In essence, then, *ijmāʿ* is prescriptive and not a description of reality. Someone who invokes the authority of consensus is attempting to force another to heed evidence he considers universally compelling. In this sense, the actual boundaries of the umma mentioned by Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī, Abū Naṣr al-Wāʿilī and al-Juwaynī prove immaterial. In reality, asserting the authenticity of the ḥadīths in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* could convince only those willing to accept the premises of mainstream Sunni ḥadīth criticism as it existed in the fifth/eleventh century. This claim of consensus would not even have

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193 Al-Juwaynī’s requirements for inclusion in *ijmāʿ* are vague and highly subjective, generally restricting it to qualified jurists and legal theorists (*usūlī*). He states that the opinions of vaguely named “heretics (*mubtadīʿa*)” may be considered depending on the circumstances; al-Juwaynī, *al-Burḥān*, 2:684-5, 689.

convinced a great Sunni muḥaddith like al-Dāraqi, whose standards for Addition had proven more stringent than al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s. On the rhetorical plane, however, invoking the authority of consensus on the Ṣaḥīḥayn could prove compelling provided one’s opponent also upheld the status of the two books. Claims made about ḫumā‘ on the Ṣaḥīḥayn thus depended on an opponent’s commitment to imagining the same authoritative station for the two books and acknowledging the same conventions of argument.

V.15. Conclusion: Why the Ṣaḥīḥayn Now?

As the long fourth century came to a close around 450/1058, a cadre of ḥadīth scholars and legal theorists from the transmission-based schools had put forth al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections as texts wielding the authority of a common convention. Yet the Ṣaḥīḥayn were not necessarily the most widely used ḥadīth collections. Mālikīs could rely on the Mawahha’, Ḥanbalīs on the Musnad. Even Abū Naṣr al-Wā’īli clearly favored Abū Dāwūd’s collection; al-Juwaynī relied more on al-Dāraqi’s Sunan in his everyday work. Moreover, when Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyīnī made his proclamation about the Ṣaḥīḥayn many decades had passed since ḥadīth scholars such as Ibn al-Sakan and jurists like al-Khaṭṭābī had articulated the possibility and need for ḥadīth works that could act as loci of consensus. Why canonize the Ṣaḥīḥayn, and why now?

195 Brown, “Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon,” 31-34.
It was al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī who provided the necessary catalyst for the transformation of al-Bukhārī and Muslim into kanons of authenticity. He served as a magnet for studies of the Sahīhayn, inheriting two works the contents of which had been thoroughly studied and whose transmitters had been painstakingly identified. No other ḥadīth collections had received the ceaseless attention devoted to the Sahīhayn and their authors’ methods, and no other works had consistently earned the admiration of the community of ḥadīth scholars. Most importantly, no other collections could conceivably bear the claims that al-Ḥākim made about their authors’ methods and the status of their transmitters.

The genre of ilzāmāt had been established by al-Dāraqūṭnī, but al-Ḥākim transformed it from an obscure and personal activity into a polemical tool. The mission of expanding the number of authentic ḥadīths in circulation motivated al-Ḥākim throughout his career, and the concept of the “requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” furnished the vehicle for doing so. He identified the methodologies that the two scholars employed in compiling their works with the highest level of critical stringency. Apparently conscious that he was acting more on ideals than reality, al-Ḥākim defined their standards in a manner that met the requirements of both Sunni ḥadīth scholars and the Mu’tazilites whose attacks on the transmission-based school had irked him throughout his career. In his Mustadrak, al-Ḥākim presented the standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as a kanon of authenticity that could endow a vast new body of ḥadīths with the reliability of the Sahīhayn. Al-Ḥākim’s work became very influential very quickly, attracting commentary and spreading as far as Andalusia during the author’s lifetime.
Al-Ḥākim and most of the Șahîḥayn Network worked within the realm of ḥadîth collection and criticism, but his colleague Abū ISMq al-Isfarâyînî and his student Abû Naṣr al-Wâ’ilî participated in the wider discourse of epistemology, law and legal theory. Indeed, the broader Muslim community had earlier imagined the authority with which ījmâ‘ could endow ḥadîths, and ḥadîth scholars had begun conceiving of the ḥadîth collection as a possible locus of communal consensus. It was only during the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, however, that legal discourse among a wide variety of schools had collectively articulated that the ījmâ‘ of the umma could raise āḥâd ḥadîths from yielding mere probability to total certainty. Abû ISMq and Abû Naṣr al-Wâ’ilî combined these notions of the ḥadîth collection as a common ground and the authority endowed by ījmâ‘ in their proclamation of the absolute authenticity of al-Bukhârî’s and/or Muslim’s Șahihs. Al-Juwaynî seconded this declaration, proving that the Șahîḥayn could bridge the serious enmity between the Ḥanbalî/über-Sunni and Shâfi’î/Ash’arî camps.

These developments endowed the Șahîḥayn with a new potential authority within the body of transmission-based scholars. They had been acknowledged as a common ground and a convention recognized by both the Ḥanbalî/über-Sunni and the Shâfi’î/Ash’arî schools. Moreover, both al-Ḥākim and the scholars who declared the community’s authoritative consensus on the two books envisioned a canon that reached beyond the boundaries of the transmission-based schools. With the end of the long fourth century we thus find that members of the transmission-based schools had authorized two texts that both defined an existing convention for discussing the Prophet’s legacy and
carried the potential to extend that convention to a wider community. What would come
of this potential beyond the three figures of Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Wā’ili and al-
Juwaynī? Only by meeting widespread needs within the scholarly community could the
Ṣahīhayn canon take root.
VI.

THE CANON AND THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY:
THE ŞAHİHAYN AS MEASURE OF AUTHENTICITY, AUTHORITATIVE
REFERENCE AND EXEMPLUM

VI.1. Introduction

At some moment around the dawn of the fifth/eleventh century, the Şahihayn emerged as authoritative representations of the Prophet's sunna among the transmission-based Shafi'i and Hanbali schools. Beyond that theoretical singularity when a book becomes more than the sum of its pages, however, canonization involves forces greater than the career of one remarkable individual, like al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī, or the isolated declarations of a few, like Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyīnī or Abū Naṣr al-Ṭāʾīlī. It represents the choice of a community to transform texts into authoritative institutions, to endow them with authority because doing so allows them to meet certain needs or perform certain essential functions.

The authorization of the Şahihayn indeed met three important needs in the Sunni scholarly community of the mid-fifth/eleventh century. First, the canon provided a common measure of authenticity for scholars from different legal schools engaged in debate, exposition of their doctrines or efforts to bolster the hadiths they employed as proof texts. Spreading out from al-Ḥākim's students and prominent members of the Şahihayn Network to leading scholars among the Shafi'i, Hanbali and Mālikî schools in
Iraq and Iran, the two works became an authoritative convention for evaluating attributions of the Prophet’s interpretive authority. This canon would become indispensable for scholars, for citing a ḥadīth as being included in one or both of the Ṣaḥīḥayn endowed it with an authenticity guaranteed by the umma’s consensus. By the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, even the ḥadīth-wary Ḥanafi school found acknowledging this convention essential. Second, in a time when jurisprudence was growing increasingly distant from the specialization of ḥadīth criticism, the institution of the canon also began playing an important role as an authoritative reference for jurists who lacked the expertise necessary to independently evaluate ḥadīths. Finally, the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon was not simply a conventional tool for authorizing Prophetic reports. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim also became the exemplum that could shape the science of ḥadīth collection and criticism itself. Therefore, as institutions such as the madrasa formed, schools of law solidified and the field of legal theory fully matured, the mid-fifth/eleventh century saw the Ṣaḥīḥayn emerge as powerful institutions for jurists searching for conventions of debate or authoritative references, as well as ḥadīth scholars struggling to systematize the study of the Prophet’s word.

The nature of the authority that the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon wielded, however, was far from absolute. The power of the canon was bound intimately to the interactive functions it fulfilled. It was an illusion conjured up as convention in the dialogic space of debate and exposition. Within the closed circles of legal or theological schools, however, scholars had no compunction about rejecting al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s ḥadīths.
VI.2. 1. The Need for a Common Measure of Authenticity: The Șahîhîyân in Scholarly Debate

Traditions of the Prophet were *prima facie* compelling for Muslim scholars. Certainly among their own colleagues, the jurists of a particular legal school felt no pressure to provide rigorous chains of transmission for Ɂadîths used in elaborating their common body of law. In such circumstances, it was not necessary to go beyond simple attributions of Prophetic authority. The issue of a Ɂadîth’s authenticity arose only when opinions clashed, when competing parties employing the Prophet’s normative legacy as a proof text challenged the reliability of one another’s evidence.

The Baghdad Shāfi‘î Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083) emphasized this need for a common measure of authenticity in his manual on juridical debate, the *Kitâb al-ma’unâ fi al-jadal*. Engaging his Ḥanafî counterparts proved an alluring interest for al-Shīrāzī, and he authored two other works on issues of disagreement between the two schools.¹ In the *Kitâb al-ma’unâ*, al-Shīrāzī addresses the possibility of a situation in which a Shāfi‘î scholar faces demands to produce an *isnâd* for a Ɂadîth he has adduced as evidence. If an opponent demands that one provide a chain of transmission, one should simply refer him to “a relied-upon book (*kitâb mu’ramad*).” The difficulty in providing or rebutting evidence only arises when one’s own Ɂadîth is not found in “the *sunan*.”²

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It was this need for a common measure of authenticity in the context of debate or exposition that the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon so effectively fulfilled. Indeed, al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works had acquired a powerful air of legal compulsion by al-Shirāzī’s time. As Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyīnī had declared, to rule against a ḥadīth found in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* without some convincing excuse was to oppose the consensus of the Muslim community. Writing some sixty years after al-Isfārāyīnī’s death, al-Ghazālī emphasized how widespread the notion that the contents of the two books were legally compelling had become. In his *al-Mankhūl min ta’rīqat al-uṣūl*, a work on legal theory directed against Ḥanafī opponents of the Šafī’/Ash’arī school, al-Ghazālī states casually that:

We know that if a muftī, if a question proves too difficult for him and he looks through one of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, comes across a ḥadīth that addresses his aim, it is not permitted for him to turn away from it, and he is obligated to rely on it (*al-tawżī*). He who permits [turning away from the ḥadīth] has broken with the consensus [of the umma] (*kharaqa al-ijmā’*).³

That al-Ghazālī does not feel obliged to prove this claim, but rather employs it axiomatically to argue a separate point, illustrates how compelling an institution the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* had become by the late fifth/eleventh century. It was thus in debates or polemical writings that the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon functioned most clearly as a vehicle by which a scholar could wield the authoritative consensus of the community against his opponent.

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³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mankhūl*, 269. For the importance of consensus in the formation and maintenance of orthodoxy in Islam, and the equation of breaking it with disobeying the Prophet, see Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 48-53.
VI.3. **Takhrīj: Applying the Measure of Authenticity**

The *Sahihayn* canon thus found its most salient application in the *takhrīj* of ḥadīths, or citing the various collections in which a report appears. In theory, a scholar seeking to provide such validating references for his ḥadīths could cite any ḥadīth collection he wished. The attempt to prove the reliability of a report, however, hinged inevitably on the quality of the collections to which he referred. *Takhrīj* therefore generally involved the products of the *sahih* movement, especially the Six Books and later the *Sahīhs* of Ibn Khuzayma, Ibn Hibbān and the *Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim. As we shall see, referring to the *Sahihayn* canon differed qualitatively from citing these other respected collections. Not only did al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works alone enjoy the claim of the community’s consensus on the authenticity of their contents, they also better accorded with the rules of Sunni ḥadīth criticism as they coalesced in the mid-fifth/eleventh century and beyond.

*Takhrīj* using al-Bukhārī and Muslim, however, did not merely serve as a stamp of approval for the relatively limited quantity of material featured in their collections. Taking advantage of the differing narrations or multiform permutations of a single Prophetic tradition, scholars like the Shāfi‘ī Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) were able to extend the measure of authenticity to material that differed significantly from the actual contents of the *Sahihayn*. Later scholars such as al-‘Irāqī, Ibn Ḥajar and al-Sakhāwī thus took al-Bayhaqī and others to task for telling their readers that a ḥadīth
appears in the \textit{Sahihayn} when in fact al-Bukhārī or Muslim included only the basic \textit{isnād} (\textit{aṣl al-isnād}) or general text of the report.\footnote{Ibn Ḥajār, \textit{al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ}; 81; al-Sakhāwī, \textit{Fath al-mughīth}, 1:60-1.}

More importantly, the critical standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, however a scholar might choose to define them, continued as a stamp of legitimacy that could extend the consensus on the \textit{Sahihayn} to new bodies of hadīth. In his treatise on Sufism, entitled \textit{Safwat al-taṣawwuf} (The Essence of Sufism), Muḥammad b. Ṭahir al-Maqdisī (d. 507/1113) proudly states that he will not use any poorly attested (\textit{gharīb}) hadīths in arguments against opponents. Rather, he will rely only on those found in the \textit{Sahihayn}, which “the umma of Muslims has accepted with consensus, as well as that which meets [al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim]’s requirements (\textit{sharḥīhimā}) but that they did not include.”\footnote{Al-Maqdisī, \textit{Safwat al-taṣawwuf}, ed. Ghūdah al-Muqaddam ‘Adrah (Beirut: Dār al-Muntakhab al-‘Arabī, 1995), 133.} Here the dual power of the \textit{Sahihayn} canon is clear in the authority of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s texts themselves and in their capacity as a \textit{kanôn} by which their authority could be extended to outside hadīths.

To the present day, the “requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” have retained this function as a vehicle in which the authorizing consensus of the community can be deposited for later application. In the perennial debate over seeking the intercession of dead saints (\textit{tawassul}), the modern scholar Yūsuf Ḥāshim al-Rifā‘ī defends this practice against detractors by invoking a hadīth in which the caliph ʿUthmān tells a man seeking aid to call upon the late Prophet for assistance in gaining God’s favor. Al-Rifā‘ī avers
that this ḥadīth meets the criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, “so there remains nothing one could criticize or denounce in the authenticity of the ḥadīth.”

The array of sources that could be invoked in takhrīj led ḥadīth scholars to contemplate a system of ranking the various respected ḥadīth collections. As we have seen above, al-Ḥākim had pioneered this by associating the Sahīḥayn and their requirements with the highest level of authentic ḥadīths. In his Sharīṭ al-a’īmma al-khamsa, al-Ḥāzimī (d. 584/1188) uses the students of the early ḥadīth transmitter al-Zuhrī (d. 124/743) as a template for ranking the critical stringency of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā’ī. Al-Bukhārī only drew from the top level, consisting of scholars like Mālik, while Muslim also relied on the second tier. Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasā’ī resorted to the third level, while al-Tirmidhī plumbed the depths of the fourth.

Since debate often pitted al-Bukhārī and Muslim or one of these two scholars’ critical requirements against one another, there gradually developed a more detailed ranking strictly for the Sahīḥayn. Al-Mayyānishī (d. 583/1187) concluded that the highest level of reliability belongs to ḥadīths on which both al-Bukhārī and Muslim agreed. The second level consists of reports that only one of them included. The third level features reports that meet their requirements but do not appear in the Sahīḥayn, and the lowest level consists of ḥadīths that fail to meet those conditions but nonetheless possess good isnāds. Ibn al-Jawzáī followed al-Mayyānishī, adding several lower levels

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7 Al-Ḥāzimī, Sharīṭ al-a’īmma al-khamsa, 43-4.

8 Al-Mayyānishī, 262-3.
of ḥadīths such as forged reports. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ developed the final form of this ranking system, which consisted of ḥadīths:

1) Agreed on by al-Bukhārī and Muslim
2) Only included in al-Bukhārī
3) Only included in Muslim
4) Meeting the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim
5) Meeting only the requirements of al-Bukhārī
6) Meeting only the requirements of Muslim
7) ḥadīths that are saḥīḥ but do not meet al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s requirements

These rankings were not simply exercises in empty contemplation. If we understand these evaluations as judgments about the functional value of ḥadīth collections, we must appreciate that they arose as responses to pressing questions within the scholarly community. As Monroe Beardsley states in his discussion of instrumentalism in aesthetics, “Statements of value are to be regarded as proposed solutions to problems of value, that is, situations in which choices have to be made.” Scholars faced situations in which they had to choose between competing authentic ḥadīths. As Ibn al-Wazīr notes incisively in his comparison between the critical methods of Muslim and Abū Dāwūd, “Know that the purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate

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10 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Mughaddima, 169. This ranking has been followed by almost all later scholars, some of whom have discussed the levels in more detail; see Abū al-Fayḍ Muḥammad al-Ḥanafi al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Harawi (d. 837/1434), Jawāhir al-ushūl fi ilm hadith al-Rasūl, ed. Abū al-Maʿālim Abū al-Mubārk al-Harawi (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Ilmiyya, [1973?]), 19; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā quūb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 107; Mulla Khāṭir, Makānat al-Ṣaḥḥayn, 98-102.

that the ḥadīths of Muslim are preferable to those of Abū Dāwūd in the case of competition (taʿruf) between them....\textsuperscript{12}

Indeed, these comprehensive rankings emerged in the wake of seminal attempts to systematize the Sunni study of ḥadīth. Although scholars such as Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī (d. 349/960) and al-Īṣārī (d. 371/981-2) had been evaluating collections such as the Sahīhayn from a relatively early date, concerted efforts to rank the various products of the sahih movement seem to have started suddenly in the early and mid-sixth/twelfth century.\textsuperscript{13} This followed works like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s al-Kīfāya fī ʾilm al-riwāya (The Sufficient Work on the Science of Transmission), which were attempts to authoritatively recognize choices that Sunni ḥadīth scholars, jurists and legal theorists had made about the transmission, evaluation and usage of ḥadīths. Scholars like al-Ḥāzimī found themselves forced to see where the methods of al-Bukhārī and Muslim fit within the shared rules of ḥadīth study articulated in the writings of systematizers like al-Ḥākim, al-Khaṭīb and Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071).

Ranking al-Bukhārī’s critical stringency above that of Muslim, for example, acknowledged significant and practical principles that had emerged as predominant among Sunni ḥadīth critics. On the issue of when one could accept the vague phrase “from/according to (ʿan)” in an isnād as not masking a break in transmission, it was the school of thought associated with al-Bukhārī and ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī that became the

\textsuperscript{12} Ibn al-Wazīr, Tāqīth al-anzār, 81.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) seems to have been an exception. Al-Dhahabī reports that he ranked the best ḥadīth collections as the Sahīhayn, the Muntaqāq of Ibn al-Sakān, the Muntaqāq of Ibn al-Jārūd, the Muntaqāq of Qāsim b. ʿAbdāq, then the Sunans of Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasāʾī and then thirty other books; al-Dhahabī, Tadkhīrat al-ḥuffāz, 3:231.
mainstream stance. These two masters had required proof that the transmitter employing "from/according to" had actually met at least once the person from whom he claimed to narrate. Muslim, on the other hand, had only required that they be contemporaries with a possibility of having met one another. In his al-Kifāya, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi declares that the community of ḥadīth scholars had come to consensus that requiring at least one meeting was correct. When Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr sought to apply the criteria of the saḥīḥ movement to Mālik’s Muwatta’, he therefore turned to al-Bukhārī’s requirements as the prevailing rule. Most major ḥadīth scholars or critics since then, such as Ibn al-Ṣālah (d. 643/1245), have followed Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s and al-Khaṭīb’s formulations of the rules governing the use of “from/according to (ʿan).”


15 See above Chapter 3, section on Muslim’s Methodology in his Saḥīḥ.
Bukhārī in critical stringency thus amounted to tailoring the canon to the contours of convention among ḥadīth scholars.

The superiority of the Sahihayn over other respected ḥadīth collections used for takhrīj also had palpable implications in scholarly debate. This shines forth clearly in a seventh/thirteenth century debate that raged between the towering Shāfiʿī ḥadīth scholar Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and his contemporary al-ʿĪzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1261-2) over the permissibility of a type of supererogatory prayer known as salāt al-raghaʿīb. The evidence for this type of prayer hinged on a ḥadīth adduced by al-Ghazālī in his pietistic work, Iḥyāʿ ʿulūm ad-dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). Although both Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām agreed that this report was weak, the former felt that people should still be allowed to perform the prayer, while Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām argued that “paving the way for lying about the Messenger of God is not permitted (al-tasabbub ilā al-kadhib ʿalā Rasūl Allāh la yajūz).” In the course of letters these two scholars wrote to one another publicly debating the issue, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ defended his point of view by arguing that “the ḥadīth has sahiḥ narrations,” citing a ḥadīth from Ibn Majah’s Sunan as evidence. Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, however, refuted him by pointing out that one of the transmitters in Ibn Mājah’s isnād was a known liar (i.e., Yaʿqūb b. al-Walīd al-Māḍīnī).

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18 Al-Albānī et al., Musājala ṣīḥiya, 17.

19 Al-Albānī et al., Musājala ṣīḥiya, 32.
Although by the time of al-Maqqisi in the early sixth/twelfth century many
scholars in the Islamic heartlands considered Ibn Mâjah’s Sunan to be part of the well-
respected “Six Book” hadith canon, the work could not deliver the decisive authority of
the Sahihayn. A rigorous critic like al-Daraquqmi had disapproved of only two hundred
and seventeen narrations from al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s books and only two of their
narrators. Al-Dhahabi, however, counted no less than one thousand weak narrations from
the approximately 4,341 hadiths in Ibn Mâjah’s Sunan. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm was thus on
much steadier ground when he cited a hadith from Sahih Muslim to support his position.

Given the possible implications of choosing one collection over another for takhrîj in a
debate, it is not surprising that scholars in Baghdad asked al-Maqqisi to write a book
explaining the differing criteria of the Six Books.

VI.4. The Origins of Takhrîj Among the Students of al-Ḥâkim al-Naysabûrî

In light of al-Ḥâkim al-Naysabûrî’s leading role in the canonization of the
Sahihayn, it seems natural that we find the first concerted application of this new measure
of authenticity in the work of his students. The actual earliest known use of al-Bukhari
and Muslim for the takhrîj of hadiths, however, occurs in the work of another member of
the Sahihayn Network who never studied with al-Ḥâkim: Hibatallah al-Lalakâ’î (d.

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20 Al-Dhahabi, Siyar, 13:279. For another instance in which the Shafi’i Taj al-Din al-Subki
confidently states that a hadith from Ibn Mâjah is inauthentic, see his Tabaqât, 4:13 (biography of al-
Bayhaqi); also, Abü al-Fayd Ahmad al-Ghumari (d. 1960), al-Mughîr ‘ala aḥādid al-Jami’ al-saghir
(Beirut: Dâr al-Ra’id al-‘Arabi, 1402/1982), 89-90.

21 Al-Albani et al., Musâjala ‘Ilmiyya, 8.

22 Al-Maqqisi, Shurût al-a’imma al-sitta, 10.
418/1027-8), one of the scholars in the Baghdad knot.23 At several points in his Sharh usūl i tiqād ahl al-sunna, al-Lālakā‘ī adduces ḥadīths as evidence and then supports them by stating that al-Bukhārī and/or Muslim included them (akhrajahu) in their Sahīhs.24 This format was a natural outgrowth of the mustakhraj techniques of al-Lālakā‘ī’s colleagues such as al-Barqānī (d. 425/1033-4). Like the mustakhraj, takhrīj functioned to display the quality of a scholar’s ḥadīths. Instead of following the format of other mustakhraj authors like Abū ‘Awāna or Abū Nu‘aym al-Isbahānī, who simply replicated the template collection with their own isnāds, al-Barqānī’s joint Mustakhraj of the Sahīhayn lists his narration of a ḥadīth and then notes that al-Bukhārī, Muslim or both “included it (akhrajahu).”25 Takhrīj simply involved using this tactic when composing other books.

The use of al-Bukhārī and Muslim to consistently and confidently affirm the authenticity of ḥadīths or the reliability of transmitters, however, can be traced to two of...

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23 I have found one earlier occurrence, but I believe it to be a later addition to the text. In his work on the differences of opinions amongst jurists, Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 318/930-1) cites a ḥadīth and then says “akhrajahu al-Bukhārī wa Muslim.” This is probably a later addition, since in the early fourth/tenth century people did not generally refer to al-Bukhārī as such (if they referred to him at all), calling him Muhammad b. Ismā‘il or Abū ‘Abdallāh. Using ‘al-Bukhārī’ as shorthand was a result of the mustakhraj period, and no mustakhrajs of al-Bukhārī had been produced during Ibn al-Mundhir’s time; Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Iṣrāf fī al-madhhab ahl al-sunna, 1:108 (for al-Bukhārī, 1:87, 4:876 (for al-Bukhārī and Muslim), 1:85 (for Muslim). On one occasion “al-Bukhārī included it…” is added in the margin by a later copyist. That this addition is noticable bolsters the reliability of the remaining instances as parts of the author’s original work.

24 Al-Lālakā‘ī, Sharh usūl i tiqād ahl al-sunna, 1:108 (for al-Bukhārī), 1:87, 4:876 (for al-Bukhārī and Muslim), 1:85 (for Muslim). On one occasion “al-Bukhārī included it…” is added in the margin by a later copyist. That this addition is noticable bolsters the reliability of the remaining instances as parts of the author’s original work.

al-Ḥākim’s students: Abū Ya‘lā Khalīl b. ‘Abdallāh al-Khalīlī (d. 446/1054) and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066). The first of these two, al-Khalīlī, employed the Ṣahīḥayn as a tool for establishing the reliability of transmitters in his short but valuable biographical dictionary of ḥadīth scholars, ʿal-Īrshād fi ṭaʿrīfát ‘ulāmāʾ al-ḥadīth (Guidance for Knowing the Scholars of Ḥadīth). Al-Khalīlī hailed from Qazvīn, where he worked for a time as a judge, but studied extensively with al-Ḥākim in Naysābūr. From among the other members of the Ṣahīḥayn Network, he only studied with al-Ghīṭrīfī.26 His link to the Jurjān cult of al-Bukhārī might explain his favoring al-Bukhārī over Muslim as a source for citation. His admiration for al-Bukhārī is clear, for he calls him “the imām agreed on by all without contest.”27 Al-Khalīlī introduces at least nineteen men as transmitters al-Bukhārī included in his Ṣahīḥ. He cites another eighteen as transmitters from both the Ṣahīḥayn. He only relies on Muslim’s Ṣahīḥ independently twice, however, and mentions no other works as a means of takhrīj.

Using al-Bukhārī and Muslim as a measure of authenticity for ḥadīths began in earnest with Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, who was well-known as one of al-Ḥākim’s most senior students. When later scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ cited al-Ḥākim’s opinions or his works, it was most frequently through a chain of transmission from al-Bayhaqī. Al-Ḥākim provided one of al-Bayhaqī’s primary reservoirs of ḥadīths, since, according to al-Dhahabī, he did not have the books of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah or al-Nasā’ī at his disposal. He did, however, possess a camel load of ḥadīth books from al-

26 Al-Rāfiʿī, al-Tadwīn fī akhbār Qazwīn, 2:501-4; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:214; idem, Ṭārīkh al-islām, 30:120-1; idem, Siyar, 17:666-8.

27 Al-Khalīlī, ʿal-Īrshād, 377.
Al-Bayhaqī was an amazingly prolific scholar. In fact, al-Dhahabi believed that he was capable of founding his own madhhab had he so wished. Instead, al-Bayhaqī authored an oeuvre that became such a bastion of the Shāfiʿī school that Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī considered al-Bayhaqī to be the only person to whom al-Shāfiʿī was indebted. Al-Bayhaqī organized al-Shāfiʿī’s statements and proof texts in the massive Maʿrifat al-sunan wa al-ʿāthār and then compiled his al-Sunan al-kubrā, a huge hadīth collection backing up every detail of Shāfiʿī substantive law with Prophetic traditions as well as opinions from the Companions. Al-Bayhaqī was sought out as an expert on Shāfiʿī fiqh and al-Muzani’s Mukhtasār.29 Both later Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarīs and Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnis respected and relied on his work. The staunch Ashʿarī Ibn ʿAsākir heard his whole oeuvre from his students, and the Ḥanbalī Khwāje ʿAbdallāh had iḥāzās from him.30

Al-Bayhaqī’s output was representative of the new Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarī orthodoxy. Works such as his al-Madḵhal ilā al-Sunan al-kubrā (Introduction to the Great Sunan) and the Sunan itself champion the Shāfiʿī transmission-based legal methodology and the school’s body of substantive law. In works like his Khilāfiyyāt (The Disagreements), al-Bayhaqī defends the school’s positions against its Ḥanafī opponents. He affirms the

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28 Al-Dhahabi, Siyar, 18:165.


30 Al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-islām, 30:438-41; idem, Siyar, 18:163-70.
transmission-based trust in the revealed text of the sunna for understanding dogma, while simultaneously validating Ash'arî efforts to interpret God and His attributes rationally. Discussing the hugely divisive controversy over the wording (laflz) of the Qur'ân, for example, he states simply that all transmission-based scholars believe that the Qur'ân is the uncreated word of God. While some scholars might prefer not to discuss the issue, others like al-Bukhārī (and al-Bayhaqī himself) have chosen to distinguish between the physical manifestation of the Qur'ân and the text itself. Nonetheless, all belong to the same unified school.31

We can clearly appreciate the manner in which al-Bayhaqī employed the Šahiţayn as a measure of authenticity in a sample of four works intended to affirm his Shafi'i/Ash'arî position. Stylistically, his use of the phrase "al-Bukhārī and/or Muslim included it" after a ḥadīth reflects his teacher al-Barqānī and also al-Lālakā'ī's work. Beginning with the first ḥadīth in his Kitāb al-Asmā' wa al-ṣifāt, a treatise on God's names and attributes, and then wherever possible throughout the book, al-Bayhaqī uses inclusion in al-Bukhārī's and Muslim's collections to establish reliability.32 He pursues the same tactic in his Khilāfiyyāt.33 In a work intended to provide ḥadīths proving the existence of the bête noire of Muslim rationalists, the punishment of the grave (‘adhāb al-qabr), al-Bayhaqī uses the canonical formula "al-Bukhārī and/or Muslim included it (akhrajahu)" for eighty-eight out of the four hundred and thirty (20%) narrations in the

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book. He only twice mentions other collections such as Abū Dāwūd’s *Sunan* and Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*. Al-Bayhaqī’s *al-Sunan al-kubrā* represents the most extensive use of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon for *takhrīj*. In a sample of the 1,472 narrations constituting his lengthy chapter on ritual purity (*tahāra*), al-Bayhaqī refers to inclusion by al-Bukhārī, Muslim or both 23.5% of the time. The only other work he refers to for *takhrīj*, Abū Dāwūd’s *Sunan*, appears only 0.6% of the time (9 instances).

Another student and follower of al-Ḥākim’s school of thought, Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, also provides some of the earliest usages of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon as a measure of authenticity. In his biographical dictionary of Isfahan, *Dhikr akhbār Isbahan*, he uses the phrase “the ḥadīth is authentic by agreement (*al-ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ muttafaq ‘alayhi*)” to validate his own narration of a Prophetic ḥadīth. Here he follows an earlier member of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* Network, Ibn al-Akhram, who had entitled his joint *mustakhraj* of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* “The *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Agreement (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-muttafaq ‘alayhi*)”. In his landmark biographical dictionary of Sufism and asceticism, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, Abū Nu‘aym also uses al-Bukhārī and Muslim as direct stamps of approval for ḥadīths he includes in the work’s entries.

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We know that employing the canon for takhrîj had also begun in Baghdad by the mid-fifth/eleventh century. Abû Nu‘aym’s student and a main inheritor of the Šaḥīḥayn Network (see Šaḥīḥayn Network Chart), al-Khaṣîb al-Baghdâdî, used the Šaḥīḥayn canon dramatically to establish the authenticity of a selection of 173 of his ḥadîths that he narrated in a ḥadîth dictation session. He invokes the inclusion of al-Bukhârî, Muslim or both for 57% of his reports. He invokes no other work for takhrîj, and only declares one ḥadîth to be sâhîh that does not appear in one of the Šaḥīḥayn.38 Al-Khaṣîb reiterates the paramountcy of the Šaḥīḥayn in his vision of the ḥadîth sciences when he instructs students that the two works should form the basis of any curriculum in ḥadîth study.39

VI.5. The Historical Application of Takhrîj

We have located both the epicenter of the Šaḥīḥayn canon and its initial use as a measure of authenticity in the seminal work of al-Ḥâkim al-Naysâbûrî and his students from the Shâfi‘i school. We will now examine how and when the canon spread to the Ḥanbalî, Mâlikî, Ḥanafî and Imâmî Shiite schools. We will focus on the two most salient means in which scholars used the Šaḥīḥayn canon as a common measure of authenticity: polemics, and employing the canon to fortify a school’s formative legal or ḥadîth texts.

VI.5. a. Polemics and Debate


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In the mid-1. ft/h/eleventh century, prominent adherents of the Shâfi‘î, Ḥanbalî and Mâlikî schools all began employing the Sahihayn canon as a measure of authenticity in polemics and expositions of their schools’ doctrines. It was not until the eighth/fourteenth century, however, that the Ḥanafis also adopted the canon for this use.

Al-Bayhaqi’s categorical reinforcement of the Shâfi‘î/Ash‘arî catalog stands out as both the earliest and most stunning application of the canon in his school’s history. It seems clear, however, that this intensive recourse to the Sahihayn hinged on al-Bayhaqi’s proximity to al-Ḥākim and the canonization of the two works. Although other Shâfi‘î jurists of this period did employ the Sahihayn canon, no one matched the concentrated use found in al-Bayhaqi’s or al-Khalîlî’s works. Abû al-Ḥasan al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058), for example, was a contemporary member of the Shâfi‘î school in Baghdad who was also engaged in the process of explicating and establishing Shâfi‘î substantive law. However, he made very limited use of the Sahihayn canon for takhrîj in his legal reference, al-Ḥawî al-kabîr fi fiqh madhhab al-imâm al-Shâfi‘î (The Great Compendium of the Shâfi‘î School of Law). On only two occasions in his voluminous explanation of the school’s law does he use inclusion in al-Bukhārî’s or Muslim’s collections to support the authenticity of ḥadîths that al-Shâfi‘î had invoked as proof texts.⁴⁰

It is not surprising that one of the earliest employers of the Sahihayn as a measure of authenticity came from the Ḥanbalî camp, which cooperated with the Shâfi‘î/Ash‘arîs in canonizing the two works. Like his correspondent, Abû Naṣr al-Wâ‘îlî, the great

Hanbali Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ (d. 458/1066) was an inveterate opponent of the Ash‘arīs and their figurative interpretation of God’s attributes. Like al-Bayhaqī, however, he used the canon to bolster the authority of the ḥadīths he cited as proof texts on such controversial issues. In 456/1064, Ibn al-Farrā’ held a session for dictating ḥadīths to students (majīs imlā’) and tackled the perennially divisive issue of seeing God on the Day of Judgment (ru‘yat al-Bārī’), rejected by rationalists such as the Mu‘tazilites and interpreted figuratively by Ash‘arīs. He narrated a ḥadīth in which the Prophet looks at the full moon and then tells his followers, “Indeed you will see your Lord with your own eyes (fiyān’).” Ibn al-Farrā’ adds, “This ḥadīth is saḥīḥ; al-Bukhārī included it..., and it is as if I heard it from al-Bukhārī.” Here Ibn al-Farrā’ uses both his own proximity in the isnād to al-Bukhārī and the latter’s inclusion of the ḥadīth in his Sahīḥ as a means for augmenting its authority. In his treatise on legal theory, al-‘Udda, Ibn al-Farrā’ similarly uses al-Bukhārī’s Sahīḥ to validate a report proving that a five-year-old could effectively hear ḥadīth transmitted.42

Ibn al-Farrā’ also utilizes the canon in his work on issues of dogma (uṣūl al-dīn), the Kitāb al-mu’tamad. The author devotes his attention in this work primarily to his Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī opponents, treating controversial topics such as God’s attributes, the punishment of the grave, and the issue of appropriate rule in Islam (imāma). In his subchapter on the existence of magic (siḥr), he argues against the Mu‘tazila, saying that

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41 Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanibāla, 2:172; Fath # 7435; Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 25.

42 Ibn al-Farrā’, al-ʿUdda, 3:950. This is the ḥadīth from the Companion Māḥmūd b. Rabī‘ saying, “‘Agaltu min al-Nābi (ṣ) majja‘u majja‘u fi wajhi wa anā ibn hāmas sinīn”‘; Fath #77; Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-ʿilm, bāb ma‘āla yaṣiḥṣu samā‘ al-ṣaghīr. Note that Ibn al-Farrā’”s version has the wording “fiyā (my mouth)” instead of “wajhi (my face).”
both the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth affirm it. He invokes the ḥadīth in which 'Ā'isha recounts how a Jewish sorcerer once cast a spell on the Prophet, adding that “this is a well-known (mashhūr) ḥadīth that al-Bukhārī and others from the ḥadīth scholars (muḥaddithīn) have mentioned.” He also mentions that some ḥadīths are “included in the Ṣaḥīḥ,” a phrase that generally denotes inclusion in one or both of the Ṣaḥīḥayn (here it evidently refers to Muslim’s work). Besides al-Bukhārī, he only once mentions another ḥadīth scholar as narrating a report, namely al-Dārāqūṭī; in this case, however, he places no emphasis on the source as a guarantor of authenticity. Ibn al-Farrā’’s son, Ibn Abī Ya'lä, also occasionally uses al-Bukhārī and Muslim as a measure of authenticity in his discussion of the differences between Ḥanbalīs and Ashʿarīs on issues such as God’s attributes. This use of the canon continues in later Ḥanbalī works such as Ibn ‘Aqīl’s (d. 513/1119), al-Wādiḥ fi usūl al-fiqh, until the end of the sixth/twelfth century.

Among Ḥanbalīs, it was the Neo-Ḥanbalite cadre of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) that exhibited the most cunning and aggressive usage of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon. The two works served as powerful weapons in polemics against Ashʿarīs over issues such as God’s attributes, the nature of the Qur’ān

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43 Abū Ya'lä Ibn al-Farrā’, Kitāb al-mu’tamad fi usūl al-dīn, ed. Wadiḥ Zaydan Ḥaddād (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1974), 168. This specific version of the ḥadīth “ṣahara al-nabī (s) yahūdī min al-yahūd...,“ appears in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, see Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: kitāb al-salām, bāb al-sihr. A slightly different wording appears in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, see Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-tibb, bāb 47 / Fathā # 5763.


and invoking the intercession of dead saints. Asserting the literalist position that one should accept the outward meaning of Qur’anic verses or Prophetic ḥadīths describing God’s movements, Ibn al-Qayyim calls his Ash‘arī opponents’ attention to al-Bukhārī’s narrations of ḥadīths asserting that God is indeed physically above us in the heavens. He exploits al-Bukhārī’s position of extreme respect among both Ash‘arīs and Ḥanbalī/über-Sunnis to his advantage, sarcastically implying that his opponents would condemn this venerable figure as an anthropomorphist. Ibn al-Qayyim states in a verse of poetry:

And from among you, al-Bukhārī the ‘anthropomorphist’ has narrated it, Nay, an anthropomorphist who attributes to God a [physical] position above us (mujassim fawqānī).47

On the issue of visiting the graves of prophets and seeking their assistance, Ibn al-Qayyim challenges the orthodox tenet that they are indeed alive in their graves and able to respond to the invocation of pilgrims.48 One of the ḥadīths that scholars had produced as evidence for this stance describes Moses praying in his grave. Ibn al-Qayyim, however, argues that al-Bukhārī’s decision to exclude the ḥadīth from his Sahīh demonstrates its weakness, as does al-Dāraquṭnī’s claim that it is actually the opinion of a Companion (hence, mawqūf).49 Not only does Ibn al-Qayyim use al-Bukhārī as a measure of truth to reinforce his position, he also exploits exclusion from the work to undermine his opponent’s evidence.

47 Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, al-Sayf al-ṣaqīl, 65.

48 For a discussion of Ibn Taymiyya’s and Ibn al-Qayyim’s argument against visiting graves, and an Ash‘arī response, see Taylor, In the Vicinity of the Righteous, 168-94.

49 Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, al-Sayf al-ṣaqīl, 155.
Like others, Mālikīs employed the *Ṣahīḥayn* canon in debates or expositions of their school’s positions. It is little surprise that the first Mālikī to employ the *Ṣahīḥayn* canon as a measure of authenticity had studied extensively at the hands of a member of the *Ṣahīḥayn* Network, Abū Dharr al-Harawī. Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī (d. 474/1081) of Cordova traveled east in 426/1035 and studied with al-Harawī for three years in Mecca before moving to the Abbasid capital to study with al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and others.50

With such prolonged exposure to one of the most prominent members of the *Ṣahīḥayn* Network, al-Bājī confidently employed the canon in his book defending Mālikī *uṣūl*, the *Iḥkām al-fuṣūl fī aḥkām al-uṣūl*. This work is an aggressive exposition of Mālikī legal theory, often targeting Ḥanafī or über-Sunni opponents. Although al-Bājī makes only a few references to al-Bukhārī or Muslim, or any other ḥadīth collections for that matter, these references clearly illustrate the function of the *Ṣahīḥayn* canon in the author’s thought.51 One of al-Bājī’s primary concerns in the *Iḥkām* is mounting a defense of juridical reasoning (*qiyyās*) against those über-Sunnis who reject any rulings not based directly on revealed text (*nass*). He lists the various Prophetic reports that his opponents cite as evidence against the use of reason, but rebuts them by stating that these are defective and too unreliable to be compelling. He asks his opponents how they could invoke such feeble ḥadīths in the face of the reports that he had advanced as evidence, “most of which the two *imāms* [al-Bukhārī and Muslim] have agreed on including in the


51 For these instances, see Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī, *Iḥkām al-fuṣūl fī aḥkām al-uṣūl*; 591, 744.
Saḥīḥ[ayn].” “This is what the people have agreed on as authentic,” he adds, noting that only one of his opponents’ ḥadīths appears in the Saḥīḥayn.  

Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī’s commentary on the Muwṭṭa’, his al-Muntaqā, shares many of the same concerns as his usūl work. Although it primarily seeks to explain and elaborate on the positive law laid out by Mālik, the author’s perspective is consistently both comparative and polemical. He is as eager to prove the correctness of Mālik’s school as to explain it. Al-Bājī thus occasionally relies on the Saḥīḥayn to validate Mālik’s legal positions. Defending his stance against Ḥanafī opponents on the necessity of the taslīm (turning one’s head and saying ‘peace be upon you’ at the end of prayer) for exiting a prayer, al-Bājī states, “The proof of the correctness (ṣiḥḥa) of Mālik’s position is [a ḥadīth] that al-Bukhārī narrated….” He also employs the canon conversely to cast doubt on the authenticity of opposing ḥadīths. He rejects reports that offer more information on the Prophet’s taslīm than those found in the Muwṭṭa’ by stating, “Al-Bukhārī did not include any of them, and what Muslim included are reports that allow for interpretation (yaḥtamilu al-ṭa’wil).”

The Ḥanafī school seems to have been much slower to adopt the Saḥīḥayn canon as a measure of authenticity. Although, as we discussed in Chapter Four, Ḥanafī scholars played an active role in transmitting al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries, they did not develop the strong interests in

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52 Al-Bājī, Iḥkām al-fuṣūl fī aḥkām al-usūl, 610.


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studying or utilizing the two works demonstrated by the Shāfi‘ī Ṣahihayn Network or later scholars like al-Bayhaqi. In the seventh/thirteenth century, the Damascene Ḥanafī Abū al-Ḥāṣṣ‘Umar b. Badr al-Mawṣili (d. 622/1225) produced a simplified digest of the Ṣahihayn, and Muḥammad b. ‘Abbād al-Khilāfī (d. 652/1254) devoted a book to Muslim’s collection. It was not until the eighth/fourteenth century, however, that Ḥanafīs began using the Ṣahihayn to validate ḥadīths. Writing in the Chagataied and Ilkhanid Mongol realms of Iran and Central Asia, ‘Alā‘ al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ʿAḥmad al-Bukhārī (d. 730/1329-30) employs them briefly but effectively in his Kashf al-asrār (Revealing the Secrets), a commentary on the Ḥanafī usūl treatise by Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Bazdawī of Samarqand (d. 482/1089). Responding to criticisms that one of the transmitters of a ḥadīth he uses was weak, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz retorts that al-Bukhārī “is a pillar to be followed in that science [of ḥadīth], the imām of that craft, so his including that [ḥadīth] suffices as proof of its authenticity (ṣiḥḥa)....” The author thus leaves his readers no doubt about the legitimating power of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣahih. In general, however, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s Kashf al-asrār makes very limited use of the Ṣahihayn in this manner.

By the time scholars like al-Bayhaqi and Ibn al-Farrā’ were putting the Ṣahihayn canon to use as a measure of authenticity, Imāmī Shiism had taken crucial steps in articulating its doctrine and outlining its sources. In 329/940 the twelfth imām’s absence

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55 For his biography, see Ibn Abī al-Wafā’, al-Jawāhir al-mudīyya, 2:428.

56 Al-Anṣārī, Fath al-bāqī, 76.
was declared permanent, and leadership in the community fell into the hands of scholars pending the imām’s return. The collections that would become the Imāmi ḥadīth canon had all been produced: Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī’s (d. 329/940) al-Kāfī, Ibn Bābawayh’s (d. 381/991) Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīḥ and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 460/1067) two works, al-Tahdhib and al-Istibšār.57

In the same period, tensions between Imāmī Shiites and Sunnis rose markedly with the rise of Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī power in Egypt and Syria, the terror wreaked by the Ismāʿīlī assassins, and the impending threat of the sect’s missionary activities in the central Islamic lands of the Seljuq Empire. For the Imāmī Shiite minorities living in the Karkh district of Baghdad or in the great Iranian cities of Rayy and Naysābūr, being identified with the Ismāʿīlī threat presented a constant danger. Imāmī scholars like Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū al-Rashīd b. ʿAbd al-Jalīl Abī al-Ḥusayn Qazvīnī (d. ca. 560/1165) thus expended great efforts in trying to both defend Imāmī doctrine in the face of Sunni critiques and educate Sunnis on the important differences between their own, Imāmī school and the Ismāʿīlīs.

Imāmī Shiites like Qazvīnī did not identify with Sunni ḥadīth collections at all, for they considered the Companions on whom collectors like al-Bukhārī had relied most heavily, such as Abū Hurayra, to be brazen liars.58 Nonetheless, the authority that the Ṣaḥīḥayn commanded within the Sunni community provided Qazvīnī with an important


tool for defending his school. His *Ketāb-e naqḍ* (The Refutation) represents a comprehensive effort to validate Imāmī doctrine and practice in Sunni eyes as well as to educate his readers on the trenchant differences between Imāmī and Ismā'īlī Shiites. Qazvīnī frequently cites famous Sunni works such as al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr* as proof texts, obliging Sunnis to heed “one of their own imāms.” ⁵⁹ In response to Sunni accusations that Shiites rely on weak ḥadīths and lies, he says that they are narrated via reporters who are mostly “Sunnis” and “Ḥanafīs” and are to be found in the books of these “two sects (fāriqayn).” Qazvīnī adds that the Sunni ḥadīth scholars (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) accept many of these reports.⁶⁰

Qazvīnī often refers to the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the umma and of the ḥadīth scholars in his arguments for Shiite stances.⁶¹ Responding to Sunni criticisms of Shiite claims that ʿAlī was the first person to ever have that name, he invokes as evidence the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and other books of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* that “are relied upon (keh moʾṭamad-ast).” Qazvīnī tells his opponents to “take up the ʿṢaḥīḥayn” and find the ḥadīth that says that ʿAlī’s name is written on the leg of God’s throne and on the doorway to Paradise as the brother of Muḥammad. Since both these structures existed before the creation of the world, ʿAlī is doubtless the first person to have been so named.⁶²


⁶¹ For example, see Nāṣir al-Dīn Qazvīnī, *Ketāb-e naqḍ*, 557.

⁶² Nāṣir al-Dīn Qazvīnī, *Ketāb-e naqḍ*, 576-8. Neither of these two ḥadīths actually appears in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* or the other Six Books: “I saw on the night I was taken up to the heavens, inscribed on the leg of the throne and the doorway of Paradise, ‘The garden of Eden was planted by the hands of Muḥammad, the
The Șahihayn and other respected Sunni hadith collections also provided the later Imāmī theologian of Baghdad, Rādī al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Mūsā Ibn Țāwūs (d. 664/1266), with authoritative proof texts to use against Sunnis. In his study of Ibn Țāwūs’s library, Etan Kohlberg states that he possessed copies of the Șahihayn “for polemical pro-Alid traditions included in them....” He also relied on Muḥammad b. Futūḥ al-Ḥumaydī’s (d. 488/1095) combination of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collection, al-Jamʿbayn al-Șahihayn, as a more convenient source.63

There can be no quantitative comparison between al-Bayhaqī’s overwhelming employment of the Șahihayn canon to validate his ḥadīths and the more limited use of Ibn al-Farrā’, al-Māwardī, al-Bājī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bukhārī or Qazvīnī. In general, these scholars employed the Șahihayn canon only sparingly. Unlike al-Bayhaqī and other students of al-Ḥākim, their work does not overflow with authorizing references to al-Bukhārī and Muslim. As ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz’s reverential invocation of al-Bukhārī’s authority and al-Bājī’s explicit referral to the community’s consensus on the Șahihayn demonstrate, however, these scholars were aware of the Șahihayn canon’s etiology and utility even if they only invoked it occasionally.

VI.5. b. Bolstering Formative Texts

Although al-Bayhaqī had used the canon to comprehensively buttress Shāfi‘ī substantive law in the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the remaining three Sunni madhhabs followed very different paths in their recourse to the Sahihayn to bolster their formative hadīth or legal texts. Their approaches to the canon for this purpose would depend on either the nature of their formative text or their attitude towards the Sahihayn canon itself.

It was only at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century that Ḥanbalī scholars like Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223) started to seriously reinforce the hadīths used in elaborating their school’s substantive law by takhrīj through al-Bukhārī, Muslim and other products of the sahiḥ movement. In his commentary on the Ḥanbalī formative legal text, al-Khiraqī’s Mukhtasar, Ibn Qudāma mentions that one of his goals in explicating Ibn Ḥanbal’s madhab is the takhrīj of the hadīths al-Khiraqī had used as proof texts. He states that he will cite them “from the books of the imāms from among the scholars of hadīth, so that [these reports] might inspire trust in what they indicate, and to distinguish between the authentic and flawed [reports], so that what is well-established can be relied upon and what is unknown can be abandoned.”

The task of undertaking takhrīj on the school’s most prominent hadīth collection, Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad, daunted scholars for centuries. The sheer inertia of Ibn Ḥanbal’s massive work has thwarted almost every scholarly attempt to systematically evaluate the authenticity of its contents or make the work more accessible. The Musnad consists of over forty thousand narrations (thirty thousand excluding repetitions) and clearly contains

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a great deal of material that does not warrant a *ṣaḥīḥ* rating. Discussions over its authenticity have thus generally revolved not around the question of whether the *Musnad* was totally reliable, but on whether or not its more lackluster narrations ever reached the level of fatal weakness or forgery. Because a systematic analysis would be a titanic feat, claims on this matter were often mere guesswork. Al-Dhahabī attempted to cast the *Musnad* in a good light by optimistically asserting that there are only a “few (*qāliḥ*)” hadiths found in the *Sāḥiḥayn* that do not appear in the *Musnad*. He could not conceal the questionable status of the rest of the book’s contents, however, and added that one should not take the *Musnad’s* contents as proof (*ḥujja*) because it has many reports that are too weak and even forged. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī (d. 806/1404) also listed numerous hadiths from the *Musnad* that they believed were clearly forgeries.

It was not until the career of al-‘Irāqī’s student Ibn Ḥajar (a Shafi’ī) that a scholar succeeded in performing at least a preliminary *takhrīj* of the contents of Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*. This feat, however, was only subsidiary to Ibn Ḥajar’s primary purpose in the work: rendering the *Musnad* more accessible to scholars by compiling a huge index (*astrāf*) of its contents. He did note, however, in which other main hadith collections Ibn Ḥanbal’s material appears, identifying al-Bukhārī and Muslim, among others, to bolster the authenticity of the *Musnad’s* hadiths. Ibn Ḥajar tackled the issue of authenticity in

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the Musnad more directly by writing a rebuttal of al-'Irāqī’s list of nine forged ḥadīths found in the work, often referring to al-Bukhārī and Muslim to back them up.67 In theory, the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon would have proven extremely useful to Mālikī efforts to bolster their school’s formative text, Mālik’s Muwatta’. The feat that al-Bayhaqī performed for ḥadīths supporting the Shāfi‘/Ash’arī school, al-Bājī’s student Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) accomplished for the Muwatta’.68 The Cordovan scholar’s gargantuan Kitiāb al-Tamhid li-mā ǧ fi al-Muwatta’ min al-ma ānī wa al-masānīd, twenty-four printed volumes, constitutes a comprehensive commentary on Mālik’s magnum opus. In addition to discussing the legal, doctrinal and ritual implications of the material contained in the Muwatta’, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr attempts to establish the text in the language of the ṣaḥīḥ movement. Because the Muwatta’ predated the exclusive focus on Prophetic ḥadīths and uninterrupted chains of transmission emphasized by the ṣaḥīḥs and sunan books, the work’s large number of Successor opinions and incomplete isnāds compromised its strength as a ḥadīth reference. Ever a fly in the ointment, the Zāhīrī maverick Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) thus attacked the Mālikī opinion that the Muwatta’ was the best ḥadīth book by listing it as thirty-first in his own ranking of thirty-six books. He placed it well below collections containing only Prophetic reports, amid books that mix “the words of the Prophet with those of others.”69

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67 See, for example, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Qawl al-musaddad fi al-dhabb ‘an al-Musnad li’l-imām Ahmad, 39.

68 Al-Bājī himself produced a larger commentary on the Muwatta’ from which he drew his Muntaqūt. This larger text dealt with Mālik’s isnāds more than the abridgement; Abd al-Rauf, “Ḥadīth Literature,” 280.

69 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 3:231. It is interesting that Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012), one of the first scholars to take Sahih al-Bukhārī to the Maghrib, compiled a
Oddly, although Ibn 'Abd al-Barr had the Ṣaḥīḥayn, the Sunans of Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā‘ī and other ḥadīth collections at his disposal, he made little use of them in bolstering Mālik’s reports. In fact, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr rarely resorts to takhrīj at all. On only a handful of occasions throughout the work does he refer to major ḥadīth collections. Instead, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr relies on his own mastery of the criteria established by “those requiring authentic ḥadīths” in their compilations” to rate and reinforce material in the Muwāṭṭa’. Each narration discussed in the Tamhīd begins with a rating such as muttaṣīl musnad (extending to the Prophet with an uninterrupted isnād) or musnad sāḥīḥ (extending to the Prophet, authentic). Occasionally Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr reiterates the strength of Mālik’s ḥadīths with statements such as “this ḥadīth is authentic, its authenticity agreed upon by all” or “musnad muttaṣīl according to the people of knowledge.” In the case of mursal reports (those in which a Successor quotes the Prophet without citing a Companion) and other defective chains of transmission, the author musters sound ḥadīth narrations to support them.


71 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr occasionally notes that a ḥadīth was included by al-Nasā‘ī, Abū Dāwūd, or al-Bukhārī. For examples, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Tamhīd, 3:265; 4:194-5; 5:227, 253.

72 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Tamhīd, 1:12.

73 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Tamhīd, 6:17; 8:11.
Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s contribution proved formidable. He found complete isnāds for all except four of the ḥadīths in the *Muwatta*’ that had lacked them. It was not until two centuries later that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, a Šāfi’ī by allegiance, succeeded in reinforcing the remaining four ḥadīths. In his *Risāla fi waṣl al-balāghāt al-arba*, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ argues that al-Bukhārī and Muslim included a ḥadīth conveying the same meaning as Mālik’s report, “*Innī la-ansā aw unassā lā asunn* (indeed I forget or am caused to forget, [but then] I do not create sunna),” and finds narrations from the Six Books for the three other ḥadīths. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s work and the final addition of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ elicited so much confidence among Mālikīs that the famous Egyptian commentator on the *Muwatta*, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Baqī al-Zurqānī (d. 1122/1710) stated unequivocally, “The truth is that the *Muwatta*’ is *ṣaḥīḥ* with no exceptions.” The twentieth-century Mauritanian scholar of the *ṣalībat*, Muḥammad Ḥabīb Allāh al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1944 CE) exclaimed that there was now “no difference between al-Bukhārī and the *Muwatta*.”  

Yet why did Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Bājī, and other early commentators on the *Muwatta*’ such as Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabī (d. 543/1145) not employ the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon to

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75 Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Baqī al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ Muwatta‘ al-imām Mālik*, 5 vols. ([Cairo]: Matba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1381/1961), 1:13. We will see below that this claim exceeded even those made about the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, where some exceptions were made for flawed hadīths. Some earlier figures such as the Ḥanāfī al-Mughūlī (d. 762/1361) brought the *Muwatta*’ to the same level as al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* not by praising the former but by denigrating the latter. Al-Mughūlī states that the ta’īq hadīths in al-Bukhārī’s book are far more compromising than Mālik’s incomplete isnāds; ibid., 1:12.

systematically validate Malik’s reports?77 Al-Bukhari’s Sahih could certainly have proven invaluable for this task, for Malik’s transmissions in the Muwatta’ furnished perhaps the largest single source for al-Bukhari’s work. No fewer than six hundred (35.3%) of the Muwatta’s narrations appear in the Sahih.78 The answer to this conundrum may lie in that very fact: Malik realized that the Sahihayn were effectively built upon the Muwatta’. To use the Sahihayn to shore up Malik’s work would thus be circular, tantamount to referring to a reproduction to prove the worth of an original.

Indeed, Malik frequently cited early reports of al-Shafi’i saying, “There is no book after the book of God most high that is more useful (anfa’) than the Muwatta’ of Malik,” or of the great Basran hadith critic ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Mahdi (d. 198/814) saying, “We know of no book in Islam after the book of God most high that is more authentic (asahih) than the Muwatta’ of Malik.”79 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr sets forth this myriad praise of the Muwatta’ in the introduction to his Tamhid, adding other reports such as ‘Abdallah b. Wahb’s (d. 197/813) statement that “whoever has copied (kataba) the Muwatta’ of Malik need write nothing more on what is permissible and forbidden (al-halal wa al-haram).”80

Among Malik’s, the Muwatta’ was thus the true foundation of the sahih movement on which later masterpieces like the Sahihayn were built. Abū Bakr b. al-

77 In his commentary on the Muwatta’, Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabi frequently uses the Sahihayn as well as other famous sunans such as that of al-Nasā’ī for takhrīj of hadiths he mentions in his comments, but not to back up the hadiths of Malik himelf, see Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabi, Kitāb al-qabas fi sharh Muwatta’ Malik b. Anas, ed. Muhammad ‘Abdallāh Walad-Karim (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1992).

78 Fuad Sezgin, Buhārī’nin Kaynakları, 305.


80 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, Kitāb al-tamhid, 1:78. For the other quotes praising the Muwatta’, see ibid., 1:76-79; cf. al-Qāḍī Iyād, Tartīb al-madārik, 1:191.
‘Arabī states in the introduction of his commentary on al-Tirmidhī’s Jāmi’ that al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ “is the second basis (aṣl) in the realm [of ḥadith], but the Muwāṭṭa’ is the first basis (aṣl al-awwal), and on them have been built all others” such as the collections of Muslim and al-Tirmidhī.81 Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ thus speaks of the Muwāṭṭa’ and the Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as “the three mother-books (aṣl al-awwal),” “the authentic collections of reports (āthār) that have been agreed upon as foremost throughout the ages, and that the scholars have accepted in all the rest of the regions (ṣāʾir al-amsār).” These works are “the usūl of every aṣl… and the principles of the sciences of traditions (mabādi’ ʿulūm al-āthār).”82

Like Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, neither al-Bājī nor Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī’s commentaries on the Muwāṭṭa’ make use of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon to support the authenticity of Mālik’s material. Rather, al-Bājī exudes confidence in the foundational role of the Muwāṭṭa’ and the unanimity of the community’s approval of Mālik’s ḥadīths. He admits, for example, that Mālik’s report about ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar’s never attending Friday prayer without perfuming and anointing himself with oils lacks a ṣaḥīḥ isnād (i.e., it does not extend back to the Prophet). But al-Bājī argues that this is unnecessary, since the umma had acted on this ḥadīth and “accepted it with consensus (talaqqathu biʾl-qubūl).” The report thus enjoyed a guarantee of authenticity far beyond that provided by a mere ṣaḥīḥ isnād.83


83 Al-Bājī, al-Muntaqāʾ, 1:203.
As with their late recourse to the *Sahihayn* canon in debate and exposition, it was only in Mamluk Cairo of the eighth/fourteenth century that Ḥanafīs turned to al-Bukhārī and Muslim to bolster their school’s formative legal and ḥadith texts. With the exception of al-Mawṣilī and al-Khilāfī in the seventh/thirteenth century, only at this time did Ḥanafī ḥadīth scholars begin systematically studying and employing the *Sahihayn*. ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān Ibn al-Turkmānī (d. ca. 747/1347), a Ḥanafī judge in Egypt, was a prominent teacher of al-Bukhārī’s *Saḥiḥ*; even Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī numbered among his students.84 Another Ḥanafī teacher of al-‘Irāqī’s in Cairo, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Abdallāh b. Qalīj al-Mughūltāy (d. 762/1361), wrote a famous commentary on *Saḥiḥ al-Bukhārī*.85 It was Ibn al-Turkmānī’s students, however, who first systematically employed the *Sahihayn* canon to legitimize major Ḥanafī ḥadīth collections.

Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Ibn Abī al-Wafī (d. 775/1374) served as a Ḥanafī muftī in Mamluk Cairo and eventually produced the most comprehensive biographical dictionary of the Ḥanafī school.86 In a personal addendum to this dictionary, Ibn Abī al-Wafī explains how he was assigned the task of validating Ḥanafī ḥadīths using canonical collections. His teacher Ibn al-Turkmānī had been approached by a Mamluk amīr who, like most of the Turkish military elite, subscribed to the Ḥanafī madhhab.87 This amīr evidently enjoyed debating issues of religious law with


scholars from an opposing school, probably the dominant Shāfiʿī madhhab, but had consistently stumbled before his adversaries’ demands for his hadith sources. The amīr would reply, “We have the book of [Abū Ja’far] al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933),” but complained to Ibn al-Turkumānī that “if we mention a hadith from it to our opponents they say to us, ‘We will not listen to anything except what is in al-Bukhārī and Muslim....”’ Ibn al-Turkumānī replied to the amīr, “Most of the hadiths in al-Ṭahāwī are [also] in al-Bukhārī and Muslim or the Sunans [of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Mājah], and other books of the hadith masters (huffāz)....” The amīr thus asked him to find citations for all of al-Ṭahāwī’s material based on those books. In typical scholarly manner, the judge replied, “I do not have the time for that, but I have someone from my students (ashābī) who can do it.” Ibn al-Turkumānī handed the task to his son, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Māridīnī, who then assigned it to a younger student: Ibn Abī al-Wafī’.88 Provided with reference books from the amīr’s own library, Ibn Abī al-Wafī’ proceeded to supplement the contents of al-Ṭahāwī’s Sharḥ maʿānī al-āthār with narrations from “well-known hadith books (al-kutub al-mashhūra), namely the Ṣaḥīḥayn, the Four Sunans as well as other musnads, detailing what is authentic, acceptable or weak.”89

Although Ibn Abī al-Wafī’’s finished work, al-Ḥāwī fi bayān āthār al-Ṭahāwī, occasionally refers to other works, such as Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ, it is inclusion in the Ṣaḥīḥayn in particular, or meeting al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards, that furnishes the author’s principal means for validating al-Ṭahāwī’s hadiths. Indeed, Ibn Abī al-


Wafā’ bends the Ṣahīḥayn canon to maximum use. Even when a hadith appears with a chain of transmission not approved by al-Bukhārī or Muslim, Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ asserts that “the basic text (aṣl) of the hadith is in the Ṣahīḥayn.” Conversely, if the text of one of al-Tahāwī’s hadiths does not appear in the Ṣahīḥayn but its isnād does, he states that “its isnād is an isnād from the Ṣahīḥayn.” Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ proves even more flexible in employing the legitimizing power of the canon: if one narrator in the isnād did not earn a place in al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s works, Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ still insists that “the rest of the isnād is men of the Ṣahīḥayn.” He also makes use of al-Ḥākim’s application of “the requirements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” in the Mustadrak to authorize reports, sometimes declaring in his own opinion that certain hadiths meet the conditions of the Shaykhayn.

The task of reinforcing the hadiths cited in one of the Ḥanafi school’s leading legal references, the Ḥidāya of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Abū Bakr al-Marghīmānī (d. 593/1196-7), fell to another of Ibn al-Turkumānī’s students: ‘Abdallāh b. Yūsuf al-Zayla’ī of Cairo (d. 762/1361). A friend and colleague of the Shāfi‘ī Zayn Dīn al-ʻIraqī, al-Zayla’ī’s Naṣb al-rāya fi takhrīj aḥādith al-Ḥidāya stands out as one of the most clear


91 Ibn Abī al-Wafā’, al-Ḥāwī, 1:50, where it occurs twice.

92 Ibn Abī al-Wafā’, al-Ḥāwī, 1:61, 142

93 Ibn Abī al-Wafā’, al-Ḥāwī, 1:49, 64, 75, 85, 120. He notes, for example, that “al-Ḥākim narrated through him [Fahd b. Sulaymān] in his Mustadrak, so he meets the requirements of the Shaykhayn.”

and accessible works of ḥadīth literature.95 The great Indian Ḥanafi ḥadīth scholar of Cairo, Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791), later performed the same service for a selection of ḥadīths on which Ḥanafīs had historically relied for deriving law (aḥkām). In his Kitāb ʿuqūd al-jawāhir al-munīfa, he states that he will validate these ḥadīths by showing their narrations in the Six Books.96

Why did the Ḥanafīs begin employing the canon almost three centuries after their Shāfīī counterparts? With al-Ḥākim’s Mustadrak and the declarations of his associates from the Shāfīī/Ashʿarī and Ḥanbalī/über-Sunni camps, the Ṣaḥīḥayn emerged as authoritative texts within the transmission-based community. The Ḥanafī school, however, constituted the bulk of the reason-based school to which the transmission-based scholars remained in steadfast opposition. Just as ḥadīth scholars like al-Bukhārī and al-Ḥākim had condemned Ḥanafīs for departing from the Prophet’s true sunna, so did the Ḥanafīs like Abū Muṭṭī Makhlūl al-Nasafi (d. 318/930) consider the ahl al-ḥadīth brainless literalists, capable of merely parroting the Prophet’s words but not of understanding his message.97

This Ḥanafī contempt for transmission-based scholars tainted the school’s view of al-Bukhārī. This comes as no surprise in light of the muḥaddith’s virulent criticism of

95 Ibn Ḥajar did a second-generation takhrīj on the Hidāyah after he had finished with his takhrīj of al-Raḍī’s sharḥ of al-Ghazzālī’s Wasīṭ upon the request of some Ḥanafī students; see Ibn Ḥajar, al-Dirāya fi takhrīj ahādīth al-Hidāyah, ed. ʿAbdallāh Hāshim al-Yamānī al-Madānī (Cairo: Māṭbaʿat al-Fajjāl al-Jadīda, 1384/1964), 10.


Abū Ḥanīfa in his *Kitāb rafʿ al-yadayn* and his general criticism of the reason-based school in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. In the chapter on the issue of milk-relationships (*riḍā*) in his mammoth work of Ḥanafi substantive law, the famous Ḥanafi jurist and legal theorist al-Sarakhsī (d. ca. 490/1096) produces an amazingly insulting story about al-Bukhārī. He tells how al-Bukhārī upheld the opinion that if two children drink milk from the same ewe they would become milk-siblings, prohibited from one day marrying one another (*ḥurmat al-riḍā*). When the great *muḥaddith* supposedly visited his native Bukhara and began answering the legal questions of its citizens, the leading Ḥanafi of the city, Abū Ḥaḍīr Aḥmad b. Ḥaḍīr (d. 217/832), told him that he was unqualified to give expert legal opinions. Al-Bukhārī ignored him and continued to answer questions. When someone asked about the issue of drinking milk from the same ewe, the people found al-Bukhārī’s response so preposterous that they expelled him from the city.

It goes without saying that al-Bukhārī probably did not espouse this opinion and that the story is apocryphal; earlier sources make clear that al-Bukhārī’s expulsion from Bukhara came at the *amīr*’s orders at the end of his life, and at any rate, Abū Ḥaḍīr died before al-Bukhārī reached full maturity.98 The story, however, provides a somewhat comic foil for al-Sarakhsī, who proceeds to explain that if two youths drink the milk of the same animal they would in no way become milk-siblings. The milk-sibling relationship is analogous to kinship, and just as humans cannot be related to animals, so

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98 Also, al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* lacks a chapter on milk-relationships (*al-riḍā*). He covers the topic in four subchapters in the book on marriage, but makes no claim about animal’s milk; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, 9:174. On al-Bukhārī’s expulsion from Bukhara, see above, Chapter 3, n. 59.
that relationship cannot be established by an animal’s milk. Over two hundred years later, the Ḥanafi legal theorist Abū Barakāt ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) reproduced the same insulting story to prove a fundamental principle in the Ḥanafi school: “a ḥadīth scholar who is not a jurist (al-muḥaddith ghayr al-faqīḥ) errs often.” In other words, only specialized jurists are qualified to derive laws from Prophetic traditions. Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ includes the same story about al-Bukhārī in his Ḥanafi biographical dictionary, al-Jawāhir al-mudīyya.

Ḥanafīs seem to have maintained a skeptical distance from the Šaḥīḥayn canon into the eighth/fourteenth century. Yet it was an inescapable feature of the scholarly environment with which they had to come to terms. As his account of how he came to apply the Šaḥīḥayn canon to a Ḥanafi ḥadīth collection suggests, Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ was responding to outside polemical pressures rather than acting on any reverence for al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s work. In fact, Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ reveals a deep cynicism towards the canonical culture surrounding the two collections. Discussing how Shāfi’īs assert the authenticity of a ḥadīth that al-Ṭahāwī had declared weak by arguing that it is included in Muslim’s Šaḥīḥ, Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ states that Shāfi’īs “cannot show off [the ḥadīth] (yatajawwahuna) to us because it comes from Muslim, for [many] things appear in Muslim, and showing it off does not bolster [their position] in situations of conflicting [narrations] (iṣṭīḍām).” Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ then embarks on what may be the lengthiest


101 See n. 99 above.
and most comprehensive existing enumeration of the types of flaws appearing in the Șahîhayn, detailing consistently weak chains of transmission as well as the problematic texts of certain ƙaɗîths. Referring to Abû Zur‘a al-Râzî’s warning to Muslim upon reading his Șahîh, Ibn Abî al-Wafā’ concludes, “God bless Abû Zur‘a, for he spoke the truth.” In Ibn Abî al-Wafā’’s opinion, the Șahîhayn had indeed “made a path for the people of bid‘a” and been bent to polemical and partisan purposes.\footnote{Ibn Abî al-Wafā’, \textit{al-Jawāhir al-muфиyya}. 4:565-69.} A more playful contempt for the canon appeared in the career of a slightly earlier Ḥanafî ƙaɗîth scholar who visited Cairo, Shams al-Dîn Maĥmûd b. Abî Bakr al-Kalâbâdî al-Bukhârî (d. 700/1300). When this scholar would see a handsome youth, he would play on his own name (al-Bukhârî) and say “that is șahîh according to the requirements of al-Bukhârî.”\footnote{Ibn Abî al-Wafā’, \textit{al-Jawâhir al-muфиyya}. 3:455. Invoking religious idiom in homoerotic literature was common; see J.W. Wright Jr., “Masculine Allusion and the Structure of Satire in Early ‘Abbâṣîd Poetry,” in \textit{Homoeoticism in Classical Arabic Literature}, ed. J.W. Wright Jr. and Everett K. Rowson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 10.}

\section*{VI.5. c. Misuse of the Șahîhayn Canon}

The authority that the Șahîhayn or the “requirements of al-Bukhârî and Muslim” carried in debates was very alluring. In the time before standardized texts and easily accessible indices, and long before searchable databases, knowing the exact contents of capacious ƙaɗîth collections like the Șahîhayn proved impossible to all but the most accomplished scholars. Both among the less masterful of the scholarly class and less literate segments of society, it was difficult to restrain the legitimizing authority of the
Sabīhayn to the actual contents of the books. It was tempting to claim that a ḥadīth supporting one’s position had met al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s standards.

Qazvīnī had made a valiant attempt to defend Ḥumāmī beliefs by claiming that certain pro-ʿAlid reports were included in the Sabīhayn. Unfortunately, the ḥadīths he cites stating that ʿAlī’s name is written on the leg of God’s throne or above the doorway to Paradise are nowhere to be found in the two collections, nor do they appear in any of the Six Books, as was mentioned above.104 This overstepping of the boundaries of the canon was not limited to non-Sunnis who may not have been well-acquainted with Sunni ḥadīth collections. The prominent Cairene Ḥanafī Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Ḫubaydallāh al-Ardabīlī (d. 875/1471) approached the Shafīʿī ḥadīth scholar Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) with a list of ḥadīths the status and citations of which he was unsure. In the majority of al-Sakhāwī’s responses in his book al-Ajwība al-ʿāliyya ʿan al-asʿila al-Dimyāṭīyya, the scholar replies that the ḥadīths have been falsely ascribed to some ḥadīth collection or critic. Seven ḥadīths had been falsely cited from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, eight from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and three from al-Tirmidhī’s Jāmiʿ.105

104 See n. 62.

VI.6. 2. The Need for an Authoritative Reference: The *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and Non-Ḥadīth Specialists

The *Ṣaḥīḥayn* met a second important need exhibited by the Sunni community in the mid-fifth/eleventh century: that of a common authoritative ḥadīth reference for non-specialists. This need stemmed from an increasing division of labor between jurists and ḥadīth scholars in the mid-fifth/eleventh century. With the establishment of madrasas in cities like Baghdad, Naysābūr and Merv in this period, a space had been created that primarily emphasized the study of law (*fiqh*) as opposed to the pietistic or scholarly transmission of ḥadīths. Unlike the transmission-based scholars of al-Bukhārī’s time, who had compiled their *musannafs* as expressions of their own legal thought, many of the mid-fifth/eleventh century denizens of the madrasas lacked expertise in ḥadīth criticism. Although Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī had been sought out as a ḥadīth scholar, legal theorist and theologian alike, two generations later Shāfī’ī scholars like al-Shīrāzī and al-Juwaynī were focusing more narrowly on elaborating substantive law, theology and legal theory. As al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) noted in his letters, the breed of jurists who were also masters of ḥadīth criticism had all but died out. Legal scholars needed to turn to established ḥadīth collections with widely respected standards in order to validate their legal stances or ḥadīths.

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The role of the *Sahihayn* as an authoritative reference was embryonic in al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī’s work, where he proffered the *Sahihayn* as a protective canopy for authentic Prophetic reports.\(^\text{108}\) In his lengthy treatise on *usūl*, the *Sharḥ al-luma‘*, al-Shīrāzī builds on this theme in an attempt to meet the jurists’ needs. He explains that Shāfi‘ī jurists accept ḥadīths from “senior ḥadīth scholars (*kibār ʾashāb al-ḥadīth*)” without research or question. Like a judge trusts a witness once he has proven his reliability, so can jurists trust the authenticity of these critics’ material. Al-Shīrāzī mentions al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and Yahyā b. Ma‘īn as examples, as well as major jurists who had also mastered ḥadīth, such as Mālik and Ibn Ḥanbal.\(^\text{109}\)

The articulation of this need for authoritative references and the suitability of the *Sahihayn* to meet it appear most clearly in discussions on the office of *muftī* (jurisconsult, a term often conflated with *mujtahid*), the legal expert from whom the population sought rulings. In his description of the necessary qualifications for a *muftī*, al-Shīrāzī states that he must possess a command of the four sources of Islamic jurisprudence: the Qur’ān, the Prophet’s sunna, consensus and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). In terms of the sunna, the *muftī* must know which ḥadīths to accept and which to reject. But al-Shīrāzī exempts the *muftī* from the requirement of mastering the intricacies of *iṣnād* or ḥadīth criticism, for “if we made knowing that ḥadīth by its *iṣnād* obligatory for each *mujtahid*, this would lead to great difficulty, for that requires a lifetime.” Instead, a *muftī* should rely on “the *imāms* of the *ʾashāb al-ḥadīth*” like al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Dāraquṭnī and

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Abū Dāwūd. A contemporary Shāfi‘ī in Nāṣābūr, Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Sam’ānī, (d. 489/1096), lists “the relied-upon books” for such purposes as the Sāhīḥ of al-Bukhārī first and foremost, then that of Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī, the Mustakhraj of Abū ʿAwāna and finally the Sāhīḥs of Abū ʿAbbās al-Daghūlī and Ibn Ḥībbān.111

Al-Ghazālī concurs, stating that a muftī or mujtahid must rely on critical collections of ḥadīths that distinguish between authentic and unreliable material.112 When working with ḥadīths that have been accepted as authentic by the umma, one need not scrutinize their chains of transmission (lā ḥāja bihi ilā al-nāzar fī isnādihi). The muftī should thus follow al-Bukhārī and Muslim in the evaluation of narrators, since these two critics only narrated from those whose uprightness (‘adāla) they had established. Al-Ghazālī cautions that if one does not defer to following these two experts on issues of isnād evaluation, one would have to master that science oneself. He adds, “This is a tall order (tawfīq), and is, in our time, with the massive number of intermediaries (wasā‘if) [in the chains of transmission], very difficult (ʿasīr).”113

In his discussion of the requirements for a muftī in the Ḥanafi school, ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Bukhārī echoes this division of labor and reliance on canonical ḥadīth collections. Like al-Shīrāzī, he requires the mujtahid or muftī to have command of the sunna and know the ḥadīths dealing with legal rulings (ḥadīth al-aḥkām). The jurist,

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110 Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, Sharḥ al-tuma‘, 2:1033-4.
112 Al-Ghazālī, al-Manṣūh, 459.
however, need not memorize this material. Rather, he must have at his disposal a vetted copy (āsl muṣahhah) of one of the ahkām ḥadīth collections such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim or Abū Dāwūd as a reference.\textsuperscript{114}

Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī expresses the same opinion for the Mālikī school. He states that those who have achieved the expertise necessary to critically examine ḥadīths can evaluate reports on their own, just as al-Bukhārī and Muslim did. “But he who has not achieved that condition,” he adds, “must follow those two [al-Bukhārī and Muslim] for ḥadīths he claims to be authentic, pausing (tawāqquf) at what they did not include in their Sahīhs.”\textsuperscript{115}

It is at this point that the split in the ḥadīth tradition initiated by the Sahīh movement again comes into focus. The canonization of the Sahīhayn and their use as measures of authenticity transformed them into institutions of authority in the Muslim community. This institutional role emerged as a counterweight to the focus on the chain of transmission as the sole vehicle for tying Muslim scholars to the hermeneutic authority of the Prophet’s words. The consensus of the umma on the Sahīhayn and their subsequent use as a reference in implementing the Prophet’s authority meant that books could replace the authoritative source provided by the living isnād. When al-Shīrāzī explains that jurists can replace a direct link to the Prophet and a mastery of evaluating its authenticity with reference books vetted and authorized for that purpose, he obviates the need for an intensive study of isnāds.


\textsuperscript{115} Al-Bājī, Abū al-Walīd Sulaymān b. Khalaf al-Bājī wa kitābuhu al-Ta’dīl wa al-tajriḥ, 1:310.
The diverging paths of the jurists and ḥadīth scholars becomes evident when we juxtapose al-Shirāzi’s discussion of *mufīṣ* with that of two of his Shafi‘ī contemporaries more rooted in ḥadīth study than legal theory or substantive law. In Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqi’s discussion of the *mufīṣ*’s requirements we find no mention of resorting to reference works. He merely repeats al-Shafi‘ī’s original requirement that a *mufīṣ* himself master the sources of legislation and know which ḥadīths to accept or reject.  

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi also repeats these fundamental requirements, stating that “a *mufīṣ* will not be able to [meet these requirements] unless he has been excessive (*akthara*) in writing the reports of the early generations and hearing ḥadīths.” The chasm separating him from al-Shirāzi widens further when al-Khaṭīb recounts, rhetorically no doubt, how Ibn Ḥanbal required someone to know at least five hundred thousand ḥadīths before he could act as a *mufīṣ*.

The most dramatic step in proposing the ʿṢaḥīḥayn as institutions of authority to which scholars seeking to evaluate ḥadīths could turn came almost two centuries later, with the work of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245). By Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s time, Muslims no longer compiled massive collections of ḥadīth with living *isnāds* back to the Prophet, like al-Bayhaqi’s *Sunan*. In a time when the critical rigor of giants like al-Bukhārī seemed to be fading into history, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ pondered how jurists or even ḥadīth scholars should evaluate previously unrated ḥadīths they came across in the course of study or debate. He argued that, “If we find some report in a ḥadīth notebook that seems to have a ʿṣaḥīḥ isnād

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but is neither in the _Sahihayn_ nor indicated as _sahih_ in a book of the relied-upon, well-known _imams_, we do not dare insist that it is authentic (_lā natajāsaru 'alā jazm al-ḥūkm bi-ṣīḥhati_).” Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s call rested on his belief that ḥadīth transmission in his time had deteriorated so much from the rigorous standards of yesteryear that ḥadīth scholars were no longer able to trust their transmissions from earlier sources. Consequently, “knowing the ḥasan and _sahih_ depended on the _imams_ of ḥadīth having specified this in their well-known, relied-upon works that... have been preserved against alteration and scribal error (ṭahrīf).” “Most of what is sought out from the _isnād_ circulating [today],” he concludes, “falls outside this pale.”

Beginning with his follower al-Nawawī, scholars understood Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s position as calling for an end to the evaluation of ḥadīths in favor of a total reliance on _sahih_ collections.

This dramatic call to equate all _sahih_ ḥadīths with the contents of the _Sahihayn_ and other _sahih_ books embraced the jurists’ need for authoritative references at the expense of the ḥadīth scholars’ methodology. The function of the two books as

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118 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, _Muqaddima_, 159-60.

119 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ probably meant that one could no longer declare ḥadīths transmitted by living _isnāds_ and not found in major collections authentic. As for ḥadīths found in earlier compilations that included reports of various levels of reliability, such as al-Ṭabarānī’s _Muṣjam_, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ was probably not arguing against ruling on the authenticity of this material. It was in this sense, however, that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s comments were understood from the time of his follower al-Nawawī on. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) devoted a small treatise to this subject, entitled _al-Tanqīḥ fi maṣ’alat al-taṣḥīḥ_, in which he clarified Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s statement but then proceeded to himself declare an end to the authentication of ḥadīths due to the inability of later scholars to conduct proper ‘ila critcism. See the edited text of this treatise in Badīʿ al-Sayyid al-Lahḥām, _al-Imām al-ḥafṣ al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī wa jihāduhu fi al-ḥadīth wa ‘ulūmihi_ (Damascus: Dār Qutayba, 1415/1994), 460-3.

120 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ states that one could also find _sahih_ ḥadīths in the books of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī and al-Dāraquṭnī, but that one could not assume that all their contents were authentic, since this was not the criterion of their compilers. _Sahih_ books, however, such as that of Ibn Khuzayma, could provide this security; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, _Muqaddima_, 163-4.
authoritative institutions therefore emerged as a source of tension between scholars whose chief affiliation was to the study of law and others who focused more on ḥadīth. Although Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ was first and foremost a Shāfi‘ī ḥadīth scholar, as his efforts to eliminate the last vestiges of doubt from the Muwatta’ suggest, his interests lay in strengthening scholarly institutions. His call indeed amounted to declaring the victory of the authoritative institution of the saḥīh book over the living isnād. Reacting with predictable tension to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s argument, almost all later ḥadīth scholars understandably rejected the notion that they were unqualified to independently evaluate ḥadīths; as Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī explained, “this was the ḥadīth scholars’ job.”

What emerged as a consensus among scholars in the wake of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s provocative claim was a balance between the jurists’ needs for authorized institutions housing the Prophet’s legacy and the ḥadīth scholars’ focus on the living isnād as the link to his authority. The Sahihayn would serve as the primary reference for non-specialists, while qualified ḥadīth scholars could continue evaluating material they came across. Ibn Ḥajar thus instructs jurists who are browsing through a musnad or sunan work but are not ḥadīth experts to refer to the Sahihayn to see if a report is authentic or not. If al-Bukhārī or Muslim did not include the report, one should see if some other imām declared it authentic. Other ḥadīth scholars, like al-Nawawī, al-Bulqīnī (d. 805/1402-3) and Ibn al-Wazīr seconded the notion that those who have the expertise must independently

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122 Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 149.
evaluate isnāds, but those who do not must rely on the Sahīhayn, their mustakhrajs and ilzāmāt works. 123

The role of the Sahīhayn as a reference for non-specialists evaluating the reliability of Prophetic reports had profound implications for pietistic literature: if a ḥadīth had earned al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s stamp of approval, one need not provide an isnād when citing it. The Shāfi‘ī ḥadīth scholar Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), dubbed “the Reviver of the Sunna (Mubyf al-sunna),” demonstrated how the Sahīhayn canon could simplify the use of ḥadīths in the religious life of regular Muslims. He explains that his most famous work, the pietistic manual Maṣābih al-sunna, is culled from the books of the great ḥadīth imāms to help people implement the Prophet’s sunna in daily life. The work is small and portable, for a very simple reason: al-Baghawī omits the contents’ isnāds. Instead, the author divides the ḥadīths in each chapter into two sections, “authentic (ṣiḥḥ)” and “good (ḥisān).” The authentic section consists only of reports from al-Bukhārī and Muslim, while the less reliable “ḥisān” ḥadīths come from the collections of al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā‘ī and other respected compilers. The reader thus relies on the source of the ḥadīths to know their reliability. Those coming from the Sahīhayn are considered automatically reliable, whereas al-Baghawī states that he will alert the reader to any weaknesses in the ḥadīths of the “good” section. 124

123 Ibn al-Wazīr, Tanqīḥ al-anzār, 40; see n. 121.

It is clear that in cities like Damascus in the early seventh/thirteenth century, inclusion in the Sahihayn exercised potent authority among the everyday Muslims al-Baghawi was targeting. Even the laity held the contents of the two works in unique veneration. A common citizen, for example, asked Ibn al-Salah for a legal ruling about the hadith “He who repents for a sin is like one without sin (al-ta’ib min al-dhanb ka-man la dhanb lahu),” inquiring whether or not it was in the Sahihayn and how it relates to the issue of that person’s legal competence.125 Of the twenty-one recorded requests that the Shafi’i prodigy al-Nawawi (who began his studies in the wake of Ibn al-Salah’s death and remained firmly within his orbit in hadith study), received from everyday citizens of Damascus asking if a certain hadith was authentic or not, the scholar employs the Sahihayn in four responses (most are negative).126 One questioner even inquires directly if the Sahihayn or other famous collections include any non-authentic hadiths. Al-Nawawi replies that all the hadiths of al-Bukhari and Muslim are authentic, while the Sunans of Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi and al-Nasa’i include varied levels of weak and sound hadiths.127

The referential role of the Sahihayn canon even facilitated the study of hadith among aspiring young students. Zayan al-Din al-Iraqi produced a manual using the Sahihayn in the same manner as al-Baghawi but designed it for students of hadith. In the

125 Ibn al-Salah, Fatwa’ Ibn al-Salah (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, [1980]), 19. Ibn al-Salah replies that the hadith was not in al-Bukhari’s or Muslim’s collections nor does it have a firm isnad (isnad thabit).

126 Al-Nawawi, Fatwa’ al-imam al-Nawawi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al’Ilmiyya, 1402/1982), 177-192. For example, one person asks about whether the hadith “la salat ii-far al-masjid illa fi al-masjid” is in the Sahihayn; ibid., 191.

127 Al-Nawawi, Fatwa, 177.
introduction to this book, his *Taqrīr al-asānīd fī tartīb al-masānīd*, al-‘Irāqī explains that he has collected a selection of ḥadīths for his son, since a student of ḥadīth needs to memorize a number of reports in order to dispense with carrying heavy loads of books. Since in his time chains of transmission had grown too long to have any significant number of one’s own living isnāds to the Prophet, al-‘Irāqī states that he has collected ḥadīths from the books of early scholars (*al-mutaqaddimun*). If the ḥadīth appears in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, he states, he provides no isnād, because its authenticity is “agreed on (*muttafaq ‘alayhi*).” If the report is not found in al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s works, he provides isnāds from other major collections. 128

VI.7. 3. The Need for an Exemplum: Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the Canon that Sets the Rule

Al-Bukhārī and Muslim were not just used to prove the authenticity of Prophetic reports, but also to authoritatively shape the study of ḥadīth. Just as the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon served as a trump card in debates over individual ḥadīths, so did scholars like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ employ it to elaborate the tenets of ḥadīth transmission, criticism and its applications in deriving law. As Stanley Fish notes in his discussion of the durability of literary canons, “If Shakespeare is on your side in an argument, the argument is over.” 129 In this sense both Shakespeare’s works and the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* are canonical in that they are standards that can be employed to set the rules of a genre. They


129 Fish, 12-15.
are the *kanûn* to be imitated, the exemplum in whose ingenious pages lie the methods of mastering a science. Aristotle thus employs Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in his exposition of the proper components and characteristics of epic poetry. Amid his discussion of how well Homer embodied excellence in this genre, he states, "Homer deserves acclaim for many things, but especially because he alone among [epic] poets is well aware of what he himself should do."130 For Aristotle, Homer's conscious mastery of his art provides the ultimate example for appreciating and writing epic. Homer's unparalleled methods themselves act as Aristotle's proof texts. As Fish realizes, a text thus becomes canonical when a community recognizes that it is the thing to which "all workers in the enterprise," or, in Aristotle's case, the genre, "aspire."131

Just as Aristotle invoked Homer, prominent architects of the ḥadîth tradition declared al-Bukhārī and Muslim the exemplum that sets the rule. Ibn Ḥajar states that "there is no doubt about the preeminence of al-Bukhārī and Muslim over both the people of their own time and those who came after them from among the *imāms* of that science in terms of knowledge of authentic and flawed ḥadîths...." If someone opposes their work or their judgment on authenticity, "there is no doubt that [al-Bukhārī and Muslim] supersede all others in this." "Objection," he adds, "is thus fended off from them globally...."132 Al-Ḥāzimī describes al-Bukhārī as the best of his time in ḥadîth collection and criticism, "and in light of the certainty of his station in these matters there is no way

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131 Fish, 12-15.

to object to him in that subject."\(^{133}\) Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) states that not even Ibn Khuzayma or Ibn Ḥibbān approach al-Bukhārī’s mastery. As the result of his consummate skill, in the vast majority (jumhūr) of instances in which someone criticized material that al-Bukhārī approved, “his [al-Bukhārī’s] opinion is more favored than those of his detractors.”\(^{134}\) Al-Maqdisī stated that the Ṣaḥīḥayn had become “proofs for the people of Islam (hujja li-ahl al-islām).” He claims that ḥadīth scholars since their time have thus focused on commenting on and studying the two books, since it is not possible to add anything more to that science (ṣanʿa).\(^{135}\)

One of the most obvious areas in which al-Bukhārī and Muslim impacted the rules of ḥadīth criticism was the definition of ‘authentic’ reports. Al-Baghawi testified to this when he equated the Ṣaḥīḥayn with authentic ḥadīths in general. One of the flaws that could undermine the authenticity of a ḥadīth was “irregularity (shudhūd).” The definition of ‘irregular (shādhdh)’ ḥadīths, according to the consensus of Sunni ḥadīth scholars by the eighth/fourteenth century, was a report that contradicted a more reliable source, such as a better-attested ḥadīth or a verse of the Qur’ān.\(^{136}\) Earlier scholars like al-Khalīlī, however, had defined shādhdh much more broadly, and thus more dangerously, as a report whose only flaw is that it is narrated through only one chain of

\(^{133}\) Al-Ḥāzimī, Shurūṭ al-a’imma al-khamsa, 59.

\(^{134}\) Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ al-fatāwā, 1:256.

\(^{135}\) Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, Kitāb al-jamʿ bayn kitābay Abī Naṣr al-Kalābādhī wa Abī Bakr al-Iṣbahānī, 2.

transmission. Here al-Khalili had followed his teacher al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, who wrote that shadhdh hadiths are those narrated by a trustworthy (thiqa) transmitter but whose text is not corroborated (asl mutaba') from his source. Later scholars such as Ibn al-Salah and Ibn Hajaj fiercely rejected al-Khalili's definition because it would compromise prevailing understandings of the definition for authentic hadiths. Ibn al-Salah uses two hadiths “included in the Sahihayn” that would fall under al-Khalili’s definition to prove that his definition was flawed. Ibn Hajaj underscores this objection, arguing that not even al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s methodologies could live up to what al-Khalili had proposed. Ibn Hajaj offers his final definition for sahh hadiths thus: “a report whose isnad connects to the Prophet via the narration of totally upstanding transmitters in command of what they transmit or, if not totally, supported by others like them, and is not shadhdh or afflicted with a flaw (mu'all).” Significantly, he immediately adds that he has tailored this definition specifically to al-Bukhari and Muslim. He explains: “I say this because I have considered many of the hadiths of the Sahihayn and have found that the ruling of sahh cannot be conferred upon them without this [definition].”

Al-Bukhari and Muslim were also frequently invoked as the exemplum that set the rules of selecting acceptable hadith transmitters. In his Kifaya fi ilm al-rivaya, al-

137 Al-Khalili, al-Irshad, 13. Here al-Khalili states that, contrary to al-Shafi’i’s opinion (and that of later orthodoxy), a shadhdh hadith is not one that disagrees with a more reliable source, but rather what “has only one isnad (laysa lahu illa isnad wahid)”; al-Hakim, Marifat ilm al-hadith, 148.


Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī states that the general practice among ḥadīth scholars is not to accept any criticism of a narrator unless the critic has explained the reasons for his objection. He proves this point by explaining that “this was the practice of the imāms from among the masters of ḥadīth and critics such as Muḥammad b. Iṣmāʿīl al-Bukhārī and Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī.” Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ follows al-Khaṭīb, invoking Muslim’s use of impugned transmitters, such as Suwayd b. Sā‘īd, and al-Bukhārī’s reliance on ‘Ikrima, Ibn ‘Abbās’s pro-Khārijite client.

The Ṣahīḥayn canon, however, was a double-edged sword that could be wielded by parties at odds with one another on the proper rules of ḥadīth criticism. The case of accepting reports from heretics (mubtadi‘) clearly illustrates this. Some early scholars like al-Shāfi‘i generally permitted narrating from them, while more strict critics condemned it. A middle ground formed with scholars like Mālik and Ibn Ḥanbal who accepted ḥadīths transmitted from heretics provided they were neither extremists nor proselytizers. The Shāfi‘i legal theorist of Baghdad, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Barhān (d. 518/1124), defended the Shāfi‘i school’s stance on the issue. He states that one can accept reports from all heretics except the extremist Shiites group the Khaṭṭābiyya and Shiites who rejected the first two caliphs (Rāfīda). As proof, Ibn Barhān invokes the

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140 Al-Khaṭīb, al-Kīfāya, 1:338.

141 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddima, 221.

142 For an informative summary of this, see al-Khaṭīb, al-Kīfāya, 1:384 ff.; Ibn Rajab, Sharh Ṣal al-Tirmidhī, 1:53-56.

143 For a discussion of the Khaṭṭābiyya, see W. Madelung, “Khaṭṭābiyya,” EI. Al-Dhahābī explains that al-Shāfi‘i had allowed narration from these groups because they allowed lying; al-Dhahābī, al-Muqīṣa, 85.

Ibn al-Ṣalāh, however, employs the Sahihayn canon to espouse what became the more strict mainstream opinion. Like Ibn Barhān, he states that rejecting the narrations of all heretics (mubtadīʿīn) is untenable because al-Bukhārī and Muslim rely on them in both their primary (ʿusūl) and auxiliary (shawāhid) ḥadiths. He adds, however, that the Sahihayn do not include proselytizing heretics, from whom transmission would be forbidden.\footnote{Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddima, 299-300.}

The Sahihayn canon did not only serve as an exemplum that could be employed to set the rules of ḥadith criticism. The two works could also be referred to in order to elaborate how Prophetic ḥadiths should be employed in deriving law. In his al-Wuṣūl ilā ʿusūl, for example, Ibn Barhān describes the case advanced by some Ḥanafī scholars for the broad acceptance of mursal ḥadiths in deriving law. Arguing against transmission-based scholars who generally considered a mursal ḥadith to be flawed due to the break in its isnād, these Ḥanafīs had supposedly claimed that the aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth had in fact accepted mursal reports. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, they argued, had even included many mursal ḥadiths in their Sahih.\footnote{Ibn Barhān, al-Wuṣūl ilā al-ʿusūl, 2:179.} This claim was, of course, highly erroneous. The
Sahihayn are certainly not replete with mursal hadiths, and Muslim himself specified that mursal hadiths were not acceptable proofs (hujja) in the introduction to his collection. 147

VI.8. The Limits of the Canon’s Authority: The Dialogic Power of the Sahihayn

The power of the Sahihayn canon stemmed from the assertion that the absolute authenticity of the hadiths they contained would validate one’s stance in argument or exposition. Although Abū Ishāq al-Isfahānī’s statement obliging scholars to rule according to the Sahihayn had allowed for the possibility of interpreting a hadith in a manner that could neutralize its legal import, this did not obscure the thrust of his declaration: ruling against a hadith from the two books was tantamount to breaking consensus. Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘ili and al-Juwaynī reinforced this claim by affirming the absolute authenticity of the two collections. Al-Ghazālī’s remark that a jurist must rule according to the Sahihayn or break with ijmāʿ merely represented the crystallization of this edifice of authority built around the Sahihayn in the first half of the fifth/eleventh century.

The power of the canon, however, was a façade that could only intimidate or convince those confronted with it from outside. It was an illusion conjured and maintained in the relative space between adversaries in the arena of debate, or between author and intended reader in expository writing. An individual Ḥanafi jurist or Ash’arī theologian felt no compunction about ignoring or rejecting a hadith from al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s books if it clashed with his own position. As the great Ḥanafi legal theorist

147 Muslim, Sahih, 1:24. This claim is so ludicrous that it is difficult to believe that any educated Ḥanafi would make it. It may be that Ibn Barhān was unwittingly engaging in a ‘straw man’ argument.
Abū al-Ḥasan al-Karkhī (d. 340/952) proclaimed, his default position (aṣl) is that any Qur'ānic verse or hadīth that “contradicts the stance of our school (aṣḥābinā) is assumed to have been either abrogated or set aside in favor of another (tuhmalu ‘alā al-naskh aw ‘alā al-tarjih).” Such policies led the Damascene scholar Ṭahir al-Jaza‘īrī (d. 1920) to note incisively, “The jurists interpret away (yu‘awwiliin) any hadīth that disagrees with their madhhab, or oppose it with another hadīth even if it is not well-known, even if that [first] hadīth is found in the Sahihayn.”

In general, it was not uncommon for Muslim scholars engaged in debate to insist on a rule in one context then invert it in order to defend their school’s stance in another. Ibn al-Jawzī, for example, adhered to the Ḥanbalī school that had led the campaign for the admission of āḥād hadīths in elaborating dogma as well as law. When responding to the Shiite claim that ‘Ā‘ishah was guilty of unbelief (kufr) for fighting ‘Alī, however, Ibn al-Jawzī changed positions diametrically. He argued that the hadīth Shiites cited as evidence for this, “You will fight him (i.e., ‘Alī) and you will be wrong (satuqatilfnahu wa anti ‘alima),” “is all by reports of limited attestation (āḥād),” and “is thus not epistemologically certain by this means (lā yuq.ta ‘u bi-mithlihi).”

Treatises on the legal theory reveal the Sahihayn canon’s limited existence in relative space. In general, uṣūl books from both the Ḥanafīs and the ‘Majority’ (al-jumhūr) school espoused by Shāfī‘īs, Mālikīs and most Ḥanbalīs offer nothing but silence

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about the place of the *Sahihayn* in Islamic epistemology. Even al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, a Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arī ḥadīth scholar very aware of the rhetorical power of the *Sahihayn* canon, reserves no place for it in his *Kitāb al-faqīh wa al-mutafaqqih* (Book of the Jurist and Law Student), a work designed to familiarize ḥadīth scholars with *ʿUsūl al-fiqh*. Although he notes that *ḥadīd* ḥadīths agreed upon by the umma yield certainty (*ʿilm*), he dismissingly relegates “the *sunan* and the *sahih* books (*siḥāh*)” to the category of reports that convey only probability (*zann*).\(^{151}\)

One of the few instances in which the epistemological standing of the *Sahihayn* is mentioned at all in an *ʿUsūl* work is a denial of any special status. Discussing the well-established fact that *ḥadīd* ḥadīths yield only probability, the Shāfi‘ī legal theorist Ibn Barhān (d. 518/1124) rejects the opinion of “some *ʾashāb al-ḥadīth*” who say that the authenticity of what is narrated in the *Sahihayn* is absolutely certain (*maqtūʿ bi-슈háthihi*).\(^{152}\) He explains that al-Bukhārī and Muslim were not infallible (*maṣūm ‘an al-シュhāta*), since ḥadīth scholars have criticized their work and found errors (*awhām*). If their works were epistemologically certain this would be impossible. Ibn Barhān further rejects any exceptional status for the *Sahihayn* by arguing that the only evidence supporting this claim, the acceptance of their ḥadīths by consensus, does not prove their absolute authenticity. The Muslim community accepted the two books because they felt that their contents were legally compelling; but not all that is legally compelling is

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\(^{151}\) Al-Khaṭīb, *Kitāb al-faqīh wa al-mutafaqqih*, 1:278.

absolutely authentic. Although Ibn Barhān attributes this opinion to more extreme transmission-based scholars, he is in effect demolishing the argument made by his fellow Shāfi‘ī/Ash‘arīs Abū ʿĪsāq al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Juwaynī. The irony of this situation lies, of course, in Ibn Barhān’s above-mentioned claim about narrating from heretics, where he invokes the umma’s agreement on the Ṣaḥīḥayn to prove his point. The power of the canon thus appears only in the dialogic space of debate and exposition. Even within the scope of one book like Ibn Barhān’s al-Wuṣūl, a scholar can wield the canon’s authority against opponents in one instance and then circumscribe it in other, less combative settings.

Although ignored or contested in ṣūl works, the source and degree of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon’s authority as originally declared by Abū ʿĪsāq al-Isfarāyīnī was finally properly acknowledged by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ in the seventh/thirteenth century. In several of his ḥadīth works, he states that the authenticity of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s ḥadīths “is absolutely certain, and epistemologically certain discursive knowledge (ilm yaqīnī nazarī) occurs with [them].” He exempts from this claim, however, that “small amount


154 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ went through several phases in his opinion on this issue. He states in his Mugaddima that he had originally believed that the ḥadīths of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, like all ẓāḥid reports, yield only probability (zann). Later he realized that the infallible consensus of the umma on the two works meant that what seemed like probability was in fact certainty. In this work and in his Ṣiyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ asserts this for the contents of both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, not just the ḥadīths that they both agreed on. His follower, al-Nawawī, tells us that in another (earlier?) work (juz’) Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ stated that the truthfulness of what al-Bukhārī and Muslim both included is absolutely guaranteed. Ibn Ḥajar quotes this from Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s lost sharḥ of Muslim; al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:128; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 112; see n. 155.
of material (ahru yasīra)" criticized by major scholars like al-Dāraquṭnī, since one could not claim consensus on its authenticity.155

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s claim proved a tempting foil for later hadīth scholars, who have devoted a great deal of energy to arguing for or against its validity. Those who have supported the notion that the contents of the Ṣaḥīḥayn yield certain discursive knowledge include prominent figures such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr, al-‘Irāqī, al-Bulqīnī, and the major formulators of the late Sunni tradition: Ibn Ḥājar al-‘Asqalānī, al-Sakhāwī, Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 926/1520) and Ibn Ḥājar al-Haythamī (d. 974/1597).156 More recently, modern scholars such as Khalīl Mullā Khāṭir have joined these ranks. Those who have disagreed with his claim have been far fewer in number: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s virtual disciple, al-Nawawī, his opponent al-‘Īzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 733/1333), and the Salafi maverick Muḥammad b. Iṣmāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1768).157

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s claim, however, has done little to earn the Ṣaḥīḥayn any special absolute status in Sunni epistemology. Although this discussion has attracted the attention of generations of hadīth scholars, it has not spread beyond the limited genre of the technical study of hadīth science (muṣṭalahāt al-ḥadīth). Usūl texts, treatises on

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155 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 85; idem, Muqaddima, 170-1.

156 Ibn Taymiyya, Majmāʿ fatawā; 1:25; 618:20; idem, Ilm al-ḥadīth, ed. Mūsā Muḥammad ʿAlī ([Cairo]: Dār al-Kutub al-Īslāmiyya, 1404/1984), 100; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bāṣīth ʿal-ḥadīth, 30; al-Bulqīnī, 172; Ibn Ḥājar, Nuzhat al-nazar, 29 (Ibn Ḥājar adds another qualification to this claim, namely that it only applies to what is in the Ṣaḥīḥayn but does not contradict their other contents); al-Sakhāwī, Fatḥ al-mughīth, 1:74 (he follows Ibn Ḥājar); al-Anṣārī, Fatḥ al-bāqī, 83-4 (he also follows Ibn Ḥājar); Ahmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajār al-Haythamī, al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Māṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1390/1970), 92.

madhhab law, theology or ḥadīth-based legal derivation (what is referred to as fiqh al-
sunna) rarely go beyond the established references to āḥād or mutawātir as
epitomization of classes for reports. The general inconsequence of the discussion
surrounding Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s statement is further revealed by the argument of his
opponents. Far from constituting any massive assault on the canon, al-Nawawī’s rebuttal
of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ actually affirms the canonical role of the Sahihayn. Like Ibn Barhān, al-
Nawawī (who is followed by Ibn Jamā‘a) only rejects the notion that the community’s
collective acceptance of the Sahihayn renders their contents epistemologically certain.
The fact of this consensus on the two works stands uncontested, as does their compelling
power in debate. Al-Nawawī affirms this; the special status of al-Bukhrā’i’s and
Muslim’s collections resides in the fact that their contents have been lifted above the need
for critical examination.  

The undeniable proof of the relative nature of the canon’s authority, however, lies
in the willingness of legal or theological schools to unhesitatingly ignore or criticize a
ḥadīth from the Sahihayn if it counters their positions. When this stems from a
disagreement over the interpretation of a ḥadīth, it entails no transgression of the canon’s
authority. The Ḥanafīs al-Sarakhsi and al-Nasafi had, after all, asserted that muḥaddiths
were not qualified to appreciate the true legal implications of their ḥadīths. On the
question of tasriya, or tying the udders of a milk-animal-for-sale in order to temporarily
increase its milk and attract buyers, Ḥanafīs rejected explicit reports from al-Bukhrā’i’s
Sahih discouraging the practice. While both al-Bukhrā’i and the Shāfi‘ī school followed a

158 Al-Nawawī, Sharh Sahih Muslim, 1:128.
ḥadīth that granted a buyer deceived by such a scheme the right to a refund and an amount of dates in compensation, Ḩanafīs held that the original sale was valid. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī explicitly states that this ḥadīth is authentic and found in the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Yet it contradicts juridical reasoning based on the Qurʾān and sunna and thus cannot be acted on. According to Ḥanafī jurisprudence, the Qurʾān and juridical reasoning dictated that a transaction only requires the health or good quality of the item sold (ṣalāmat al-mabīr). A paucity of milk does not compromise this.\(^{159}\)

The Mālikī Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī also asserted the jurists’ right to disagree with the legal implications of ḥadīths from the Ṣaḥīḥayn or their authors’ legal assumptions. He states that “al-Bukhārī is deferred to in the science of ḥadīth, but not in jurisprudence (‘ilm al-fiqh)....” Al-Bājī then refers to some of al-Bukhārī’s chapter titles to show how he did not derive the correct rulings from his ḥadīths and that he might even have sometimes hunted for proof texts to support his own legal opinions.\(^{160}\)

Not all rejections of ḥadīths from the Ṣaḥīḥayn, however, stemmed from differences in interpretation. Adherents of legal and theological schools sometimes actually criticized their authenticity. The Ḥanafī school, for example, rejected material from both Ṣaḥīhs if their narrations proved too problematic. Ḥadīths dealing with the

\(^{159}\) A sizable minority opinion within the Ḥanafī school, following the work of Ibn Abān, requires a narrator to have sufficient legal mastery of the material he transmits in order for his ḥadīth to supersede giyās. Abū Hurayra, who is the Companion who transmits this ḥadīth, is not considered so qualified. See, for example, al-Shāshī, ʿUsūl al-Shāshī, 272; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Aḥmad al-Bukhārī, Kashf al-ʿasrār, 2:381. For discussions of tasriya, see Ibn Ḥajar, Fath al-bārī, 4:458-60; al-Laknawi, Zafar al-amānī, 66. For this ḥadīth, known as ḥadīth al-muṣarrāt; see Fath # 2148; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-buṣū’; bāb al-naḥy li’l-bā’i’an lā yuḥṣif ila al-ibīl.

issue of the Prophet's prayer in the event of an eclipse (ḥadīth al-kusūf), for example, proved exceptionally difficult to reconcile with one another. When an eclipse surprised the Muslim community, the Prophet left his house and convened a public prayer. The ḥadīths detailing his prayer, however, disagree on the number of times the Prophet bowed (rukū'). The Ḥanafi ḥadīth scholar al-Zaylaʿī attempts to navigate the impossibly confused web of conflicting mātns for these ḥadīths in his Naṣb al-rāya, where he presents the contradictory reports from within the Sahihayn and the other Six Books. The most reliable version according to al-Zaylaʿī is that narrated by 'A'isha describing only one bow, while the others have two, three, four or five bows.161 As a result, the Indian Ḥanafi Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawi (d. 1304/1886-7) concludes that his school had abandoned the Sahihayn's ḥadīths on this issue, since they had "become grossly problematic (iḍṭaraba iḍṭirāb an fāḥishan)."162

Perhaps the most starkly partisan criticism of a ḥadīth in the Sahihayn, however, occurs at the hands of the Shafiʿī school that had played such an important role in canonizing the two works. Muslim includes a narration by the Companion Anas b. Mālik in which he states that he had prayed behind the Prophet and the first three Caliphs but had heard none of them say the basmala out loud. Shafiʿīs from the time of al-Dāraquṭnī and al-Bayhaqī criticized this narration from Sahih Muslim, which explicitly contradicted


162 Al-Laknawi, Zafar al-amānī, 400; al-Qanūbī, al-Sayf al-ḥādīd, 111. The Ḥanafis stuck with the "default in prayer (al-aṣr fi al-ṣalāt)" namely that rukū' occurs only once (al-tawāḥhud fi al-rukū').
the madhhab’s stance on the basmala. After a lengthy chapter in his al-Sunan al-kubra featuring hadiths showing that one should say the basmala aloud during prayer, al-Bayhaqi has a chapter on hadiths arguing the opposite. For each tradition (cluster of narrations) opposing his school’s stance, he finds some problem undermining its reliability. Al-Bayhaqi notes that the hadith of Anas (narrated via al-Awzā‘ī ← Qatāda b. Di‘āma) is featured in Sahih Muslim, and he mentions that this and several other narrations through Qatāda all have sections specifically saying that “I did not hear any of them say Bismillâh al-Rahmân al-Rahîm...” or “and they did not say [it]... out loud.”

Al-Bayhaqi rebuts these narrations, however, by arguing that others had narrated this hadith from Shu‘ba ← Qatāda ← Anas without the explicit negation of the basmala. Relying on al-Daraquzî’s opinion, al-Bayhaqi favors this latter version of the hadith, which al-Bukhârî includes in his Sahîh.163

Oddly, Ibn al-Salah literally uses Muslim’s narration through Anas as a textbook example of a flaw (illa) occurring in the text of a hadith, an example that became enshrined in the pedagogical Alfiyya poem that al-‘Irâqî composed for hadith students based on Ibn al-Ṣalah’s Muqaddima. Following the takhrîj ranking system, Ibn al-Ṣalah favored the version of the hadith agreed upon by both al-Bukhârî and Muslim, without Anas’s addition of “not one of them said [the basmala] out loud.” He further undermines Anas’s narration by citing one Sa‘īd b. Yazîd asking Anas about the basmala, to which

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163 Al-Bayhaqi, al-Sunan al-kubra, 2:73-76, kitâb al-salât / bâb man qâla lâ yajhāru bihâ; Sahîh al-Bukhârî: kitâb al-salât / bâb 240 / hadith #1; al-Bayhaqi, Ma‘rifat al-sunan wa al-a‘hâr, 1:524; al-Daraquzî, Sunan al-Daraquzî, ed. ‘Abdallâh Hâshim al-Madani, 4 vols. in 2 (Cairo: Dâr al-Mahâsin li’l-Tib‘a‘a, 1386/1966), 1:316. Al-Daraquzî does not note that any of these narrations appear in Sahîh Muslim, nor does he include this criticism in his Kitâb al-tatâbbu‘.
Anas replies, "indeed you have asked me about something on which I have memorized no [ḥadīths], nor has anyone before you asked." Later, prominent Shāfiʿīs such as al-ʿIrāqī, Ibn Ḥajar and al-Anṣārī followed Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s argument.

Scholars like Ibn Ḥajar could not conceal the clear partisan motivations for criticizing Muslim’s report and noted that opinions on its authenticity break down along madhhab lines between those who affirm saying the basmala out loud and those, like the Ḥanafis, who do not. As a Shāfiʿī, Ibn Ḥajar ultimately sided with Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s criticism of Muslim. His Ḥanafī nemesis in Cairo, Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī (d. 855/1451), consequently mocked him for rejecting a perfectly valid narration he would otherwise have considered authentic.

Leading Ashʿarī theologians such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī also severely criticized a ḥadīth appearing in both the Sunnah in which the Prophet prays for the forgiveness of the most flamboyant hypocrite (munāfiq) in Medina, the Khazraj leader Abdallāh b. Ubayy. Ibn ʿUmar narrates that when the Prophet went to pray over

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164 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddima, 261. Al-ʿIrāqī remarks how bizarre it is for Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ to use a ḥadīth from Muslim as an example of a flawed narration after asserting that everything in the Sunnah is absolutely certain. He justifiably explains this, however, by adding that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ had exempted from this claim material that had been criticized by great critics like al-Daraqūṭnī; al-ʿIrāqī, al-Taqyīd wa al-frjāl; 98.


the deceased 'Abdallâh's grave, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭâb objected. He reminded the Prophet that God had forbidden Muslims from praying for the forgiveness of hypocrites, referring to the Qur'ânic verse, "Pray for their forgiveness or do not pray, even if you pray seventy times God will not forgive them (Qur'ân: 9:80)." The Prophet replies that in the verse God had "given [him] a choice (khâyra navbarî Allâh)," and that he "will exceed seventy [times]."

This ḥadîth caused a great uproar amongst Ash'ârî theologians and legal theorists, because it implied that the Prophet felt that he could circumvent the command implicit in the verse, namely not to pray for hypocrites. Ibn Ḥajar explains that a number of prominent scholars had therefore attacked the authenticity of the ḥadîth despite its widespread narrations and the Shaykhayn's agreement on it. He quotes Nâṣîr al-Dîn Aḥmad Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284), who states that Abû Bakr al-Baqillânî said, "It is not possible to accept the ḥadîth or that the Prophet said it." In his Taqrib, al-Baqillânî supposedly said that "this ḥadîth is one of the āḥâd reports whose soundness (thubûtuhâ) is not known." Al-Juwaynî says in his Burhân that "the ahl al-ḥadîth have not deemed this sound." Al-Ghazâlî agrees in his Mustafa, asserting that "this is an āḥâd report

168 "Istâghfîr lahum aw lâ tantâghfîr lahum, in tantâghfîr lahum sabîna marraî fa-l'an yaghfira Allâhu lahum."  
169 I was unable to find the statement quoted by Ibn Ḥajar in al-Baqillânî's Kitâb al-tamhîd or the 1413/1993 Mu'assasat al-Risâla edition of his al-Taqrib wa al-îrshâd, Ibn Ḥajar, Fatîh al-bâtîr, 8:430-1.  
170 Al-Juwaynî, al-Burhân, 1:458.
(khabar wāḥid) that cannot be used to establish proof (ḥujja) for the implications of speech (fī iḥbāt al-lugha); besides, it is more probably (zahara) not saḥīh.”

Ironically, al-Ghazālī’s objection to this ḥadīth demonstrates the paradox of the Șahīḥayn canon and its restriction to relative space. Although he undeniably questions the authenticity of this ḥadīth in his Mustasfā, earlier in his Mankhūl he had defended it. There he insists that the Prophet’s actions in the ḥadīth neither compromised the truth of the Qur’ānic verse nor the reliability of the report. God had given him the choice to ask for forgiveness or not. Al-Ghazālī wrote his Mustasfā many years after the Mankhūl, and it is possible that he simply changed his opinion on the ḥadīth. Context, however, provides a more convincing explanation. The Mankhūl is generally a polemical work directed at the Ḥanafī school. In it, the ḥadīth about the Prophet praying for ‘Abdallāh’s forgiveness plays a role in the author’s defense of the Shāfī/Asḥārī notion of “mafhūm al-kalām,” or methods for deriving the indirect legal implications of a divine injunction. Specifically, al-Ghazālī is defending this notion against Ḥanafī critics who reject the authenticity of the ḥadīth and thus its applicability as evidence for mafhūm al-kalām, a type of proof considered invalid among Ḥanafīs. In his Mustasfā, a pedagogical tool written many years later after al-Ghazālī had sworn off debate and returned to teaching at

171 Al-Ghazālī, al-Mustasfā, 2:87. For my rendering of mafhūm and lugha, see Bernard Weiss, The Search for God’s Law, 117; Hallaq, A History of Islamic Legal Theories, 58.

172 Al-Ghazālī, al-Mankhūl, 212.

173 For a discussion of a Ḥanafī perspective on one of the dimensions of mafhūm al-kalām, dalīl al-khītab (i.e., the indirect implication from an injunction, so that if the Prophet says pay tithe on a certain kind of sheep one need not pay it on others), see Marie Bernard, “Ḥanafī Usul al-fiqh through a Manuscript of al-Ǧassās,” 628; Ahmad b. ‘Ali Ibn al-Saʾāfī (d. 694/1294-5), Nihāyat al-wusūl ilā ʿilm al-usūl, ed. Saʿd b. Gharīb b. Mahdī al-Sulamī, 2 vols. (Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1418-19/1997-99), 2:560 ff.
the Shafi'i/Ash'ari-dominated Naysabur Niẓāmiyya, he could comfortably question material that seemed to contradict the tenets of Ash'ari theory. As a young firebrand polemicist in Baghdad, however, the writer of the Mankhūl had to defend his Shafi'i school against its Ḥanafi opponents.

VI.9. Conclusion

In the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the Ṣahihayn canon stood ready to fulfill important functions for Muslim scholars in cities like Baghdad and Naysābūr. Studied extensively by the Ṣahihayn Network, focused by al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī into a measure of authenticity and authorized by scholars like Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī, Abū Naṣr al-Wāʾilī and al-Juwaynī, the Ṣahihayn provided an important convention for scholarly debate and exposition. In a time when the legal discourse of the madrasa was drifting farther and farther from the specialized study of ḥadīth, the two works became the most authoritative ḥadīth references for jurists more narrowly focused on law. Whether used in polemics or to buttress the proof texts relied on by a particular school in the language of a common convention, the Ṣahihayn served as the measure of authenticity for prominent Shafi`is, Ḥanbalis and Mālikis from the mid-fifth/eleventh century on. In the eighth/fourteenth century even the ḥadīth-wary Ḥanafi school found itself grudgingly forced to adopt the common measure of authenticity. The canon’s authority, however,

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174 For al-Ghazālī’s oath never to engage in debate again, see Brown, “The Last Days of al-Ghazzālī,” 95.

was not absolute. It was a collaborative illusion summoned to provide common ground among rivals. Alone, within a particular legal or theological school, the authoritative edifice of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s ḥadīths collapsed before interpretive differences or partisan agendas.

The vaunted station of the two books, however, was not simply due to the declarations of scholars like al-Isfarāyīnī or al-Wā’īlī. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works consistently bested other respected collections used for takhrīj by meeting the highest levels of excellence established by the Sunni ḥadīth tradition as it reached its full maturity between the fifth/eleventh and seventh/thirteenth centuries. Implicit in this success, however, lay the potential for serious tension surrounding the place and role of the Sahihayn canon. Although scholars attempting to systematize the Sunni study of ḥadīth like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ often employed the Sahihayn as the exemplum that set the rule, the Sunni ḥadīth tradition operated according to rules external to the two books. As exemplified by the reaction to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s attempt to replace the living isnād with the Sahihayn, here lay the seeds of tension between the continuing practice of ḥadīth critics and the institution of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. If the canon was to maintain its air of compelling authority in the arena of discourse, a canonical culture would have to be forged to extend the two books the charity required to reconcile this tension.
VII.
THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY AND THE CREATION OF CANONICAL CULTURE

VII.1. Introduction

By the end of the fifth/eleventh century, the Sahihayn had become synonymous with authenticity in Sunni discussions of the Prophet's legacy as well as an exemplum of excellence in hadith scholarship. The institution of the canon, however, faced potent challenges from two different fronts. First, the pre-canonical past of the two works was fraught with fissures. The initial negative reactions to the Sahih movement, al-Bukhari's checkered career and the fact that Naysaburi scholars had ranked Muslim's collection above that of al-Bukhari all threatened the stability of the canon. Second, there existed inconsistencies between al-Bukhari's and Muslim's work on the one hand and the conventions of hadith criticism on the other. In the post-canonical world, these inconsistencies created a tension between the institution of the canon and the Sunni hadith tradition as it matured fully in the early seventh/thirteenth century.

To protect and maintain the canonicity of the Sahihayn would require reconciling the canonical vision of the two works and the personas of their authors with both their pre-canonical past and the external rules of hadith scholarship. This would entail reading the texts of al-Bukhari and Muslim according to the Principle of Charity, which calls for interpreting a text in the best possible light in order to bring into harmony external
notions of truth and those presupposed within the text. Just as Davidson described the Principle of Charity’s function in speech communities, so would participants in elaborating Sunni scholarly culture treat the texts of al-Bukhārī and Muslim with charity “in order to preserve a reasonable theory of belief” in the canon.¹

The worldview that demands the extension of charity to canonical texts can be termed the books’ canonical culture. It is the environment created and cultivated by the community to which the canon is bound, by an audience that recognizes that “canonizing a text... requires a commitment to make the best of it.”² Canonical culture rereads history and text to reconcile them with canonical authority. The saga of al-Bukhārī and Muslim can thus be viewed as a process of creating and maintaining the Sahihayn canonical culture, which emerged with the canonization of the two works in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries. The earliest surviving elaboration of the canonical culture consists of the image of al-Bukhārī and Muslim forged by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071). The personas of the two scholars that he crafts in his Tārikh Baghdād established the dominant themes of the Sahihayn canonical culture: the place of al-Bukhārī, Muslim and their works at the pinnacle of ḥadīth scholarship; the vindication of al-Bukhārī from the scandal of the created lafẓ; al-Bukhārī’s superiority to Muslim; and the simultaneous complementary relationship between the two. Even after constructing the Sahihayn canonical culture, however, generations of scholars would resort to interpretive gymnastics and editorial revisions of history in order to maintain it.

¹ Davidson, 196.
² Halbertal, 28.
Mirroring the canonical culture established around the personas of al-Bukhārī and Muslim was the extension of charity to the texts of the Sahihayn themselves. Both before and after their canonization, the collection and criticism of hadith functioned according to rules that were external to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works. As the Sunni hadith tradition became increasingly systematized with the writings of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, and even more so with those of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), the conventions of hadith scholarship emerged as an institution with which the canon stood in potential tension. Examining the issues of obfuscation in transmission (tadlis) and the criticism of transmitters, we shall see that the Sahihayn sometimes fell short of the established standards of hadith scholarship. Preserving the authority of the canon thus depended on charitable interpretations of the works that exempted them from these rules.

Divergences between the methods of the Shaykhayn and other hadith critics had manifested themselves concretely in critiques of the Sahihayn, such as that of al-Dāraquṭnī. Protecting the canonical culture would thus require three of its great proponents, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar, to employ the Principle of Charity and their mastery of the hadith tradition to resolve these outstanding criticisms of the canon.

VII.2. The Beginnings of Canonical Culture: Between 390-460 / 1000-1070

From the evidence available, the canonical culture surrounding the Sahihayn seems to have emerged in Baghdad in the period between al-Dāraquṭnī’s career in the mid- to late fourth/tenth century and that of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi in the mid-
fifth/eleventh. Considering the direct relationship that Halbertal posits between the canonicity of texts and the charity with which they are treated, it is no surprise that the construction of a canonical culture surrounding the *Sahihayn* began at the same time as the emergence of the canon itself. Between approximately 390/1000 and 460/1070 the hadith-scholar environment in Baghdad transformed from one open to criticism of the *Sahihayn* to a canonical culture that demanded the extension of charity to al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Although Ibn ‘Ammār al-Shahīd, al-Ismā‘īlī and al-Dāraqūtni had all exhibited profound interest in al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections, they had no compunction about criticizing the *Sahihayn* if they felt their authors had erred. Neither did these fourth/tenth-century scholars feel obliged to qualify or apologize for such critiques. Their evaluations merely represented an aspect of scholarly interest in the *Sahihayn*, two works that did not differ ontologically from any other hadith book. Only after their canonization had endowed al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections with an authoritative role and significance for communal identification did criticizing the works or their authors pose any threat.

The construction of the *Sahihayn* canonical culture first becomes evident in the work of al-Dāraqūtni’s student Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī (d. 401/1010-11), a member of the Baghdad knot who penned a work defending *Sahih Muslim* against some of al-Dāraqūtni’s criticisms. His *Kitāb al-ajwiba* (Book of Responses) might have been nothing more than an exercise in objective scholarship: al-Dāraqūtni had made certain criticisms that Abū Masʿūd believed were incorrect. In the work, however, it becomes immediately clear that Abū Masʿūd’s agenda bears far more significance: he aims...
primarily at exonerating Muslim’s scholarly legacy from any sort of blame. Even when he admits that al-Dāraquṭnī’s critiques are correct, for example, he tries to shift the blame away from Muslim to transmitters in the isnād. “And as for attributing the oversight to Muslim among the others, no...,” he states in one case. In two instances of inappropriate Addition, Abū Mas‘ūd admits that al-Dāraquṭnī was correct in objecting to Muslim’s inclusion of the narration. He defends Muslim, however, by saying that he did not have the correct version at his disposal. If he did, he would have taken it instead. In three instances he argues charitably that Muslim included the problematic version only to demonstrate its flaw.

Abū Mas‘ūd’s defensiveness about Muslim’s work stands in stark contrast to al-Dāraquṭnī’s impartial study. At one point in the Kitāb al-ajwiba, al-Dāraquṭnī criticizes a narration noted by Muslim but acknowledges that the scholar ultimately decided to leave it out of his Sahīh. For al-Dāraquṭnī, whose scholarly interest lay in identifying flawed narrations regardless of where he found them, this was still worthy of note. Abū

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3 Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwiba; 152, 321.

4 Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwiba; 168, 212.

5 Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwiba; 159, 180, 188.

6 Yet we know that Abū Mas‘ūd also criticized some narrations in Sahīh Muslim in his Aṭrāf al-Sahīhayn. These criticisms, however, seem to have been restricted to Muslim’s auxiliary narrations (mutābā‘ī ‘ā/-shawā‘ī) or to have been citations of earlier criticisms such as those of al-Dāraquṭnī. On one such occasion, Abū Mas‘ūd vaguely notes a “disagreement” on one of five auxiliary narrations Muslim provides for his two principal narrations of a hadith in which the Prophet tells his followers not to kill an enemy if they have professed faith in Islam. In another case Abū Mas‘ūd follows al-Dāraquṭnī in criticizing one of Muslim’s narrations for omitting a transmitter. These criticisms are preserved in the surviving elements of al-Dimashqī’s Aṭrāf and also in Abū ‘Alī al-Ghashānī al-Jayyānī’s al-Tanbīh ‘alā al-awhām al-wāqi‘a fī Sahīh al-imām Muslim. See, al-Jayyānī, al-Tanbīh ‘alā al-awhām al-wāqi‘a fī Sahīh al-imām Muslim, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl (Rabat: Wizarat al-Awqāf, 1421/2000), 69 (Sahīh Muslim: kitāb al-imām, bāb taḥrīm qat‘ al-kāfir ba‘da an qāla lā a’ilāh illā Allāh), 76. See also, Abū Mas‘ūd al-Dimashqī, Aṭrāf al-Sahīhayn; 3b, 26b.
Mas'ūd, however, objects angrily, "So if he left it out, what is the meaning of attributing error to him [Muslim] in this!?"

Within a few decades of al-Dāraquṭnī’s death the charity called for by Abū Mas'ūd had become expected. In Baghdad, the canonical culture surrounding al-Bukhārī in particular seems to have gelled by approximately 450/1060. The writings of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī indicate a prevailing expectation of charity in discussing al-Bukhārī’s works among ḥadīth scholars. Al-Khaṭīb composed a book dealing with the overall problem of mistaken identities in biographical dictionaries of ḥadīth transmitters, titling it Kitāb mūđīḥ al-ja'm ʿwa al-tafrīq (The Book of Clarifying Errors of Conflation or Distinction). Although this work criticizes a whole slew of ḥadīth scholars, al-Khaṭīb opens the book with a mistake made by al-Bukhārī in his al-Tārīkh al-kabīr. He follows this with a fascinating statement:

It may be that some people who read these lines will assume the worst of us, believing that we intend to impugn our predecessors, exposing the faults of our venerable shaykhs and the scholars of yesteryear. Far from it, for by the beams of their light do we see, and by following in their clear footsteps do we distinguish [truth from falsehood]. Indeed, it is by their well-worn path that we circumvent error. Our relationship to them is nothing more that what Abū ‘Amr b. ‘Alāʾ (d. 154/771 or 157/774) said (he gives isnād): ‘Compared to those who have come before us, we are nothing but a tiny root on the base of a great date palm.’ Indeed, when God creates luminaries among men and raises up a leader for each community, he requires those whom they guide to adhere to the truth that they illuminate. [Yet] God obliges those who stand by the truth and follow in their footsteps and are blessed with understanding to illuminate what [earlier scholars] neglected and to correct their oversights. This, because [these earlier scholars] were not immune to mistakes and were not totally protected from the ugly face of error. This is the right of the learned scholar over the student, and the obligation of those who follow to those who precede. We hope that this apology will be clear to whomever

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7 Abū Mas'ūd al-Dimashqī, Kitāb al-ajwība, 264.
comes upon our book, the *History of the City of Peace* (*Tārīkh Baghdad*)..., for in it we have presented, from among the virtues of al-Bukhārī, material sufficient enough to clear away any suspicion of our opinion of him as well as any accusations concerning our correcting his errors....”

Al-Khaṭīb continues with a quote from al-Muzānī, saying, “If a book were looked over seventy times there would still be a mistake in it, for God has not permitted that any book be *ṣaḥīḥ* except His Book (i.e., the Qurʾān).” He quotes Ibn Ḥanbal’s son ʿAbdallāh as saying, “I read a book to my father [for checking] thirteen times, and on the fourteenth time he came up with a mistake, so he put the book down and said, ‘Indeed I have denied that any book could be perfectly correct (*yaṣīḥḥa*) except the Book of God most high.’”

Al-Khaṭīb’s tortured apology for even minor criticisms of al-Bukhārī’s identification of ḥadīth transmitters reflects an intense anxiety over reactions to his work and the powerful canonical culture that evidently surrounded the scholarly persona of al-Bukhārī by that time. Al-Khaṭīb’s homily invoking the sacred duty of scholarly vigilance, phrased in the idiom of the ḥadīth student’s pietistic reverence for his teachers, represents an effort to counterbalance the charity the author feels he is expected to show al-Bukhārī. By referring his readers to the formidable accolades he grants al-Bukhārī in his *Tārīkh Baghdad* (whose biography is perhaps the longest of any figure in the work), al-Khaṭīb seeks to placate potential critics by calling their attention to his contribution and obedience to the canonical culture. Read against the grain, al-Khaṭīb’s agonized preemptive defense suggests a scholarly atmosphere totally different from the one in which al-Dāraquṭnī, a fellow Shāfiʿī of Baghdad, had freely criticized al-Bukhārī less

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than a century earlier. When students asked him about several dozen transmitters from
the Sahihayn that al-Nasâ'i (d. 303/915) had criticized, al-Dâraqûtnî bluntly seconded
most of al-Nasâ'i's evaluations.10 Although al-Dâraqûtnî's Kitâb al-tatabbu 'contains
serious and substantive criticisms of the Sahihayn, its author felt no need to justify or
apologize for his critique.

We cannot be sure of exactly whom al-Khaṭîb was so wary in his minor criticisms
of al-Bukhârî. We know that he faced consistent intimidation from the Ḥanbalîs, from
whose ranks he had defected and who publicly questioned his transmission-based Sunni
allegiance.11 Considering the ferocity with which the Shâfî 'Abû Mas'ûd al-Dimashqî
had defended Muslim's Sahih, however, we can easily imagine that al-Khaṭîb's fellow
Shâfî hadith scholars in Baghdad may have aroused his concern just as much as the
Ḥanbalîs. Because we do not know when al-Khaṭîb wrote the Kitâb müdiḥ al-awhâm, we
cannot precisely date the context in which he was writing any time before his death in
463/1071. Based on the absence of any apologies in al-Dâraqûtnî's critique of the
Sahihayn, the vehemence of Abû Mas'ûd's eventual rebuttal of his teacher and finally al-
Khaṭîb's writing, we can conclude that in Baghdad a canonical culture arose around the
Sahihayn between 390/400 and 460/1070.

VII.3. The Character of the Canonical Culture: Al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî and
Defining the Personas of al-Bukhârî and Muslim

10 See al-Dâraqûtnî, "Dhikr aqwâm akhrajâ lahum al-Bukhârî wa Muslim fi kitâbâyimâ wa
ḍa'afahum al-Nasâ'i," MS Ahmet III 624, Topkapî Sarayî, İstanbul: fols. 253a -254b.

11 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-huffâz, 3:225.
The canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim is a question of how the Muslim community has viewed these two scholars’ legacies. Their historiographical personas thus form as much a part of the text of the canon as their actual books. The extent to which Islamic civilization has identified the Șahīhāytn with their authors is illustrated by their agency in the formulaic statement “al-Bukhārī/Muslim included it...” or equating the works with their compilers in common phrases such as “the ḥadīth is in Muslim.” Indeed, the skill, piety and critical rigor of the two scholars served as the basis on which their authority was founded. Questioning al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s judgment or devotion to the Prophet’s legacy thus constituted a threat to the Șahīhāytn canon itself. Although al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s apology did not even involve al-Bukhārī’s Șahīh per se, the idea of criticizing that expert’s judgment in his al-Tārīkh al-kabīr proved sufficiently alarming to prompt an apology.

Al-Khaṭīb’s biographies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim provide our earliest extant expressions of the canonical culture surrounding the Shaykhaytn. As al-Khaṭīb himself informs us, he intended his biography of al-Bukhārī in the Tārīkh Baghdād to describe the scholar with the proper reverence. Although al-Khaṭīb’s brief biographies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as well as fragments of al-Ḥākim’s entries have survived, the Tārīkh Baghdād offers us the earliest complete and, indeed, self-conscious expression of the Șahīhāytn canonical culture. The majority of biographies in the Tārīkh Baghdād consist only of reports from earlier sources that al-Khaṭīb presents through their isnāds. As a result, his role in crafting al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s biographies is that of an editor who
constructs an image of the two scholars by choosing selectively from the vast pool of historiographical raw material about them.

Like all later Sunni biographers, al-Khaṭīb freely ladled out hyperbolic descriptions of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s virtues, as well as those of other great scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal. There was never a dearth of praise for the guardians of the faith. Al-Khaṭīb therefore leaves the reader with no doubt as to al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s prodigious memories, piety or mastery of hadīth. What concerns us here is not the mere quantity of positive evaluations, however, but rather the picture that such praise paints, the contours of the personas it shapes or the unspoken problems it intends to address. A canonical culture must reconcile the history that was with the history that should have been. The culture that al-Khaṭīb elaborates thus directly addresses the most prominent issues in the saga of the Sahīhayn: the proper relationship between the Shaykhayn and the greatest generation of their teachers, appropriately acknowledging the accomplishments that the Sahīhayn presented, al-Bukhārī’s scandal of the laft of the Qurʾān, and the proper ranking of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

We have seen the problem that al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s superlative scholarship presented for the atavistic logic of the ḥadīth-scholar community in the tale of al-Bukhārī plagiarizing his Sahīh from his teacher. Scholars such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Rāmahurmuẓī did not perceive the Sahīhayn or their authors as superseding the greatest generation of Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Maʿīn and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī. It was not until the writings of Ibn Manda (d. 395/1004-5) that al-Bukhārī, Muslim and the saḥīḥ movement as a whole
began to be seen as the pinnacle of the ḥadīth tradition. The Ṣaḥīḥayn canonical culture would have to correct this imbalance.

Al-Khaṭīb’s treatment of al-Bukhārī and Muslim thus leaves little doubt about their superiority over their teachers. He cites one Ahmad b. Abī Bakr al-Madīnī as asserting that al-Bukhārī possessed better legal acumen (afqāh) and was more perceptive (abṣar) than Ibn Ḥanbal. When someone objects to this provocative statement (as al-Khaṭīb’s reader might), al-Madani replies, “If you looked at al-Bukhārī and Mālik you would see they were the same in juristic knowledge and ḥadīth.”

Ahmad b. Naṣr al-Khaffāf is quoted as saying that al-Bukhārī is more knowledgeable than Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh and Ibn Ḥanbal by twenty degrees. Ahmad b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Bukhārī, the great scholar’s grandson, heard his grandfather say that he did not humble himself (istṣaṣghara) in the presence of anyone except ‘Ali b. al-Madīnī, but admitted that “perhaps I still mentioned ḥadīths he did not know (ughāribu ʿalayhi).”

Al-Khaṭīb relies on a narration through al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī from Muslim’s colleague Ahmad b.

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Salama, who saw “Abū Zur‘a and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī place Muslim before the shaykhs of their time in the knowledge of authentic ḥadīths.”

In the case of al-Bukhārī, his disgrace at the hands of the über-Sunnis in the laffz scandal had tarnished his name in the eyes of prominent architects of the ḥadīth tradition, such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī. The narrative constructed by al-Khaṭīb, however, is one of vindication in which al-Bukhārī righteously stood by what would become the orthodox position on the Qur‘ān. As the Shāfi‘i/Ash‘arī al-Subkī later explains, “Every reasonable person knows that our wordings are from among our deeds, and that our deeds are created, and that thus our wordings are created.” Al-Bukhārī’s contemporary Muḥammad b. Khushnām is invoked as a witness that al-Bukhārī denied the accusation that he believed the Qur‘ān itself was created, insisting instead that the acts of men are created. He states that he will not change his position until proven wrong. For al-Bukhārī, certain of the truth of his position, “the complimenter and the detractor are the

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16 For the Ash‘arī exposition of this stance, see al-Bayhaqi, Kitāb al-asma‘ wa al-sīṣār, 2:17 ff.; al-Juwaynī, Textes apologetiques de Guwaini, ed. and trans. Michel Allard (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1968), 146. By the mid-fifth/eleventh century even moderate Ḥanbalīs, such as Ibn al-Farrā’, acknowledged that the wording of the Qur‘ān was created; Ibn al-Farrā’, al-Masā‘il al-‘aqdīyya, 77 ff. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā’s biography of al-Bukhārī includes a report that does not uphold this image, but rather has al-Bukhārī telling Ibn Ḥanbal that anyone who says that the laffz of the Qur‘ān is created is a “Jahmi kāfir.” This is almost certainly an early Ḥanbalī attempt to exonerate al-Bukhārī, since his Khaliq q‘al al-‘ibād leaves no doubt that he did in fact believe that the wording of the Qur‘ān was created; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila, 1:259.

17 Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 2:230.

same.”\textsuperscript{19} Al-Khaṭīb relies on al-Ḥākim for the comeuppance of the amīr of Bukhara, who had used al-Bukhārī’s stance on the lafẓ of the Qur’ān to expel him from the city: he was imprisoned less than a month later by the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. As for Ḥurayth b. Abī al-Waraqā’, the Ḥanafī scholar whose assistance the amīr had enlisted in condemning al-Bukhārī, members of his family were afflicted by suffering too terrible to describe.\textsuperscript{20} To further assure al-Bukhārī’s orthodox standing, al-Khaṭīb narrates a report through al-Ḥākim that invokes the authority of a vehement opponent of the created Qur’ān, Ibn Khuzayma, saying that “there is no one under the heavens more knowledgeable in ḥadīth than al-Bukhārī.”\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, al-Khaṭīb portrays al-Bukhārī’s accuser, the great muḥaddith Muḥammad b. Ḥayyā al-Dhuḥlī, as both inferior to al-Bukhārī in the science of ḥadīth and motivated by petty jealousy. Al-Khaṭīb cites al-Ḥusayn al-‘lījī as describing Abū Zur‘a and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī listening to al-Bukhārī attentively, adding that he was “more knowledgeable than al-Dhuḥlī in this and that.”\textsuperscript{22} Another contemporary of al-Bukhārī reports that he saw him and al-Dhuḥlī walking together in a funeral procession.

\textsuperscript{19} Al-Khaṭīb, \textit{Tārikh Baghdād}, 2:29.


Al-Dhuhi was asking al-Bukhari questions, to which he replied with such ease it was as if he were reading one of the shortest *sūras* of the Qurʾān (no. 112, *sūrat al-Ikhlas*). Al-Khaṭīb then includes two separate reports that al-Dhuhi began attacking al-Bukhari for his stance on the wording of the Qurʾān only after his students began deserting him and flocking to al-Bukhari’s study circle.

The canonical culture as depicted by al-Khaṭīb also emphasizes what a momentous feat the compilation of the *Ṣaḥḥāyyn* represented as well as their authors’ critical stringency. He provides several reports telling us that al-Bukhari selected his *Ṣaḥḥ* from over 600,000 ḥadiths and spent ten years compiling it, intending it as “a testament (*huṭṭa*) between [himself] and God.” A report from al-Firaḍī tells us that al-Bukhari included only the most authentic ḥadiths, and that he performed ablutions and prayed two *rakʿas* before inserting any ḥadith in the book. Again relying on a report

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from al-Ḥākim, al-Khaṭīb includes a report that Muslim compiled his *Ṣaḥīḥ* from a selection of 300,000 ḥadīths.27 We then find the famous statement of Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī that “there is no book under the heavens more authentic than *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* in the science of ḥadīth.”28

The canonical culture also reflects the nature of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canon itself. Muslim is thus clearly ranked below al-Bukhārī. Al-Khaṭīb includes a report narrated through al-Ḥākim in which a scholar says that he once saw Muslim asking al-Bukhārī questions like a youth before his teacher.29 In one instance, Muslim was so impressed with al-Bukhārī’s knowledge of ḥadīth that he almost cried.30 On the same occasion, Muslim professes to al-Bukhārī, “I testify that only the jealous could hate you, and that there is none like you.”31 In a report narrated through al-Ḥākim, Muslim comes to al-

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Bukhārī seeking his expertise, then kisses his forehead and calls him doctor (tabīb) of ḥadīth and its ills/flaws (literally, ʿilal). 32

As part of the accolades he includes for Muslim, al-Khaṭīb provides the report of Ibn ʿUqda saying that Muslim made fewer errors than al-Bukhārī because he included fewer ḥadīths with incomplete isnāds. 33 In a rare instance of personal commentary, however, al-Khaṭīb restores the proper relationship between the two books by adding that “Muslim followed in Bukhārī’s footsteps and gained from his knowledge (naẓara fi ʿilmihī)… and when al-Bukhārī came to Naysābūr near the end of his life, Muslim followed him around constantly.” 34 To further counter expert opinions ranking Muslim above al-Bukhārī, al-Khaṭīb quotes the great al-Dāraquṭnī as stating, “If not for al-Bukhārī, Muslim would not have come or gone.” 35 The authors of other prominent ṣaḥīḥ collections are also featured complimenting al-Bukhārī in particular. In one report, al-


Nasā'ī says that al-Bukhārī's Ṣaḥīḥ is the best book available. Al-Tirmidhī is quoted as calling al-Bukhārī "the ornament (zayn) of the umma." In al-Khaṭīb's treatment of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, we also notice that the two scholars, like their works, present a unified and complementary pair. Al-Khaṭīb makes another personal addendum to a report of Muslim venerating al-Bukhārī, explaining that "Muslim used to defend (nādala ʿan) al-Bukhārī to the point that what happened between [Muslim] and Muḥammad b. Yāhūd al-Dhuhāli got worse (ḥattā awḥasha) because of him." Al-Khaṭīb includes Ibn al-Akhram's famous comment that, together, al-Bukhārī and Muslim missed very few authentic ḥadīths (qallamā yafītu al-Bukhārī wa Muslim mā yathbutu min al-ḥadīth).

The personas of al-Bukhārī and Muslim in the Tārīkh Baghdaḏ formed the basis for all later biographies of the two scholars. Particularly in the case of al-Bukhārī, al-Khaṭīb's work actually provided one of the two largest sources for later historians.

Material from the Tārīkh Baghdaḏ makes up approximately 47% (52/110 reports) of al-

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38 Al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdaḏ, 13:103. It is not obvious from the text of al-Khaṭīb’s work that he himself made this addition, but al-Ghassānī, who had both Tārīkh Baghdaḏ and al-Ḥākim’s work, from which the report is cited, at his disposal, notes that al-Khaṭīb made this addition; Ghassānī, al-Tanbīḥ, 30; Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-ṭāʿān, 5:194; al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-islām, 20:188; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya, 11:37; al-Ṣafadī, al-Wafī bi l-ʿawāfat, 25:553; Ibn al-ʿImād, Shadharāt al-dhahab, 2:144.

Dhahabi's comprehensive biography of al-Bukhārī in the *Tārīkh al-islām*, and 41% (11/27) of his entry on Muslim.

The second major source on which later biographers such as al-Dhahabi and al-Subkī drew was al-Ḥākim's lost *Tārīkh Naysābūr*. Al-Ḥākim served as the premier source for information about Muslim in particular, since he had been a veritable Naysābūr institution. Even al-Khaṭīb, who relies on al-Ḥākim for only half a dozen reports in the *Tārīkh Baghdaḍ*’s massive biography of al-Bukhārī, refers to al-Ḥākim for 50% (7/14) of the reports he includes in his much shorter biography of Muslim.

The *Tārīkh Bukhārā* (now lost) of Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Ḥamd Ghunjār al-Bukhārī (d. 412/1021) was one of the earliest sources on al-Bukhārī, but al-Khaṭīb seems to have incorporated much of its material in the *Tārīkh Baghdaḍ* through a transmission of the book from its author. The other early source of original material on al-Bukhārī of which neither al-Khaṭīb nor al-Ḥākim seem to have made any use is the *Tārīkh Samarqand* of Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Astarābādī (d. 405/1015). Later scholars like al-Dhahabi relied on the *Tārīkh Samarqand* (now lost) for reports about al-Bukhārī’s grave, which was in the vicinity of Samarqand. These include stories of al-Bukhārī’s enemies visiting his grave to offer repentance, and the many

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miraculous phenomena that transpired around his tomb (his grave, for example, emitting a perfumed scent and eventually attracting pilgrims from far and wide).\textsuperscript{41}

Although we do not know exactly how al-Ḥākim portrayed al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the surviving elements of his \textit{Tārīkh Naysābūr} emphasize the same themes as al-Khaṭīb. In fact, al-Khaṭīb relied on narrations through al-Ḥākim in a number of the above-mentioned reports illustrating the feat involved in producing the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ\textit{ayn}}, al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s preeminence in the pantheon of ḥadīth scholars, and al-Bukhārī’s vindication against his accusers.

\textbf{VII.4. Charity and the Maintenance of Canonical Culture}

The themes that al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī emphasized – the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ\textit{ayn}} as the pinnacle of ḥadīth scholarship, al-Bukhārī’s vindication, his superiority to Muslim, and the unified front of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ\textit{ayn}} – would define the contours of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ\textit{ayn}} canonical culture from the fifth/eleventh century on. By selecting which reports to provide his readers, al-Khaṭīb’s recension of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s biographies sought to bring the vagaries of history and the problematic origins of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ\textit{ayn}} into accord with their authoritative station in the Sunni community.

Yet several of these reports inherently challenged the canonical culture surrounding the two works. Through applying three levels of interpretive or editorial processes to them, however, the Sunni scholarly tradition was able to maintain and

protect the Şahîhayn canonical culture. First, the canonical culture itself exerted a subtle influence on the transmission and copying of historical works. Second, scholars resorted to interpretive gymnastics in order to reconcile the data of history with canonical culture. Finally, scholars actually edited problematic reports to fit expectations of how the Muslim community should view al-Bukhârî and Muslim.

VII.4. a. Reinventing the Etiology: Charity and Legitimizing al-Bukhârî’s Şahîh

Compiling hadîth collections devoted solely to sâhih reports had been a revolutionary act, and venerable hadîth scholars like Abû Zur‘a al-Râzî had protested it. This posed a challenge to the authoritative status of the Şahîhayn, for how could the compilation of the two most authoritative collections have met with disapproval from leaders in the hadîth-scholar community? By the early sixth/twelfth century, ‘Abdallâh b. Muhammad al-Baṭalyawsî of Andalusia (d. 521/1127) had reinterpreted the initial reception of the Şahîhayn in a manner that shifted the blame from transmission-based legal scholars like Abû Zur‘a to the more reason-based ‘jurists (fuqahā’).’ Al-Bukhârî and Muslim, he explains, had battled the forgery of hadîths until the people of their age persecuted them for it. It was this critical stringency in hadîth that “stirred up anger in the hearts of the jurists (fuqahā’) against al-Bukhârî.”42 By the time of al-Nawawî, however, the urge to cast the origins of the sâhih movement in a better light had moved beyond reinterpreting history to revising historical reports themselves.

The impetus for the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement as described in al-Khaḍīb’s account of al-Bukhārī’s life is not completely clear. The great scholar’s decision to begin compiling his *Ṣaḥīḥ* is explained in a report narrated through al-Ḥākim from one of al-Bukhārī’s students, Ibrāhīm b. Ma‘qîl al-Nasâfî. Al-Bukhārī recounts that, “We were with Ishaq b. Râhawayh, and one of our companions said to us, ‘If only you (plural) would compile an abridged book on the *sunan* of the Prophet (ṣ) (*kitâb* *mukhtar* *an* *li-sunan al-Nabi*).’ That stuck in my heart, and I undertook collecting this book – namely, the *Jâmi‘* (i.e., the *Ṣaḥīḥ*).”

Here we see that there is, in fact, no mention of that characteristic that would distinguish al-Bukhārī’s collection from previous works: its sole focus on authentic reports.

In al-Nawawî’s succinct lexical reference and biographical dictionary of the Shâfi‘î school, the *Tahdhib al-asmā‘ wa al-lughāt*, however, we find that the report has been transformed. Al-Nawawî also cites Ibrâhîm b. Ma‘qîl al-Nasâfî’s quotation from al-Bukhārî. In this version, however, a scholar says, “‘If only you (plural) would collect an abridged book (*kitâb* *mukhtar* *an* of the authentic *sunan* of the Messenger of God (ṣ) (*al-ṣaḥīḥ* *li-sunan al-rasûl*),’ and that became stuck in my heart and I undertook collecting that book.” This addition of “authentic” also appears in the versions of this report found in major later biographies of al-Bukhārî, such as Ibn Nāṣîr al-Dîn al-Dânishqi’s (d. 846/1438) introduction to his commentary on al-Bukhārî, the *Iftîāḥ al-


44 Al-Nawawî, *Tahdhib al-asma‘ wa al-lughât*, 1:74. This version of the report seems to have circulated before al-Nawawî, however, alongside the other version. Abû al-Walîd al-Bâjî mentions a permutation of this version in the mid-fifth/eleventh century, citing it through al-Ḥâkim al-Naysabûrî. Al-Nawawî, however, seems to have been the first to have made this version of the quote the official one; al-Bâjî, *Abû al-Walîd Sulaymân b. Khalaf al-Bâjî wa kitâbuhu*, 1:309.
Although he narrates the same report through al-Khaṭīb, in his Hady al-sāri Ibn Ḥajar makes Iṣḥāq b. Rāḥawāyḥ himself the one who suggests collecting the authentic reports of the Prophet.46

In al-Nawawī’s recension of the quote, we are thus led to believe that al-Bukhārī’s decision to compile a collection of authentic ḥadīths was no longer a radical departure from tradition. Rather it was recast as a response to a need expressed by fellow scholars in the company of a senior ḥadīth master. In Ibn Ḥajar’s recension, the suggestion comes from Ibn Rāḥawāyḥ himself, a member of the greatest generation of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s teachers.

Al-Nawawī also includes another etiology for al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ. He provides a report with no isnād in which al-Bukhārī states, “I saw the Prophet in a dream, and it was as if I were standing before him with a fan in my hand swatting the flies away from him (adhubbu ʿanhu), so I asked a dream interpreter and he told me, ‘You are swatting lies away from him (tadhubbu ʿanhu al-kadhib),’ and this is what led me to produce the Ṣaḥīḥ.”47 In his comprehensive biographical survey of Islam’s first millennium, Shadharāt al-dhahab, this is the only etiology for the Ṣaḥīḥ that Ibn al-ʿImād (d. 1089/1679) presents.48 The great Meccan ḥadīth scholar, Mullā ʿAlī Qārī (d.1014/1606),


46 Ibn Ḥajar, Hady al-sāri, 7.


also notes that this dream propelled al-Bukhārī to compile his collection.\textsuperscript{49} The twentieth-century Moroccan scholar Fatḥ Allāh b. Abī Bakr al-Bannānī (d. 1934-5) concurs in his commentary on al-Bukhārī’s work.\textsuperscript{50} In this dream etiology the impetus for initiating the \textit{sahīh} movement comes through direct inspiration from the Prophet himself, phrased as the ḥadīth scholars’ commendable duty to preserve his authentic legacy.

It is important to note, however, that there was no categorical attempt to doctor the historical record. Encyclopedic and fastidious historians like Ibn ‘Asākir, al-Dhahabī and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī (d. 1239/1824) preserved the original wording of al-Khaṭīb’s report and excluded the \textit{isnād}-less account of al-Bukhārī’s dream.\textsuperscript{51} Nor should we assume that scholars like al-Nawawī consciously altered the report originally found in \textit{Tārīkh Baghdadā}. In the canonical culture of the \textit{Ṣahīḥayn}, authenticity was the defining characteristic of al-Bukhārī’s work. For the scholars who copied al-Khaṭīb’s history, it would have been an understandable oversight to interpolate the adjective “\textit{sahīh}” into al-Bukhārī’s account. As in language, the application of the Principle of Charity means glossing over or reinterpreting momentary inconsistencies in the grammar of canonical culture. Working in the midst of the \textit{Ṣahīḥayn} canonical culture, a copyist could not be faulted for subconsciously correcting this ‘oversight.’


The primacy of the Sahihayn in the Sunni vision of the Prophet's legacy represented both an act of communal consensus and the priorities that the Sunni tradition had set in elaborating the hadith sciences. The Sunni tradition was thus heavily invested in defending the position of the two books as the acme of hadith scholarship. Al-Shafi'i's statement that the Mawatta' was the most correct (or authentic) book after the Qur'an thus attracted a great deal of interpretive concern. Ibn Jama'a and Ibn Taymiyya explain that this opinion, trumpeted by Malikis like Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and al-Qaqa'i 'Iyad, in no way proves the superiority of the Mawatta' to the Sahihayn or undermines the umma's consensus on the primacy of the two books. When al-Shafi'i made his evaluation, they explain, al-Bukhari and Muslim had not yet compiled their collections.52

More difficult was maintaining the proper relationship between the Sahihayn themselves, which proved a persistent concern for Sunni guardians of the canonical culture. Ignoring al-Bukhari's superiority to Muslim in matters of critical methodology threatened the received opinion and practice among hadith scholars on issues like the acceptability of narrations communicated by the phrase "from/according to (an)."

Although the vast majority of hadith scholars recognized that al-Bukhari had produced a more thorough and demanding work, the opinions of several respected figures broke with this consensus. Abu 'Ali al-Naysaburi had said that Muslim's book was the most authentic work available.53 Al-Qaqa'i 'Iyad adds that a Maghribi scholar, Abu Marwan


53 Al-Qaqa'i 'Iyad, Ikmal al-mu'lim, 1:80.
mentioned that at least one of his teachers preferred Muslim’s *Sahih* to that of al-Bukhārī. Ibn Ḥajar and others mention that Ibn Ḥāzm had also favored Muslim’s work.⁵⁵

Although al-Khaṭīb had indirectly undermined this minority opinion by mustering contrary evidence from towering sages like al-Dāraquṭnī, it was Ibn al-Ṣalāh who first actively attempted to disarm this threat to the *Sahihayn* canonical culture. He explains that if Abū ʿAlī al-Naysābūrī had meant that Muslim’s work was superior only in that it did not include ḥadīths with incomplete *isnāds* as legal commentary, this would be correct. If those scholars in the Maghrib that al-Qāḍī ʿĪyāḍ mentioned preferred Muslim’s *Sahih* because all the narrations of one Prophetic tradition are found in one place as opposed to being scattered throughout the work, this would also be a valid point. Asserting that Muslim surpassed al-Bukhārī in methodology and judging authentic ḥadīths, however, was categorically incorrect.⁵⁶

This explanation became commonplace among later defenders of the canonical culture such as al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar.⁵⁷ Al-Sakhāwī’s student ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Daybā (fl. 900/1500) composed a verse:

> People have disputed before me concerning al-Bukhārī and Muslim, which should we favor?
> I said, “Indeed al-Bukhārī has excelled in authenticity, as Muslim excelled in finely crafting [his book].”⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ See also, Mullā ʿAlī Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafrūṭ*, 1:16, where the author replicates Ibn Ḥajar’s discussion.
Ibn Ḥajar further attempted to neutralize Abū 'Alī al-Naysābūrī’s comment by suggesting that no evidence existed that the scholar had ever seen al-Bukhārī’s book.⁵⁹ The fact that certain Maghribī scholars preferred Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ to that of al-Bukhārī, he continued, does not entail that Muslim’s work was more reliable. Ascribing “preference (aṣfāliyya)” to a work is not equivalent to ascribing it “greater authenticity (aṣahhiyya).”⁶⁰ Al-Subkī’s defense of the canonical culture was more blunt; he stated simply that “there is no weight to the opinion of those who favor Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim to it [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī], since that opinion is irregular (ṣāḥidhā) and is thus not to be depended on.”⁶¹

VII.4. c. Charity and Muslim’s Meeting with Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī

In all accounts of Muslim’s encounters with Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī, the tension surrounding the notion of limiting the collection of authentic reports is palpable. When one of Abū Zur’a’s colleagues introduces Muslim as the man who had collected a book of four thousand authentic traditions, numerous reports describe Abū Zur’a as objecting, “To whom (li-man) / why (li-mā) did he leave the rest?” This comment foreshadows the efforts of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī to increase the number of authentic ḥadīths in circulation and reinforces the mainstream stance that al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works

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⁵⁸ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī, Bustān al-muhaddithīn, 78.
⁶⁰ Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 13.
⁶¹ Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 2:215.

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did not exhaust the corpus of authentic ḥadīths. Although Abū Zur‘a’s remark seems slightly critical of Muslim, in actuality it implicitly legitimizes the actions of later scholars who would use the “standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” to extend the authority of the canon to new material. This report thus frequently appears in later work on Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ.

The most complete versions of this encounter, however, include a far more critical remark by Abū Zur‘a. Ibn ‘Asākir and al-Dhahabī preserve an additional section in which Abū Zur‘a further berates Muslim in his absence for not properly respecting al-Dhuhlī. It reads:

Abū Quraysh said: We were with Abū Zur‘a, and Muslim came and greeted him. He sat down for a while and they [two] discussed ḥadīths (tadhākarā). When Muslim left I said to Abū Zur‘a, “He has collected 4,000 ḥadīths in ‘the Ṣaḥīḥ,’” and Abū Zur‘a said “Why did he leave the rest (li-mā taraka al-bāqi‘)?” Then [Abū Zur‘a] said, “He doesn’t have any sense (layṣa li-ḥadhā ‘aqī); if he’d tended properly to (dārå) Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā [al-Dhuhlī] he’d have become a man.”62

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s rendition of this report in his Ṣiyānāt Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim min al-ikhlāl wa al-ghalāt (Preserving Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim from Ruin and Error), however, excludes Abū Zur‘a’s critical remark about al-Dhuhlī.63 This truncated version is repeated in al-Nawawī’s famous commentary on Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ and in Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī’s Iṣḥāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.64 These scholars’ decision to omit the second part of Abū Zur‘a’s statement represents a defense of the canonical culture surrounding the

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62 Al-Dhahabī, Tārikh al-islām, 12:187; Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārikh madinat Dimashq, 58:93. These two versions feature the initial wording “why did he leave the rest?” Cf. al-Dhahabī, Tārikh al-islām, 19:341 (this version includes the wording “to whom did he leave the rest?”).

63 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Ṣiyānāt Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 101.

64 Al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:129; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, Majmūʿ fiḥi rasā’il, 336.
Not only does Abū Zur'a’s comment belittle Muslim, accusing him of poor judgment as well as subordinating him to al-Dhuhlī, it also threatens the canonical version of the quarrel between al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Dhuhlī.

As we saw in Chapter Three, although al-Dhuhlī’s attack on al-Bukhārī certainly inflamed his quarrel with Muslim, the falling out between al-Dhuhlī and Muslim was the culmination of a series of disagreements between the two. In al-Khaṭīb’s personal commentary, however, Muslim’s alienation from al-Dhuhlī centers on the former’s stalwart and loyal defense of al-Bukhārī. In his Tārīkh Naysābūr, al-Ḥākim seconded this by reporting that only Muslim and Ahmad b. Salama had stayed with al-Bukhārī when al-Dhuhlī denounced him. This theme matured more fully in the work of Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141), who asserted that Muslim was in fact the only person who stood by al-Bukhārī when the scholars of Naysābūr turned against him.

Abū Zur’a’s comment challenges this narrative. Indeed, it is far more congruent with the pre-canonical notion that Muslim and al-Dhuhlī were involved in a private drama between student and teacher. Abū Zur’a clearly sides with al-Dhuhlī, faulting Muslim for neither showing his teacher the proper respect nor finishing his education with him. To retain the additional section would be to undermine the scenario of al-Bukhārī and Muslim standing against a jealous and fickle mob driven by al-Dhuhlī, threatening al-Bukhārī’s vindication and the united front of the Shaykhayn.

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65 Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥidayat al-sāri, 677.

VII.5. Reconciling the Canon with Convention: The Ṣaḥīḥayn and the Rules of Ḥadīth

Although al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī had often invoked al-Bukhārī and Muslim as models of excellence to be followed in the collection and criticism of Prophetic ḥadīths, these sciences functioned according to rules external to the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Before al-Bukhārī and Muslim, generations of great critics such as Mālik b. Anas, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī and ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī had sifted through thousands of ḥadīth notebooks, sorting the strong from the weak according to their own criteria. Even in the wake of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s illustrious careers, scholars like Ibn ʿAmmār al-Shāhīd and al-Dāraquṭnī flourished according to their own idiosyncratic methodologies. Al-Dāraquṭnī maintained standards for transmitters that sometimes proved stricter than those of al-Bukhārī, while Ibn ʿAmmār al-Shāhīd could require a stronger reliance on written sources than Muslim. Both upheld more stringent standards for the acceptance of Addition that those employed in the Ṣaḥīḥayn.

Even after the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, some scholars espoused standards for the evaluation of ḥadīths that far exceeded those of the Shaykhayn. The Shāfiʿī legal theorist and ḥadīth scholar Abū al-Muẓaffar Manṣūr al-Samʿānī of Khurāsān (d. 489/1096), for example, proved even more rigorous than al-Bukhārī in his requirements for using “from/according to (ṣm)” in transmission. Beyond the mere requirement of having met at least once, he demanded that the transmitter have studied extensively with his teacher (ṭul al-suḥba).67 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dānī of Andalusia (d.

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67 Al-Samʿānī, Qawāṭiʿ al-adilla, 2:456-7.
444/1053) required the scholar narrating via “ʿan” to be well-known as a narrator from that source.\(^6\)

In addition to the personal methodologies of individual scholars, the \(\text{Ṣaḥīḥayn}\) canon might also stand in tension with the general conventions of Sunni ḥadīth scholarship. This tradition reached maturity in the writings of Ibn al-Ṣalāh, whose monumental treatise on the sciences of ḥadīth transmission and criticism became the basis for later studies in the field.\(^6\) With the systematization of the ḥadīth tradition that began with al-Ḥākim and solidified with Ibn al-Ṣalāh, ḥadīth scholarship acquired a unified and refined authority that could present a serious challenge to the \(\text{Ṣaḥīḥayn}\) canon. The conventions of the ḥadīth tradition comprised a body of rules that the \(\text{Ṣaḥīḥayn}\) might occasionally fail to follow. The canon fulfilled important functions in the scholarly and lay community, so how could ḥadīth experts address instances when the two books fell short of the standards established by the ḥadīth tradition? This potential tension between the practice of ḥadīth scholars and the authoritative institution of the \(\text{Ṣaḥīḥayn}\) canon would have to be resolved by recourse to the Principle of Charity.

**VII.5. a. Charity and Tadlīs**

One of the most glaring areas in which the \(\text{Ṣaḥīḥayn}\) occasionally ran afoul of the accepted practice of Sunni ḥadīth scholarship was *tadlīs*, or obfuscation, a phenomenon that occurred in two contexts. First, *tadlīs* could entail a student narrating something

\(^{68}\) Ibn Kathīr, *al-Būḥār al-ḥathīth*, 45.

\(^{69}\) See J. Robson, "Ḥadīth: the Study and Transmission of Tradition," *EF*.
from a teacher with whom he had studied but from whom he had not actually heard that particular report (generally termed *tadlis al-isnād*). Secondly, *tadlis* could involve a student obfuscating the identity of his source (termed *tadlis al-shaykh*). In both cases, *tadlis* consisted of misleading others about the true immediate source of one’s ḥadīths.

The first type of *tadlis* occurred commonly, and often not due to any deceptive intent. If a student attending the dictation sessions of a certain teacher excused himself to answer nature’s call and later heard the material he had missed from another student, he might omit his colleague from the chain of transmission and simply state “the teacher said....”

The second type of *tadlis* could also be innocuous, often resulting from a transmitter assuming that his audience understood who his sources were without giving their full names. It could also, however, serve to disguise an impugned or discredited source. If a transmitter said “a notable scholar told me,” he might be trying to employ a ḥadīth that he had actually heard from a person others considered unreliable or heretical.

In the wake of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi’s writings, what emerged as the regnant policy among Sunni ḥadīth scholars for evaluating the first type of *tadlis* was that one could accept a report from someone known to commit *tadlis* (called a *mudallis*) provided that he explicitly stated that he had heard the report directly (*samā’*) from his source. 70 This he could accomplish by using technical terms known to denote face-to-face transmission, such as “he narrated to us (*haddathanā*),” “I heard from him (*sami ’tu*)” or “he reported to us (*akhbaranā*).” If the *mudallis* used a vaguer phrase, such as “from (*‘am*)” or “so and so said (*qāla*),” the ḥadīth could not be accepted as authentic due to a

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presumed break in the chain of transmission. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ affirmed this position in his
classic manual on the ḥadīth sciences, and no significant objection to this policy
appeared. Employing the Ṣahīḥayn as an exemplum, he stated that al-Bukhārī’s and
Muslim’s collections, as well as other relied-upon books, often depended on the
transmission of a mudallis if it was phrased in wording that eliminated any doubt about
the continuity of transmission. 71

As Ibn Ḥajar later noted, however, the Ṣahīḥayn also contain numerous ḥadīths in
which a mudallis narrates from his source via the problematic phrase “from/according to
(ʼan).” Here it seemed that al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections could not provide the
evidence of continuous transmission required by convention among ḥadīth scholars.
Only reading the Ṣahīḥayn in the most favorable light could resolve the inconsistency
between the canon and the rules of ḥadīth scholarship. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s follower, al-
Nawawī, recognized this and authoritatively declared, “Know that what is in the
Ṣahīḥayn [narrated] from mudallises via [the phrase] ʼ an or something like it is to be
interpreted (maḥmūl) as having been established as direct transmission (sama,)
via some other narration [of the ḥadīth]....” 72

Important ḥadīth scholars accepted al-Nawawī’s extension of charity to all
instances of tadhīl in the Ṣahīḥayn. The Levantine Mamluk-period scholar Khalīl b.
Kaykaldī al-ʾAlāʾī (d. 761/1359) treated both al-Bukhārī and Muslim with extreme
charity in his definitive monograph on the issue of broken transmissions. He explains,

71 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Mugaddima, 235; al-ʾAlāʾī, Jāmiʿ al-tahślīl, 111-12; al-Sakhawī, Fath al-mughīth,
1:227 ff.
72 Al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:146.
for example, that in the case of the famous *mudallis*, the Successor Abū al-Zubayr Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Makkī (d. 126/743-4), many senior hadīth scholars refused to use reports he narrated from the Companion Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh as proof texts. Such critics only accepted what the great Egyptian scholar al-Layth b. Saʿd (d. 175/791) had vetted from al-Makkī. Al-ʿAlāʾī, however, notes that Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* contains numerous hadīths from Jābir → al-Makkī that al-Layth did not narrate though this isnād. Yet he adds that it was “as if Muslim, may God bless him, was aware that these hadīths were from material that al-Layth narrated from [Jābir] even if he did not narrate them through his path [of Jābir → al-Makkī].…” Al-ʿAlāʾī thus assumes Muslim knew that al-Layth had approved of this material even though it did not meet the standards scholars generally employed when evaluating al-Makkī’s hadīths.73

After providing a long list of notorious *mudallis*, al-ʿAlāʾī admits that “there are many hadīths from these [transmitters] in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*” that lack explicit evidence for direct transmission. Referring to al-Nawawī, he adds, “One imām has interpreted (ḥamala) this as that the Shaykhayn were aware of the direct transmission (samāʾ) of the individual for that hadīth…but this is a lengthy matter (wa fihi tātwīl).” Although al-ʿAlāʾī feels that al-Nawawī’s argument is slightly tenuous, he nonetheless states that al-Bukhārī and Muslim included such reports because they had reliable evidence that their transmitters could be trusted and an uninterrupted chain of transmission guaranteed.74

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Ibn Hajar categorically supports al-Nawawi’s charitable treatment of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. He states that any instance of *tadlīs* via “from (‘an)” occurring in the primary (*uṣūl*) narrations of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* is assumed to be a locus of direct transmission. If al-Bukhārī or Muslim included the report of a *mudallīs* using ‘from/according to (‘an)’ in the *isnād* among their auxiliary (*mutāba‘a‘/shawāhid*) narrations, this presented no problem since the two scholars did not uphold their rigid criteria in these cases. Ibn Hajar, *al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣolih*, 255-6.

Qūtb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥalabī (d. 735/1335) stated that all these instances of *tadlīs* though the phrase “‘an” should be treated as direct transmission since “the instances of ‘an in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* have the status of direct transmission.” Al-Dhahābī even exempted “what is in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and similar books” from the second type of *tadlīs*, the obfuscation of one’s teacher’s identity. He explains, for example, that when al-Bukhārī states, “Aḥmad told me,” we know he intends Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.

Several ḥadīth scholars who exempted the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* from the standard rules governing the evaluation of *tadlīs* seemed very conscious of the charity they had extended the two books. Taqī al-Dīn al-Ṣubkī once asked Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), the compiler of the most comprehensive biographical dictionary of ḥadīth transmitters, if al-Bukhārī and Muslim had really made certain that all instances in their collections in which *tadlīs* had occurred were guaranteed by direct transmission. Al-Mizzī replied, “So it is said, but that is only out of giving the benefit of doubt (taḥṣīn al-

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77 Al-Dhahābī, *al-MIQIʿA*, 50.
zann) to these two, since otherwise there are ḥadīths narrated by mudallīs that only exist by that narration found in the Sahih[ayn]." Al-ʿIrāqī echoes this when he explains that the umma’s consensus on the Sahihayn demands that Muslims extend “the benefit of doubt (taḥṣīn al-zann)” to the two works.⁷⁹

VII.5. b. Charity and Transmitters

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī had stated that al-Bukhārī and Muslim occasionally relied on transmitters who had been previously impugned as part of his argument that such criticisms were only valid if accompanied by some explanation. Al-Khaṭīb was only invoking al-Bukhārī and Muslim as part of this larger argument, and he was wise not to claim that none of the transmitters featured in the Sahihayn had been criticized without good reason. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim relied on Ayyūb b. ʿĀʾidh al-Ṭāʾī, for example, whom al-Bukhārī himself had accused of being a Murjiʿite.⁸⁰ We have already seen the example of the arch-Khārijite ʿImrān b. Ḥiṭṭān, through whom al-Bukhārī transmitted a ḥadīth. As the fifth/eleventh century drew to a close, however, and the Sahihayn’s role as an authoritative reference and a measure of authenticity became better established, the questionable status of some of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters emerged as a problem. If, as al-Nawawī replied in his fatwā, the Sahihayn contained only authentic

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⁷⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ʿalā kitāb ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 256.
⁷⁹ Al-ʿIrāqī, al-Taqyīd wa al-ʿIdāh, 366.
ḥadīths, how should scholars handle the presence of impugned transmitters in the two collections?

One of al-Khaṭīb’s students, Muḥammad b. Futūḥ al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/1095), an Andalusian who settled in Baghdad and composed his famous combined edition of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, proffered the Ṣaḥīḥayn as an exemplum to be imitated in evaluating ḥadīth transmitters. The two works, in fact, provided veritable dictionaries of reliable, upstanding narrators. He asserted that the most important result of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work was their declaration of the uprightness (ʿadāla) of all the narrators of the principal ḥadīths (uṣūl) included in the two books. Al-Ḥumaydī’s claim was built on the canonical authority of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, for:

The testimony of those two imāms, or one of them, to that effect, and their declaring [that narrator] as ṣaḥīḥ is a ruling (ḥukm) that requires following, a message designed to be heeded (yataʿayyamu al-inqiyād lahu), and a cautioning (nidhāra) the disobedience of which is to be feared....

The authoritative station of al-Bukhārī and Muslim therefore demanded a charitable view of their transmitters. Al-Ḥumaydī’s younger contemporary, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, echoed this, stating that even if some of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters had been criticized, inclusion in the Ṣaḥīḥayn trumps this. The Shaykhayn, he explained, only narrated from “trustworthy, upright masters (thīqa ʿadl ḥāfīz) with a strong

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probability of having heard from the preceding person in the *isnād*, except for a very few instances (*ahruf*).\(^{83}\)

It was the Mālikī ḥadīth scholar Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Muваḍḍal al-Maqdisī (d. 611/1214) who demanded total charity towards al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters by declaring famously that all those included in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* “have passed the test (*jāza al-qanṭara*).”\(^{84}\) This principle proved axiomatic for Ibn al-Ṣalāh a few decades later. In his *Muqaddima* he says that ḥadīth scholars should not pay heed to criticism of those whom al-Bukhārī and Muslim included in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.\(^{85}\) In his defense of Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīh, Siyānat Ṣaḥīh Muslim*, Ibn al-Ṣalāh specifically exonerates Muslim from any criticism for using weak transmitters. All such criticisms of Muslim, he argues, can be rebutted by one of four points. First, if Muslim used narrators that other experts had criticized, it is assumed (*mahmūl*) that the criticism was not adequately established. He adds, “And it is also probable that these are instances in which, even if the critic (*jāriḥ*) did clarify his reason [for criticizing one of Muslim’s men], Muslim demonstrated its falsity.” Second, the weak narration may not be one of Muslim’s primary ḥadīths, but rather one of his less rigorous auxiliary narrations (*shawāhid, mutābiʿī ʿat*). Third, the narrator in question may have lost his reliability only after Muslim had taken ḥadīths from him. Finally, referring to Muslim’s explanation to Ibn Wāra, he might have used a


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narration with a weak transmitter because its isnād was shorter than a more reliable version. 86

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s follower, al-Nawawī, repeated these reasons for exonerating Muslim. He concluded that although a number (jāmāʿa) of narrators from the Sahīḥayn have been criticized, upon reflection trust (thiqa) is conferred upon them and one must accept their hadīths. 87 Moreover, al-Nawawī cunningly reinterpreted al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s aforementioned argument to provide an earlier historical precedent for treating al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters with total charity. Arguing that “criticism [of narrators] is not accepted unless it is explained,” al-Khaṭīb had added, “for indeed al-Bukhārī relied on ( ihtajja) a number [of transmitters] who had been previously criticized by others..., as did Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj..., Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, and more than one other....” 88 Paraphrasing al-Khaṭīb, al-Nawawī interpreted this as the extension of complete charity to al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters. He states, “Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and others have said, ‘What al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd used ( ihtajja bihi) from among a number [of transmitters] who had been criticized before by others, is to be treated ( makhmūl) as if no effective, explained criticism had been established.’” 89

What al-Khaṭīb had intended as evidence that criticisms of transmitters were not valid unless accompanied by some explanation, al-Nawawī thus transformed into an exemption of al-Bukhārī’s, Muslim’s and Abū Dāwūd’s transmitters from any criticism.

86 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Sahīḥ Muslim, 96 ff.
87 Al-Nawawī, al-Taqrīb, 17; idem, Sharḥ Sahīḥ Muslim, 1:134.
88 Al-Khaṭīb, al-Kifāya, 1:339.
89 Nawawī, Sharḥ Sahīḥ Muslim, 1:134.
The charitable premise on which al-Nawawī bases this act of legerdemain, however, lacks credibility. As discussed above, some transmitters used in the \textit{Sahihayn} were indeed criticized with valid explanations.\footnote{Al-Ṣan`ānī points this out; al-Ṣan`ānī, \textit{Tawdīḥ al-ṣafkār}, 1:99.}

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī was a foundational figure in the systematization of the Sunni ḥadīth tradition — Abū Bakr b. Nuqta (d. 629/1231) elegized him by stating that “no one of sound thought can doubt that the later scholars of ḥadīth are utterly dependent on (\textit{fiyāl `alā}) Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb.”\footnote{Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Abū al-Ghanī Ibn Nuqta al-Baghdādī, \textit{Kitab al-ṭaqyīd li-ma ʿrifat ruwāt al-sunan wa al-masānīd}, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1408/1988), 154.} But al-Khaṭīb’s works provided no extension of charity to the \textit{Sahihayn} comparable to the statements made by al-Ḥumaydī, al-Maqdisī, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ or al-Nawawī. Al-Nawawī’s interpretive leap, however, grounded his exemption of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters from the conventional rules of ḥadīth criticism as articulated by al-Khaṭīb. Moreover, generations of later ḥadīth scholars have treated al-Nawawī’s paraphrase as the words of al-Khaṭīb himself.\footnote{See, for example, Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, \textit{Umdat al-qaṭār}, ed. Idārat al-Ṭibāʾa al-Munīriyya et al., 25 vols. in 12 (Beirut: Muhammad Amīn Dāmaj, [1970], reprint of the 1891 Cairo edition, citations are to the Beirut edition), 1:8; Mulla Khāṭīr, \textit{Makānat al-Saḥīḥayn}, 238.} In his book on al-Bukhārī, the modern scholar ‘Abd al-Ghanī ‘Abd al-Khāliq attributes the statement directly to al-Khaṭīb, even omitting mention of Abū Dāwūd.\footnote{‘Abd al-Khāliq, \textit{al-Imām al-Bukhārī wa ṣaḥīḥuhu}, 227.} Another present-day scholar, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭālī Amīn Qal’ajī, has done the same.\footnote{See al-ʿUqaylī, \textit{Kitāb al-du`a`fā'}, 1:54 (editor’s introduction).}
In the wake of al-Nawawī’s statement, many later pillars of the ḥadīth tradition exempted al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters from criticism. In his abridgment of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s work, the Egyptian Ibn Daqīq al-Īd (d. 702/1302) acknowledges that some of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters have been criticized. Explaining Abū al-Ḥasan al-Maqdisī’s famous declaration that the Sahihayn’s transmitters “passed the test,” Ibn Daqīq states that he meant, “He pays no heed to what is said [critically] about them; this is what he believes and this is our opinion.” Ibn Daqīq thus instructs those seeking to determine whether or not a narrator is reliable to consult the Sahihayn as a dictionary of accepted transmitters. The Muslim community’s consensus on the two books, its collective decision to dub them “the two Sahihīs” and its referral to them for rulings on authenticity make the two works the most reliable source.\(^9\)

Ibn Daqīq’s student al-Dhahabī takes the same course in his even more succinct reference for the technical terms of ḥadīth criticism. If someone is included in the Sahihayn, he is automatically deemed reliable (thīqa) by that fact alone. If this transmitter appears only in al-Tirmidhī’s or Ibn Khuzayma’s collections, however, he merits the less lustrous rating of “good (jayyid).”\(^9\) Al-Dhahabī further echoes his teacher: “All those included in the Sahihayn have passed the test (qafaza al-qanṭara), and one cannot turn away from them (lā ma’dīl ‘anhu) except by some clear evidence (burhān).”\(^9\) Al-Dhahabī even urges readers to ignore criticism of those transmitters from

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\(^9\) Al-Dhahabī, al-Mūqīza, 78.

\(^9\) Al-Dhahabī, al-Mūqīza, 80. Ibn Ḥajar repeats this argument; Ibn Ḥajar, Hady al-sārī, 543.
the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* that he had included in his own dictionary of impugned narrators, the *Mizān al-iʿtīdāl* (The Scale of Judgment). He states that these criticisms "should not be heeded," and adds that "if we open that door to ourselves, a number of the Companions, Successors and *imāms* would enter it."\(^{98}\)

Al-Dhahabī’s analogy between the transmitters of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and the Companions of the Prophet is apt, for both groups received the blanket approval of the umma. Al-ʿIrāqī recognized the comparable charity extended to these two groups when he noted that the only two classes of ḥadīth transmitters whose status is not affected by only having one narrator from them, which would normally render them *majhūl*, are the Companions and the men of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.\(^{99}\)

**VII.6. Rebutting Earlier Criticisms**

The most compromising consequence of the inconsistencies between the methods that al-Bukhārī and Muslim had employed in their works and those of other prominent ḥadīth scholars was the criticisms that venerated critics made of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. The critique of the great fourth/tenth-century ḥadīth scholar, al-Dāraquṭnī, as well as those of the Andalusian *muḥaddith* Abū ʿAlī al-Jayyānī al-Ghassānī (d. 498/1105) and the North African Mālikī ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141) proved the most problematic for the maintenance of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* canonical culture. It was to these criticisms that the canonical culture’s greatest advocates, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawī and


\(^{99}\) Al-ʿIrāqī, *al-Taqyīd wa al-ʿīdāh*, 123. Al-ʿIrāqī even wrote a book on these men.
Ibn Ḥajar thus turned their attention. Although these three masters’ inimitable command of the ḥadīth tradition allowed them to effectively overturn many of these earlier criticisms, their defenses also relied on charitable assumptions about al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s work. Indeed the Principle of Charity imbued the notion that the Sahihayn’s auxiliary narrations were not to be held to the same standard as their primary hadīths, as well as the claim that al-Bukhārī and Muslim included problematic narrations only because they assumed their audience would know more reliable versions.

It is important to note that the canonization of the Sahihayn did not end criticism of the two works. As we saw in Chapter Six, the very illusory nature of the Sahihayn canon enabled criticism of its contents even as scholars wielded it against opponents. Even scholars who actively employed the Sahihayn canon occasionally criticized a ḥadīth from the two books if it contradicted the doctrines of their school of law or theology. The arch-Shāfiʿī al-Bayhaqi thus criticized Muslim’s report demonstrating that one should not say the basmala out loud.

Ḥadīth scholars also continued to criticize items from the Sahihayn not for partisan purposes, but as part of their unabated critical review of transmissions from the Prophet.¹⁰⁰ As al-ʾIrāqī had said, evaluating reports was “the muhaddiths’ job.” Like

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¹⁰⁰ This critical review of the Sahihayn also stemmed from the very nature of manuscript transmission in the pre-print world. A constant reexamination of a text was required in order to prevent errors from creeping in as students copied their teachers’ books. Abū ʿAll al-Jayyānī’s criticisms of al-Bukhārī and Muslim thus originated from his efforts to synchronize the variant transmissions of the two texts. Although he never left Andalusia, al-Jayyānī had access to all the major recensions of the works, and produced a book on the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the Sahihayn’s transmission. His criticisms of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s texts therefore often involve errors that had materialized during the transmission process, though he also notes mistakes made by the authors themselves. In the case of Muslim’s work, he has a section on ʿalā not mentioned by al-Dāraqquṭnī in his Kitāb al-tatabbu. There, for example, he criticizes Muslim for erring in the identity of a certain transmitter and inappropriate isnād Addition: al-Ghassānī, Kitāb al-tanbih ʿalā al-wāqiʿa fi Sahih al-imām Muslim, 51, 55. It is important to note
earlier ḥadīth studies, most such criticisms involved problems in the chains of transmission of certain ḥadīths, such as breaks in isnāds or inappropriate addition. Al-Māzarī thus singled out fourteen instances of broken isnāds in Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ. Abū al-Ḥusayn Hibatallāh Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 563/1167-8) appended five original criticized narrations he had culled from Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ to the end of his copy of Ibn ‘Ammār’s ḥadīth work.’ A later copyist of the same manuscript, one Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Faḍl of Damascus (d. 630/1232-3), added one more narration he had found in his reading of Muslim for Normative Matn Addition. The boldest isnād criticisms of the Ṣaḥīhayn came from the great Ḥanbalī jurist, preacher and pious activist of Baghdad, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200).

In his famous Kitāb al-mawdūʻ āt (Book of Forgeries), Ibn al-Jawzī includes at least two

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101 Ibn ‘Ammār, 143-9. The author criticized these narrations for being uncorroborated from specific transmitters Muslim had cited (tafarrud). These impugned narrations are not found among al-Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms.

102 Ibn ‘Ammār, 150-1. Here the critic was unwittingly parroting an earlier criticism made by al-Dāraquṭnī.
narrations from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and one from Muslim’s collection due to various flaws in their *isnāds*.103

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ represents the first holistic champion of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* against earlier criticisms. His commentary on Muslim’s work has been lost, but much of his efforts at defending the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* have survived in his *Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Although Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ tries to overturn a criticism whenever possible, his main strategy centers on invoking charity: he claims that any problematic narration of a *ḥadīth* either comes from al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s less demanding auxiliary narrations or that a correct version appears in authentic forms elsewhere. Although he is able to find evidence from other major *ḥadīth* collections to disprove one of al-Jayyānī’s criticisms, he must resort to the Principle of Charity for rebutting al-Dāraquṭnī and al-Māzari.104 He objects to Māzari’s statement that Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* has fourteen narrations with breaks in their chains of transmission (*inqīṭā‘*), arguing:

This falsely conveys an impression of disarray (*yūhim khalal*105), and that is not the case. For there is nothing of that sort, praise be to God, for he [Muslim] included these [problematic narrations], especially what has been mentioned here, as auxiliary narrations (*mutāba‘a*) and included a complete version in the same book. He felt that this was sufficiently well known among the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, just as he narrated from a group of weak

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104 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 159-60. For an example of al-Māzari’s noting broken narrations, see al-Māzari, 1:283.
transmitters relying on the fact that these ḥadīths were known through reliable transmitters....

Here he thus relies on the argument that, although certain narrations of ḥadīths are problematic, Muslim allowed them as auxiliary reports only because he assumed his readers knew that correct versions existed elsewhere. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ makes the same case for the incomplete isnāds found in al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ. He further defends al-Bukhārī and Muslim against one of Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms, noting that, like almost all of al-Dāraquṭnī’s critiques, “it is a criticism of their [al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s] isnāds and does not remove the texts (matn) of their ḥadīths from the realm of authenticity (ḥayyiz al-ṣiḥḥa).” One narration of a Prophetic tradition might be flawed, but sound ones existed elsewhere that established the reliability of the Prophet’s statement.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s Egyptian contemporary, Rashīd al-Dīn al-Ṭāṭār (d. 662/1264), also mounted a defense of Muslim against al-Māzarī’s criticisms. His Kitāb ghurar al-fawā’id al-majmū‘a fī bayān mā waqa‘a fī Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim min al-aḥādīth al-maqtū‘a deals with seventy criticized narrations from Muslim’s work, which he calls “exceptions to [Muslim’s] standard method (rasm).” The author’s chief concern is that such criticisms pose a threat to the function of Muslim’s book as a measure of authenticity and authoritative reference. He states:

Perhaps someone looking at [al-Māzarī’s] book who does not have a great concern for ḥadīth nor any knowledge of how to collect their different narrations, might think that [these criticized ḥadīths] were among those

105 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 82; al-Nawawi, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:125.
106 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 83.
107 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Siyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 177.
hadīths that lack unbroken chains back to the Prophet, and that one can thus not use them as proof texts.

He has seen many people with this impression, which he hopes to counter by proving that all these hadīths in fact possess complete isnāds. 108

The most categorical defense of Muslim’s Šaḥīḥ against al-Dāraquṭnī came at the hands of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s follower, al-Nawawī, whose commentary on Muslim’s work includes detailed responses to all the impugned narrations. While he and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ had labored to exempt al-Bukhārī and Muslim from conventions of hadīth criticism that occasionally proved too demanding for the Šaḥīḥayn, al-Nawawī also knew how to use these rules to the canon’s advantage. He defends Muslim against the most frequent flaw identified by al-Dāraquṭnī, inappropriate Addition, by referring to the consensus arrived at by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and the majority of legal theorists (but not by most hadīth scholars): any Addition by a trustworthy transmitter is acceptable. 109 Al-Nawawī thus neutralizes al-Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms by demonstrating that his methods were far harsher than the accepted norm. He therefore warns his readers that al-Dāraquṭnī’s methods are “the deficient principles of some hadīth scholars, contrary to the vast majority (al-jumhūr) of legal scholars and theorists (ahl al-fīqh wa al-usūl), so do not be swayed [by


109 Al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Šaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:145; cf. al-Khaṭīb, al-Kifāya, 2:516, 538.
Throughout the text of his commentary on Muslim's work, al-Nawawi undertakes a case-by-case rebuttal of al-Dāraquṭnī's criticisms. Ibn Ḥajar mirrored al-Nawawi's defense of Muslim in the sizable introductory volume to his mammoth commentary on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the Fath al-bārī. There Ibn Ḥajar includes a massive chapter entitled “Putting forth the ḥadīths that the ḥadīth master of his age, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī, and others, criticized... and furnishing what is available as a rebuttal.” This section includes a case-by-case response to al-Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms. Like Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawi, he argues that many of the problematic narrations in al-Bukhārī’s collection come from his laxer auxiliary narrations. But while al-Nawawi excuses Muslim’s inclusion of reports with inappropriate Addition by referring to the conventions of legal theorists, Ibn Ḥajar relies more on al-Bukhārī’s peerless expertise. Al-Bukhārī possessed an unrivaled mastery of the ḥadīth sciences, Ibn Ḥajar argues, and judged the reliability of each ḥadīth based on the circumstances (qarāʾīn) of that case. One can thus not hold him accountable to the judgment of lesser scholars or the rigid rules they employed.

Yet Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawi and Ibn Ḥajar all found themselves forced to admit that several of al-Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms were undeniably correct. Because al-Dāraquṭnī was such a hugely respected figure in the pantheon of ḥadīth scholars, and because he

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10 Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 501 (quoted from al-Nawawi’s lost commentary on al-Bukhārī).


12 Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 503, 543.

13 Al-Nawawi, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:128; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 118.

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played such a formative role in the early study of the *Sahihayn*, Ibn al-Salāḥ, al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar exempted the material that he criticized from the claim of consensus on the two works’ absolute authenticity. Even if one could successfully rebut some of al-Dāraquṭnī’s criticisms, one could hardly claim consensus on those elements of the *Sahihayn* rejected by a scholar of his caliber. These exceptions fell outside the pale of *ijmā‘* and thus did not yield epistemological certainty.

Interestingly, Ibn al-Salāḥ’s exemption of material criticized by master hadith scholars from the umma’s consensus actually provided a window for selectively admitting the existence of problems in the *Sahihayn*. Because earlier pillars of the hadith tradition such as al-Dāraquṭnī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr had criticized Muslim’s narration negating the voiced *basmala*, Ibn al-Salāḥ, al-‘Irāqī and other later Shafi`īs were able to champion their madhhab’s stance on this issue by openly discussing the report as a textbook example of a flaw (*illa*) in the text of a hadith.

Other reports also contained errors beyond defense, sometimes in the content of the hadith. Al-Nawawī therefore acknowledged that one of Muslim’s hadiths saying that the first chapter of the Qur’an revealed to the Prophet was *sūrat al-Mudaththir* (no. 74) is “weak, even false (*bāṭil*), and the correct [position] is that the absolute first to be revealed was ‘Read, in the name of your Lord who created... (*sūrat al-‘Alaq*, no. 96).”

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116 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Sahih Muslim*, 2:565-6; *Sahih Muslim: kitāb al-ʾimān, bāḥ bāḥ al-wahy*, hadith of Abū Salama. This criticized narration comes after numerous other narrations that confirm that the beginning of *sūrat al-ʿAlaq* was indeed the first part of the Qur’an revealed. Muslim’s inclusion of the minority report stems from the impartial methodology he followed in compiling his *Sahih*. Just as he often
case of al-Bukhārī’s ḥadīth that describes Adam incredulously as having been “sixty arms tall,” Ibn Ḥajar admitted that “nothing has yet appeared to me that removes this problematic issue (ishkāl).” Such criticisms, however, were few among staunch proponents of the canon and occurred against the backdrop of these scholars’ devotion to defending the Sahihayn canonical culture.

In the wake of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s and al-Nawawī’s campaign for strengthening the Sahihayn canonical culture, many ḥadīth scholars devoted works to defending al-Bukhārī and Muslim from criticism or trying to clarify problematic material in their works. Ibn Kathīr wrote a whole book refuting the two ḥadīths, al-Bukhārī’s story of the Prophet seemingly making his miraculous voyage to Jerusalem before the start of his prophetic career and Muslim’s report of the Prophet marrying Umm Ḥabība (see Chapter Eight), that Ibn Ḥazm had criticized as incontrovertibly forged. Al-ʿIrāqī finished the rough draft of a small book detailing all the impugned narrations in the Sahihayn and providing defenses for them, but he never completed the work. His son, Walī al-Dīn Abū Zur’a Ahmad b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān (d. 826/1423) also wrote book called al-Bayān wa al-tawdīḥ li-man khurrija lahu fī al-Sahih wa qad mussa bi-ḍarb min al-tajrīḥ (Elucidation and Clarification of those who Appear in the Sahih and had been Tainted by Some Sort of

included reports with conflicting legal implications provided that all their isnāds were sound, so here does he include a historical report differing from other ḥadīths.

117 Ibn Ḥajar, Fath al-bāri, 6:452-3. Sahih al-Bukhārī: Kitab ahādīth al-anbiyāʾ, bāb 1; Fath # 3326: khalaqa Allāh Adam wa tūlhu siṭīnā dhīrāʾ... fa kūl man yadkhulu al-janna ‘ala sūrat Ádam, fa-lam yazal al-khalq yanqūsu ḥattā al-ān.”


VII.7. Conclusion

The pre-canonical history of al-Bukhārī, Muslim and their masterpieces contained elements that did not accord with the shape and station of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon. As the canon emerged at the dawn of the fifth/eleventh century, the environment of ḥadīth study in Baghdad transformed into a canonical culture that required a charitable reading of the text of the canon. With al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s biographies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, we see the contours of this culture take shape and emphasize themes that reconcile the canon with history. Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and their Ṣaḥīḥs are placed at the acme of the


ḥadīth tradition, erasing initial objections of the sahiḥ movement. The Sahīhayn are shown as the products of almost superhuman scholarly and pietistic effort. Al-Bukhārī is vindicated in the scandal of the Qurʾānic lafẓ, an early advocate of orthodoxy against a jealous adversary. As both a persona and a book, al-Bukhārī is ranked above Muslim. Nonetheless, the twin components of the Sahīhayn form a complimentary and conjoined pair. The construction of this canonical culture, however, did not suffice. Further interpretive and editorial efforts were required to defend the Sahīhayn canon against the enduring dangers of its pre-canonical past.

The personas of al-Bukhārī and Muslim were not the only element of the canon that required charity. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim were only two figures in the wider world of Sunni ḥadīth scholarship, a tradition characterized by a relative diversity of methodologies both before and after the formation of the canon. With the systemization of the Sunni ḥadīth sciences between the writings of al-Ḥakīm, al-Khaṭīb and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, the potential for inconsistency between this tradition and the methods of al-Bukhārī and Muslim became pronounced. On two specific topics, tadlīs and the criticism of transmitters, defenders of the canonical culture would have to extend full charity to the Sahīhayn in order to reconcile the institution of the canon and the conventions of ḥadīth study. Proponents of the canonical culture also found it necessary to address earlier criticisms that had resulted from inconsistencies between al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s methods and those of other major ḥadīth scholars. Again, the Principle of Charity constituted an important tool in the arsenals of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar.
In the maintenance of the *Sahihayn* canonical culture, we see a direct correspondence between the canonicity of these texts and the amount of charity they are afforded.\textsuperscript{123} In all aspects of the *Sahihayn* canonical culture, it was Ibn al-Šalāḥ and his follower al-Nawawī who played the most prominent and creative roles. This should come as no surprise, for Ibn al-Šalāḥ had proven the most fervent proponent of their canonical functions. He had taken dramatic steps in declaring the infallibility of the *Sahihayn*, and produced the boldest and most influential argument for institutionalizing al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections as authoritative references that could replace the arcane critical methodology of ḥadīth scholars. Al-Nawawī inherited his master’s agenda, replicating his arguments and reinforcing the canonical edifice.

\textsuperscript{123} Halbertal, 29.
VIII.

THE CANON AND CRITICISM: ICONOCLASM AND THE REJECTION OF CANONICAL CULTURE FROM IBN AL-ṢALĀḤ TO THE MODERN SALAFĪ MOVEMENT

VIII.1. Introduction

Discussing the standing of the Sahihayn, Goldziher concluded that veneration for them "never went so far as to cause free criticism of the sayings and remarks incorporated in these collections to be considered impermissible or unseemly...." He insightfully observed that "veneration was directed at this canonical work [of al-Bukhārī] as a whole but not to its individual lines and paragraphs." In his Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought, Daniel Brown concurs. He states that in the "classical" period there was a great deal of leeway for the criticism of the canonical collections. As we have seen, Goldziher’s and Brown’s assessments accurately describe the pre-canonical period as well as the continued criticism of the two books even after their canonization. They do not, however, recognize the important change that occurred in the dynamic of the canon and criticism in the early modern and modern periods.

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1 Goldziher, 236-7.
2 Goldziher, 247.
3 Daniel Brown, Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 111.
Especially in recent times, criticisms of the *Sahihayn* canon have met with remarkable hostility. Mohammad Abd al-Rauf has recognized the dramatic change in the reaction to criticism, but identifies it as the result of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s buttressing the canonical culture in the seventh/thirteenth century. He asserts that in the wake of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s writings, “no more criticism could be tolerated....”⁴ Although Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī certainly did demand a charitable reading of the *Sahihayn*, their contributions to the canonical culture marked neither a moratorium on criticism nor an actual end to it.

Indeed, criticism of the *Sahihayn* continued in force well after Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s and al-Nawawī’s seminal careers. In the century after their deaths, a number of ḥadīth scholars rejected the canonical culture built around al-Bukhārī and Muslim. These objections gave voice to the long-standing tension between the drive for institutional security that had transformed the *Sahihayn* into authoritative references and the iconoclastic strain in ḥadīth scholarship that remained steadfastly focused on the critical evaluation of individual reports.

It was the emergence of the Salafi reform movement in the eighteenth century that brought this simmering tension to a boil. Its revitalized focus on the critical study of ḥadīth, its prioritization of ḥadīth above the hermeneutic traditions of the *madhhabs* and its willingness to question *ijma* ‘attacked the very foundation of the ḥadīth canon. Two of its premier ḥadīth scholars, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1768) and Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999), exemplified this critical rejection of the *Sahihayn* canonical culture. For early modern and modern advocates of the traditional

⁴ Abd al-Rauf, *Ḥadīth Literature,* 285.
schools of law or reformists concerned with defending an increasingly beleaguered
Islamic civilization, these criticisms of the Sahihayn came to represent a rejection of the
institutions that had authorized the canon and that it served. The ferocity with which
proponents of the madhhabs have attacked al-Albānī’s criticism of the Sahihayn in
particular reflects both the canon’s role as a symbol of the classical Islamic institutional
tradition and the canon’s important function in scholarly culture.

VIII.2. Rejection of the Canonical Culture: Criticism after Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ

The Sahihayn canonical culture existed to safeguard the institution of the canon
and the important functions it served in the Sunni scholarly tradition. The charity
extended to the two works in order to overcome the tension between the methods of their
authors and the independent rules of hadith criticism reflected the needs of non-hadith
specialists, who relied on the Sahihayn as a measure of authenticity and authoritative
reference. The Sahihayn canon was supposed to provide these jurists with the authority
of the Prophet’s authentic sunna in a manageable form, sifted by those two scholars who
had come to epitomize the critical rigor of the hadith tradition and approved by the
umma’s infallible consensus.

The authoritative edifice of the canon, however, was a construct. It was the
creation of scholars struggling to provide the Islamic intellectual tradition with the secure
institutions it required to meet the needs of the wider Sunni community. Major late
architects of the Sunni hadith tradition, such as Ibn Ḥajar, embraced the canonical culture
shaped by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and elaborated by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī. Yet at
its heart, the ḥadīth scholar’s study of the Prophet’s legacy remained an austere cult of authenticity that acknowledged no source of authority beyond the chain of transmission that connected Muslims to the charisma of their Prophet. The culture of the ḥadīth scholar thus nurtured an iconoclastic strain that did not easily suffer the elaboration of authoritative institutions above and beyond the isnād. Just as many ḥadīth scholars had rejected Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s perceived call to rely on sāḥīh books and end the critical evaluation of ḥadīths, so did many refuse the demand to grant the Šaḥīḥayn an iconic status above the conventions of ḥadīth criticism. While scholars like al-Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar generally accepted the cases for charity advanced by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī, other ḥadīth scholars considered them baseless assertions with no grounding in the principles of the ḥadīth sciences. Criticism thus continued despite the strength of the Šaḥīḥayn canonical culture.

Although the great Syro-Egyptian ḥadīth master Ibn Daqīq al-Īd (d. 702/1302) had embraced the Šaḥīḥayn canonical culture on the issue of exempting al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters from criticism, he exhibited skepticism over al-Nawawī’s argument on taddīs. The notion of distinguishing the Šaḥīḥayn from other books in this case, he explained, was baseless. Such a charitable distinction must entail one of two untenable claims. Either we are sure that al-Bukhārī and Muslim made certain that every instance of possible taddīs was actually a direct transmission (samā’), which we cannot know, or the consensus (ijmā’) of the umma guarantees that no such error occurred. Yet
this again depends on the impossible task of scholars having ascertained that al-Bukhārī and Muslim were entirely thorough in eliminating breaks in their *isnāds*.

Another Shāfi‘ī contemporary of Ibn Daqīq in Cairo, Ṣa‘dīr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad Ibn al-Murāḥbīs (d. 716/1317), seconded this skepticism towards Ibn al-Ṣalāh’s and al-Nawawī’s exemption of al-Bukhārī and Muslim from the rules governing *tadlīs*. In his *Kitāb al-insāf* (apparently lost) he explained:

Indeed, in this exemption (*istithnā‘*) something makes my soul uneasy. For it is a claim without proof, especially since we have found that many of the ḥadīth masters (*huffāz*) have criticized ḥadīths found in the *Sahihayn* or one of them for the *tadlīs* of their narrators.

The Cairene Ḥanafī Ibn Abī al-Wafā’’s rejection of the *Sahihayn* canonical culture moves beyond such skepticism, however, entering the realm of unmitigated contempt. He argues that the notion of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters having “passed the test” is preposterous. Muslim, he explains, had narrated from demonstrably weak transmitters. Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ also rejects Ibn al-Ṣalāh’s argument that one should not hold al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s auxiliary narrations to the same standard as their primary ones. Such narrations are supposed to explain the status (*hāl*) of a ḥadīth, and if Muslim’s collection was supposed to include only authentic reports, what do weak auxiliary reports say about the condition of his main ḥadīths? Accepting all instances of a *mudallis* narrating via “from/according to (*‘an*)” if they occur in the *Sahihayn* but not in

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other works is similarly baseless and represents nothing more than vain posturing (tajawwuh).  

Ibn Abi al-Wafā’ then administers his coup de grace to the canonical culture, detailing a number of hadiths from the Sahihayn whose contents render them unquestionably false. He mentions Muslim’s hadith that “God most great created the earth (al-turba) on Saturday...,” which contradicts the Islamic belief that the world had been created in six days (Saturday being the seventh). He brings up a hadith from Sahih al-Bukhārī that seems to recount the Prophet making his miraculous night journey to Jerusalem before he had even received his first revelation. Finally, he notes Muslim’s report of the Prophet promising the newly converted Abu Sufyān that he will marry his daughter, Umm Ḥabība, in the wake of the Muslim conquest of Mecca. Ibn Abi al-Wafā’ points out that scholars had agreed that the Prophet had already married her years earlier. The Ḥanafi dismisses the various efforts to explain this evident contradiction as vain posturing (tajawwuh) and “futile responses (ajwiba ghayr jā’ila).”

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10 Sahih Muslim: kitāb šifāt al-munāfiqin wa aḥkāmihim, bāb ibtidā‘ al-khalq wa khalq Ādam ‘alayhi al-salam (1).

11 See Fath al-bārī, #’s 349, 3886, 7517; Sahih al-Bukhārī: kitāb al-ṣalat, bāb 1, kitāb manāqib al-anṣār, bāb 41 and 42, kitāb al-tawhīd, bāb 37.

12 Sahih Muslim: kitāb fadā’il al-sahāba, bāb fadā’il Abī Sufyān b. Ḥarb (40).


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VIII.3. Iconoclasm and Institutional Security in Islamic Civilization: The Salafi Tradition

Ibn al-Murahhal and Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ rejected the Ṣaḥīḥayn canonical culture and instead evaluated material from the two books according to the critical conventions of the ḥadīth tradition. Yet their criticisms met with no obvious reprimand. The only condemnation of criticizing the Ṣaḥīḥayn came from Yūsuf b. Mūsā al-Malāfī (d. 803/1400-1), a controversial Ḥanafī student of al-Mughulāy. His unusual and little-known statement that “anyone who looks critically (nāẓara fi) at Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī has become a heretic (tazandaqa),” however, was perceived as patently bizarre by contemporaries and later Muslim biographers. Ibn al-‘Imād (d. 1089/1679) even listed it along with allowing the consumption of hashish as an example of al-Malāfī’s deviant opinions.14

In the early modern period, the iconoclastic strain of ḥadīth study evident in scholars like Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ would again surface in the Salafi movement, with muḥaddiths like Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Ṣaḥānī and later Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī. In the turbulent struggle over defining Islam in the modern era, however, their rejections of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canonical culture would meet with fierce criticism from defenders of the classical Islamic institutions bound closely to the canon. For the first time, criticizing the Ṣaḥīḥayn would become anathema for many scholars.

VIII.3. a. Revival and Reform in the Early Modern and Modern Periods

14 Ibn al-‘Imād, Shadharāt al-dhahab, 7:40.
Since the eighteenth century, movements of revival and reform arising as responses to both internal stimuli and the pervasive influence of Western civilization have dominated Islamic intellectual history. These movements have all faced the problem of determining the proper role of ḥadīth in defining Islamic law, ritual and worldview in ongoing debates about the shape that Islam should take in the modern world. Islamic Modernists such as the Indian Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898) have dismissed the classical tradition of ḥadīth study as incapable of guaranteeing an authentic vision of the Prophet’s sunna. They have thus rejected the role of Prophetic traditions as a central tool for interpreting Islam. Diametrically opposed to these modernists are those scholars one might refer to as Madhhab Traditionalists, who believe that the classical Islamic institutions of the schools of law, theology and Sufi guilds offer the only correct path for understanding Islam.

Lying in between these two camps on the spectrum of embracing or casting off the classical institutions of Islamic civilization are the diverse movements loosely grouped under the term ‘Salafi,’ or those willing to reevaluate the institutions of medieval Islam in order to revive the pure Islam of the Prophet and the first righteous generations (salaf) of Muslims. Modernist Salafis such as the Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996) have eclectically utilized elements of the classical Islamic tradition that they felt could aid in reviving this original greatness. ʿAbduh thus attempted to revive the rationalism of the Muʿtazila, and al-Ghazālī mined the various interpretive methods of the different Sunni madhhab to produce a vision of Islam that was traditionally authentic but more
compatible with modernity. Both tried to curb those parts of the ḥadīth tradition that clashed with modernity by making ḥadīth more subservient to the over-arching principles of the Qur'ān and the methods of Muslim legal theorists. Tied to this group are the Traditionalist Salafis, who invert this equation: like other reformists, they seek to rejuvenate the Muslim community by reviving the primordial greatness of Islam, yet they have sought to recreate the Prophet’s sunna by making the classical study of ḥadīth and the ways of the early community paramount.

For all these reformist strains, the Ṣaḥīḥayn have served as a powerful symbol in debates over the proper role of ḥadīth in modern times. Islamic Modernists like the Egyptian Maḥmūd Abū Rayya have used al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s venerated status to severely criticize the classical ḥadīth tradition by demonstrating how even the Ṣaḥīḥayn contain inauthentic reports. Daniel Brown describes how Modernist “deniers of ḥadīth have especially delighted in exposing traditions in the ṣaḥīḥ collections, especially Bukhārī and Muslim, which they take to be vulgar, absurd, theologically objectionable, or morally repugnant.” Conversely, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī employed the canon to assist him in boldly reinterpreting the classical Islamic tradition to prove that women can hold high public office and to reject seemingly backward matters of dogma such as the punishment of the grave. Unlike Abū Rayya, he venerated al-Bukhārī and Muslim and so

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16 Daniel Brown, Rethinking Tradition, 89.

17 Daniel Brown, Rethinking Tradition, 95.
used their decisions not to include certain problematic hadiths on these issues to neutralize the reports’ efficacy as proof texts.\textsuperscript{18}

Because we are concerned with the tension between the \textit{Sahihayn} canon and the methods of hadith criticism indigenous to the Islamic tradition, we will focus only on the treatment of the canon by Traditionalist Salafis and Madhab Traditionalists. The other two reformist strains, the Islamic Modernists and Modernist Salafis, have been primarily concerned with reacting to the West. Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān’s dismissal of the classical hadith tradition resulted from his encounters with the Orientalist William Muir, who questioned the authenticity of the hadith corpus.\textsuperscript{19} Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī’s intellectual output and political activism were responses to European political and cultural encroachment. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī’s reevaluation of the proper role of women in Islamic society stemmed in part from witnessing the effective leadership of Margaret Thatcher.\textsuperscript{20} Skeptical of Prophetic reports that clash with rationalism or the expectations of modernity, but simultaneously eager to defend the hadith as the repository of the Prophet’s golden age, the reactionary thought of the

\textsuperscript{18} Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, \textit{Turāthunā al-fikrī}, 6\textsuperscript{th} edition (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 180-2; idem, \textit{al-Sunna al-nabawīyya bayn ahl al-fiqh wa ahl al-ḥadīth}, 64.

\textsuperscript{19} Daniel Brown, \textit{Rethinking Tradition}, 33-6.

Modernist Salafis has yielded no systematic approach to classical methods of authenticating hadiths.  

Although Western cultural, intellectual and political domination has cast its shadow over almost every corner of Muslim discourse in the modern period, the Traditionalist Salafis and the Madhhab Traditionalists have been more concerned with each other’s rhetoric than with the West. For Traditionalist Salafis, the umma’s immediate challenge is the corruption of the Prophet’s sunna wrought by excessive loyalty to the madhhabs and the practices of popular religion. For the adherents of these traditions, the Salafi threat to classical Islamic institutions looms larger than Western encroachment. For both groups, Westernization and any Muslim contaminated by it are evils beyond the scope of dialogue. That they both dismiss any Muslim thinker who does not approach questions of Islam through the classical methodologies of fiqh or hadith as “Occidentalists (mustaghribūn)” or “imitators of the Orientalists” testifies to their shared indigenous focus.  

The varied strands that would make up the Traditionalist Salafi movement emerged from the various revival and reform movements that began dominating the intellectual landscape of Islamdom in the eighteenth century. The rise of the Wahhābī movement in Arabia, the Sokoto caliphate in West Africa and later the ahl-e hadith


22 Al-Albānī, Mukhtasar Sahīh al-Bukhārī, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma′ārif, 1422/2002), 2:8-9. Here al-Albānī uses Abū Rayya and Muhammad al-Ghazālī as examples. Madhhab Traditionalists, however, generally use the term “imitator (muqallid)” only for Muslim scholars who do not follow the classical methodologies at all. Azhar shaykhs like al-Ghazālī would probably fall outside this category. Instead, they would be dismissed as “preachers (dā'īya pl. duʿāt).”
movement in India formed part of a broader network of Islamic movements. At their
core lay the objective of renewing the bond with the pure origins of Islam through a
rejuvenated interest in Prophetic hadith. These reformists sought to break free from the
historical accretions of Islamicate civilization, condemned as bid`a, and return Muslim
societies to the radical monotheism (tawhîd) of the Prophet’s original message. They
often embraced the study of hadith as the most direct means to replicating the Prophet’s
ideal Medinan community and turning away from both the excesses of popular religion
and the strict allegiance to specific schools of law.23

As John Voll has identified, the shrine cities of Mecca and Medina served as a
central junction in this massive revival phenomenon. With the move of prominent
muhaddiths such as the Cairene Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 974/1567) and Mullā ‘Alī Qārī
of Herat (d. 1014/1606) to the shrine cities, the Ḥijāz played host to a cadre of ḥadîth-
oriented scholars such as Ibrāhîm b. Ḥasan al-Kurâni (d. 1101/1689), Muḥammad Ḥayât
al-Sindî (d. 1751) and ‘Abdallâh b. Sâlim al-Bâṣrî (d. 1722), who would exercise a
tremendous influence on students from as far away as Malaysia.24 These circles produced
preeminent activist scholars like Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wâḥâb (d. 1792) and Shāh
Walî Allâh al-Dîhlawî (d. 1762). While the thought and programs of Ibn ‘Abd al-


Wahhāb and Shāh Wali Allāh differed dramatically, they both exemplified a willingness to reconsider and break with the mainstream traditions of Sunni thought as it existed in the late medieval period. To different extents, both questioned taqlīd, or the practice of following an existing madhhāb without questioning its proofs, and made a direct consultation of Prophetic ḥadīths the ultimate determinant in interpreting the message of the Qurʾān.

This common interest in reviving the study of Prophetic ḥadīths and condemning excessive or blind adherence to an established school of law ran like a common thread through most of the eighteenth-century movements of revival and reform. To varying degrees, they all championed the practice of ijtihād, or turning anew to the Qurʾān, the Prophet’s sunna and the practices of the early community in order to find new answers to the legal or religious problems of the day. In their focus on the early Muslim community and a return to its legacy at the expense of the later developments of Islamic orthodoxy, these movements were fundamentalist in character. They telescoped religious history, demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice the elaborate developments of classical Islamicate civilization in order to recapture the unity, purity and authenticity of the early community.


were no more qualitative distinctions in history. In this, scholars like Shāh Wāfī Allāh and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb subverted the atavistic conservatism of the Sunni intellectual tradition, asserting that devout and competent modern Muslims were every bit as capable of understanding the message of Islam as the founders of the madhhabs had been.  

VIII.3. b. Traditionalist Salafis in the Middle East

The loosely grouped Traditionalist Salafi movement in the Middle East developed in four dispensations. The earliest, most persistent and most politically active was founded by Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in the mid-eighteenth century in central Arabia, expanding through its alliance with the Saud family of Najd and eventually becoming the dominant religious movement on the Arabian Peninsula. A second Salafi strain appeared in the Yemeni city of Ṣanʿāʾ, with the iconoclastic ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad b. Iṣmāʿīl al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1768) and two generations later with the reformist thinker and ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1839). A third school developed in Damascus in the second half of the nineteenth century around revivalist scholars such as ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Baytār (d. 1917) and his students, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) and Ṭāhir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1920). Finally, an influential Salafi school formed in Baghdad


29 Nafi, “Taṣawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture,” 351.

through the Ḥanбалī revival led by the Alūṣī family: Maḥmūd al-Alūṣī (d. 1853), Nuʿmān al-Alūṣī (d. 1899) and Maḥmūd Shukri al-Alūṣī (d. 1924).31

These three schools were distinct from the Wahhābī movement, with both the Baghdad and Damascene schools espousing a more tolerant approach to classical Sufism. Indeed, their ideological fraternity with the Wahhābīs often proved dangerous for Salafīs in Damascus and Baghdad. Their opponents would often accuse them of being Wahhābīs, and the Ottoman state held them under suspicion of being a Wahhābī fifth column within the empire.32 Al-Ṣanʿānī was a contemporary of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb himself, and despite their similar Salafī leanings, the Wahhābī proclivity towards declaring other Muslims unbelievers (takfīr) detracted from al-Ṣanʿānī's initial positive impression of the movement. He wrote in verse:

I recant that which I said about the Najdī (Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb),
for things have come to me from him on which I differ.
I thought well of him and said, ‘Could it be, could it be,
‘That we have found someone to seek God’s path and His slaves deliver?’

... But some of his letters have come to me from his own hand,
Declaring all the world’s peoples disbelievers intentionally.
In this he has contrived all his proofs and,
You see them weak as a spider’s web when examined critically.33

Nonetheless, the Damascene, Baghdadi, Yemeni and Wahhābī dispensations of the Salafī phenomenon influenced one another. Scholars like al-Qāsimī and Maḥmūd Shukri al-Alūṣī corresponded, and, more recently, al-Albānī used Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s

31 Daniel Brown, Rethinking Tradition, 30.


33 Al-Qanūbī, al-Sayf al-hādd, 40. Supporters of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb dispute al-Ṣanʿānī’s authorship.
books in his lessons. Although the Traditionalist Salafi school differed significantly from the apologetics and Euro-centered political activism of Modernist Salafis like 'Abduh, the trends nonetheless informed one another. 'Abduh’s disciple, Rashid Rida, considered al-San'ani to be the renewer (mujaddid) of the twelfth Islamic century. Al-Albani, in turn, started down the path of reformist thinking when he came across an article by Rida in an issue of 'Abduh and al-Afghani’s al-Manar journal.

Like the other reform movements, the Traditionalist Salafis have aimed at reviving Islam’s original purity and greatness by clearing away the dross of later cultural accretions. Unlike Modernists, however, they have focused literally on reviving the Prophet’s sunna as expressed in the hadith corpus. The primary culprits in distancing the Muslim community from the authentic sunna have been “excessive loyalty to the madhhab (al-ta’assub al-madhhab),” an over-involvement in the science of speculative theology (kalâm), and popular religious practices such as those found among Sufi brotherhoods. What al-San’ani charmingly calls “the bid’ah of madhhabism (al-tamadhub)” causes Muslims to take the rulings of later scholars over the direct injunctions of the infallible Prophet. The speculative sciences have led Muslims away


from the textual authenticity that gives Islam its purity. Popular religion and indulging in cultural accretions have led them to engage in bid'ah that threatens Islam’s essential monotheism (tawḥīd), such as visiting graves and seeking the miracle-working of local saints.

To cure these ills, Traditionalist Salafis have not merely engaged in the study of ḥadīth, they have tried to cultivate its most critically rigorous spirit. Jamal al-Dīn al-Qāsimī’s Qawā’id al-taḥdīth min funūn muṭṭalah al-ḥadīth (The Principles of Regeneration from the Technical Science of Ḥadīth Study) and Tāhir al-Jaza’īrī’s Tawjīḥ al-naẓar ilā ʿusūl al-athar (Examining the Principles of Transmitted Reports) resemble classical manuals on the science of ḥadīth such as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s Muqaddima, but urge Muslims to move beyond the simple acceptance of earlier opinions when evaluating the authenticity of a ḥadīth.\textsuperscript{39} Reviving the stringent spirit of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Salafis reject the lax use of weak ḥadīths in defining a Muslim’s worldview. Al-Ḥabānī asks rhetorically: if we do not treat weak ḥadīths as such, what is the point of the science of ḥadīth criticism? “For the heart of the issue,” he explains, “is that it be highly probable, without serious doubt, that the Prophet (ﷺ) actually said that ḥadīth so that we can depend on him in the Sharia, and attribute rulings to him.”\textsuperscript{40}

Their work is reminiscent of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s innovative pioneering of the ṣaḥīḥ movement a millennium earlier, with their rejection of weak ḥadīths and willingness to break with the laxer standards of Ibn Ḥanbal’s greatest generation. It is

\textsuperscript{39} Daniel Brown, Rethinking Tradition, 32.

\textsuperscript{40} Al-Ḥabānī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhib wa-al-tarhib, 3 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 2000), 1:60.
thus no surprise that one of al-Albānī’s students, the Yemeni Muqbil b. Hādī al-Wādi’ī (d. 2001), compiled the first comprehensive ṣaḥīḥ collection in almost a thousand years, a work designed to provide Muslims with all the authentic ḥadīths not included in the Ṣaḥīḥayn.41

Salafis thus cast aside the institutions of classical Islam, relying on ḥadīths from the Prophet as the ultimate authoritative medium for transmitting the proper interpretation of the faith. According to the Salafi school, this obviates the chains of mystical and legal authority that allowed new practices such as Sufi rituals or fixed legal codes to enter Islam, merely masking departures from the authentic teachings of the Prophet. These were preserved in the authentic ḥadīths, which are accessible to any Muslim who could correctly navigate the volumes in which they were collected. The Qur’ān and the Prophet’s sunna are the only criteria for judging right from wrong. Partisanship or loyalty to a certain scholar or school should not blind Muslims from the ultimate authority of these two sources.

The Traditionalist Salafi focus on ḥadīth, reviving the ways of the early Muslim community and questioning the institutions of classical Islam that had arisen since, stemmed from the same iconoclastic strain as the Ḥanbalī reformer Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Indeed, the Wahhābī, Baghdadi and Damascene schools originated in part

from a renewed interest in Ibn Taymiyya’s writings. As Marshall Hodgson explains, this iconoclastic strain was inherent in the ḥadīth-based Ḥanbalī tradition:

Hanbalism had never really been primarily a school of fiqh at all. It remained a comprehensive and essentially radical movement, which had elaborated its own fiqh in accordance with its own principles, but whose leaders were often unwilling to acknowledge the same kind of taqlid as provided the institutional security of the other schools and rejected the ijmâ’ tradition of the living community on principle.

As we shall see, the manner in which Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya utilized the Sahihayn surfaces again in the Salafi approach to the canon. As we saw in Chapter Six, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim cunningly employed the Sahihayn as a rhetorical foil against their Ashʿarī opponents. Ibn Taymiyya dramatically supported Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s claim about the authenticity of the two works, asserting that “[Al-Bukhārī and Muslim] do not agree on a ḥadīth except that it is authentic without a doubt” and compiling the most comprehensive list of scholars whom he claimed seconded this opinion. For Ibn Taymiyya, the canon proved very useful, for al-Bukhārī and Muslim provided the centerpiece for his efforts to shift the ultimate authority in determining the Prophet’s true legacy towards ḥadīth scholars as opposed to the later substantive law of the jurists.45

Yet, just as he treated other aspects of Sunni scholarly production, Ibn Taymiyya refused to admit any iconic status for the Sahihayn. His subtle qualification that only


material found in both al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works is without a doubt authentic allowed him to criticize freely reports found in only one. Unlike al-Nawawī, his public fatwās announced that numerous reports in al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s work were flawed. He openly criticized Muslim for approving the ḥadīth of the earth being created on Saturday and the report about the Prophet marrying Abū Sufyān’s daughter.46 He noted that al-Bukhārī’s work includes at least three impugned traditions, such as the ḥadīth of the Prophet marrying Maymūna while in a state of pilgrimage (muḥrim). Ibn Taymiyya exceeded even his own boundaries by criticizing the ḥadīth of the Prophet praying after the eclipse, which appears in both the Sahīḥayn.47 This seemingly contradictory approach to the canon, wielding its authority as the acme of critical ḥadīth scholarship but simultaneously denying it iconic status, would reappear with the modern Salafi movement.


The Zaydī Shiite center of Ṣan‘ā’ was an unusual setting for a revival of the Sunni ḥadīth tradition. This environment, however, produced a succession of ḥadīth scholars of singular dynamism and devotion to the study of the Prophet’s sunna through the medium of ḥadīth. An early progenitor was the ninth/fifteenth-century scholar Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436). Although he sprang from Zaydī origins, Ibn al-Wazīr wrote a rebuttal of this Shiite school and then penned a massive defense of the

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47 Ibn Taymiyya, Ilm al-ḥadīth, 160; idem, Majmū‘al-fatāwā, 18:22.
Prophet’s sunna as understood through the Sunni prism of Prophetic ḥadīth. Ibn al-Ważîr’s intellectual interests lay in interacting with the Sunni ḥadīth tradition, and he thus composed a commentary on Ibn al-Ṣalâḥ’s Muqaddima. In this work, the Tanqîh al-anzâr, he demonstrates an intellectual creativity unparalleled by his contemporaries in Cairo. Far from blindly following Ibn al-Ṣalâḥ’s chapter structure like al-‘Īrâqî and others, he addresses neglected issues such as the reliability of Ibn Mâjah’s Sunan topically. He foreshadows the Salafî movement’s anti-madhhab stance by stating that, in matters of law, it is not permitted to ignore a ḥadîth declared saḥîh unless one can demonstrate a damning flaw in the report.  

Although he lived over three centuries later, Muḥammad b. Ṣîmâ’îl al-Ṣâ‘ânî (b. 1099/1688, d. 1768) inherited Ibn al-Ważîr’s Salafî spirit, devoting a large commentary to his Tanqîh al-anzâr and frequently citing his predecessor with great affection. Like Ibn al-Ważîr, he hailed from a Zaydî background but remained steadfastly focused on the Sunni ḥadîth tradition. His oeuvre also consisted almost entirely of commentaries on the works of major Sunni muḥaddiths: Ibn Daqîq’s Iḥkâm al-ahkâm, Ibn Ḥâjar’s Bulûgh al-marâm and al-Suyûtî’s al-Jâmi‘ al-saghîr. Al-Ṣâ‘ânî’s Kitâb iqâz al-fikra li-murâja‘at al-fitra (The Awakening of Thought for a Return to the Pure Nature [of Islam]).


represents an attempt to break theological discussion out of what he sees is the stupor of *taqlīd* and senseless speculation (*khawāf*), returning it to the ways of the Salaf. He declares that blind imitation has always been mankind’s pitfall, but further lambastes decadent Muslim scholars for their laziness, divisiveness, and obsequiousness. He accuses participants in speculative theology of constructing straw-man arguments for their opponents and then failing to reevaluate such useless assertions. Furthermore, if a ḥadīth or Qur’ānic verse contradicts these scholars’ stance or school of thought, they try to interpret it away even if the interpretation is impossible in that context.⁵¹

Al-Ṣan‘ānī studied in Mecca and Medina with Sālim b. Ṭabdallāh al-Baṣrī and others, then returned to Ṣan‘ā’ to serve as the preacher in the city’s main mosque. He frequently provoked the ire of Zaydī scholars and the community’s leaders, however, with his preoccupation with studying and teaching the “classic (*ummaḥānī*)” Sunni ḥadīth books. More seriously, he broke with the rest of the community in his insistence on following ḥadīths instead of the Zaydī school in matters of ritual. Like al-Bukhārī before him and later the *ahl-e ḥadīth* in India, he insisted on raising his hands in prayer and holding them by his chest instead of by his side like other Shiites.⁵² Al-Shawkānī, al-Ṣan‘ānī’s principal biographer, held him in great personal admiration and saw him as an ideal Salafi ḥadīth scholar unafraid of breaking with social convention. He described al-

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Sanʿānī as one who “fled from taqlīd and the spuriousness of those opinions of the jurists that lacked any proof.”

Indeed, al-Sanʿānī stands out as one of the most fearlessly iconoclastic hadīth scholars in Islamic history. Five centuries after Sunni consensus had solidified on the complex question of defining the uprightness (ʿadāla) of a hadīth transmitter in the work of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Sanʿānī proposed a total reconsideration. Whereas Sunni hadīth scholars had accepted Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s definition that an upstanding transmitter be “an adult Muslim of sound mind, free of the paths of sin and defects in honor (murūʿa),” al-Sanʿānī’s Thamarāt al-naẓar fi ʿilm al-athar (The Fruits of Reasoning in the Science of Traditions, written 1758) argues that this elaborate definition is pointless. Rather, ʿadāla is simply the state of “the likelihood of truthfulness (mazānmat al-ṣidq).” The existing standards of uprightness, al-Sanʿānī continues, are too lofty for the material they supposedly govern. Muḥaddiths, like scholars in the other Islamic sciences, had become distracted in setting up principles (usūl) that do not hold up in actual application (furū).

Al-Sanʿānī’s iconoclasm, however, appears most clearly in his treatment of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s works. Although he greatly respected the two masters, this maverick rejected almost every feature of the Sahīḥayn canonical culture as constructed by al-Khaṭīb, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar. He states quite simply that “we respect the Sahīḥayn, but do not give them more station than they deserve.”

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54 Al-Sanʿānī, Thamarāt al-naẓar, 125.
55 Al-Sanʿānī, Thamarāt al-naẓar, 137.
Most dramatically, he rejects the claim of the umma’s consensus on the two books. Although al-Nawawī had earlier refused the notion that this consensus meant that the contents of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* yielded epistemological certainty, he never questioned that *ijmāʿ* on the books’ authenticity had in fact occurred. Al-Ṣanʿānī, on the other hand, refutes this, citing the improbability of all the Muslim scholars agreeing on the authenticity of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s ḥadīths. Are we also to assume, he asks, that everyone who had in fact approved the two books was truly familiar with their contents? Even before the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* were written, he concludes, such practical difficulties in evaluating consensus had led Ibn Ḥanbal to pronounce that anyone who claimed *ijmāʿ* had occurred on an issue was a liar. The main ḥadīth providing justification for the infallibility of the umma’s consensus, he continues, would not even apply to the intricacies of ḥadīth criticism. The Prophet had stated that his community would not agree on “going astray (*dalāla*),” while a minor flaw in a narration can hardly merit such a title. The umma is immune to error writ large, not small oversights (*khaṭaʿ*) such as making a mistake in evaluating the isnād of an āḥād ḥadīth.

Al-Ṣanʿānī also attacked the canonical ranking of al-Bukhārī above Muslim. He argued that the feature that had most clearly distinguished al-Bukhārī above Muslim, his requirement for at least one meeting between transmitters in narrations via “from/according to (*ʿan*),” had little practical value and provided no real guarantee of direct transmission. How could a transmitter who may have narrated hundreds of ḥadīths

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from a particular teacher hear all these reports in one sitting? Considering this, what use is al-Bukhari’s requirement for one meeting in guaranteeing the direct transmission of all the hadiths passed through this link? There still remains the possibility of a break in the isnad (irsâl). Just as al-Shanani deflates al-Bukhari’s requirement, he gives a more positive evaluation of Muslim’s. Muslim’s requirement for contemporaneity in 'an transmissions was not a naïve assumption that two people who lived at the same time had heard their hadiths from one another; Muslim simply required the high probability that the two had met for direct transmission. In reality, this was the same level of assurance provided by al-Bukhari’s theoretically more rigorous conditions.

Al-Shanani also rejects attempts to disarm the opinions of scholars who had favored Muslim’s Sahih over al-Bukhari’s. Unlike the standard line that “some” scholars from the Maghrib had preferred Muslim’s collection, he feels that a large number of prominent hadith experts had in fact favored Muslim. Furthermore, they did so for reasons more significant than Muslim’s exclusion of incomplete legal-commentary reports (ta‘lqât) and his convenient grouping of all the narrations of a tradition in one place. Al-Shanani claims that he saw in the writings of al-Nawawi, Ibn Jamâ’a and Taj al-Dîn al-Tabrizi indications that these scholars felt Sahih Muslim was more authentic than Sahih al-Bukhari. He also rejects Ibn Hajar’s attempts to explain away Abû ‘Alî al-Naysabûri’s proclamation that Muslim’s work was the most authentic book available.

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60 Al-Shanani, Tawfîh al-aɾkâr, 1:50-1.
Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawi’s demands for charity on the issues of ṭadlīs and the criticism of transmitters did not convince al-Ṣan‘ānī. He reminds us that many of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s transmitters were criticized with good reason and clear explanations. In response to al-Nawawi’s claim that instances of a mudallis’s transmitting through ‘an in the Ṣahīḥayn should be treated as direct transmission, al-Ṣan‘ānī cites Ibn Daqiq and Ibn al-Muraḥjal’s skeptical objections. He comments that “this is a claim, but where is the proof?” Here he even breaks with Ibn al-Wazīr, who had acceded to the notion that al-Bukhārī and Muslim would not have included a mudallis’s narration via ‘an unless they knew it occurred through another reliable isnād. Again, al-Ṣan‘ānī objects that there is no proof for such a claim.

VIII.5. Shāh Wālī Allāh and the First Condemnation of Criticizing the Canon

Like Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and al-Ṣan‘ānī, the great Indian scholar Shāh Wālī Allāh voyaged as a young man to the Hijāzī crucible of reformist hadith scholarship and returned to his native Delhi with a heightened appreciation for the authority of the hadith tradition. In terms of fluency with the labyrinth of Islamic sciences, however, he proved far more advanced than the stark hadith-based Ḥanbalism of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Even al-Ṣan‘ānī, who grasped and engaged the Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilite traditions of dialectical


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theology, did not match Shāh Wālī Allāh’s innovative mixture of ḥadīth scholarship, reformed Sufism, social and political activism, and even Neo-Platonism.

Unlike Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s and al-Ṣanʿānī’s preoccupation with matters of creed and ritual observation, Shāh Wālī Allāh’s career tackled the troubling political realities of India in his time. The sudden failure of Moghul imperial power after the death of the emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 marked the end of unified and effective Moghul rule in the subcontinent. Shāh Wālī Allāh was eyewitness to the terrible destruction wrought on the unprotected Moghul realm in the wake of the empire’s decay. In 1739, the Afghan conqueror Nādir Shāh sacked Delhi and caused tremendous bloodshed. Combined with a series of disastrous Afghan invasions in 1748, 1757 and 1760, these events traumatized the psyches of men like Shāh Wālī Allāh. For scholars, it represented the fragmentation of Islamic society in India. As Ahmad Dallal writes, “Disunity is a central theme that occupied [Shāh Wālī Allāh] throughout his life.”

In his role as a scholar, teacher, and social activist and in his relations with local Indian rulers, Shāh Wālī Allāh sought to regain a lost unity. He believed that political power was an essential component of a rejuvenated Islamic civilization in India. In the wake of the Moghul failure, he wrote to several leaders such as the Niẓām of Hyderabad asking them to take on the role of Islam’s patron and leader in the subcontinent. This desire to protect communal cohesion resulted in an attitude towards religious

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disagreement and popular practices that was more pluralistic than those of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Ṣanʿānī or the founder of the West African Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio (d. 1817). Unlike the Wahhābīs, he proved very conservative about excommunication, limiting it to cases for which the Qur’ān or ḥadīth provided direct evidence and not extending it to acts of associationism (shirk) such as prostrating to trees. He allowed people to visit tombs for mourning and to seek the intercession of pious people provided one did not glorify them.67

Shāh Walī Allāh agreed with the other reformists that excessive loyalty to the madhhabs had seriously hobbled the Islamic intellectual tradition and led it away from the Prophet’s true message. Yet he also recognized the tremendous utility of these institutions. He personally treated all four Sunni madhhabs equally, and urged scholars to use them eclectically as reservoirs of expert opinions. The ultimate determinant in selecting which school’s ruling to take, however, was the direct sayings of the Prophet. Since all the schools of law had theoretically derived their authoritative rulings from the Prophet’s sunna, the ḥadīths retained an inherent and constant superiority to these bodies of substantive law. Each generation of scholars should thus consult them anew.68 For the masses of Sunni Muslims, however, following one of the four established madhhabs was essential. In India, they should adhere to the rulings of their traditional Ḥanafi school.69

69 Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India, 39; Peters, “Idjīḥād and Taqīād in 18th and 19th Century Islam,” 143; Marcia K. Hermansen, trans., The Conclusive Argument from God (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2003), xxx.
Shâh Wâlî Allâh’s commitment to communal cohesion governed his attitude towards the Šâhiḥayn canon. Despite the reformist tendencies he shared with his fellow student in the Ḥijâz, al-Ṣan`ānî, Shâh Wâlî Allâh was no harsh iconoclast. He staunchly defended the canon. Like the schools of law, they provided indispensable institutions for the preservation of unity in Islamic thought. He states at the beginning of his discussion of ḥadîth in his _mognum opus_, the _Hujjat Allâh al-bâligha_ (God’s Conclusive Argument), “Know that there is no path for us to know the precepts of the Sharia or its rulings except though the reports of the Prophet (s)....” Reliable books of ḥadîth, foremost the Šâhiḥayn and Mâlik’s _Muwâṭṭa_’, are essential for this, since “there does not exist today any non-written, reliable transmission (riwâya... ghayr mudawwana) [back to the Prophet].”

He then lists the various levels of ḥadîth collections, beginning with the top level of the _Muwâṭṭa_’ and the _Šâhiḥayn_. Alluding to a Qur’anic verse (Qur’ān 4:115) used to emphasize the importance of consensus (ījâma) since the time of al-Shâfi`î (d. 204/819-20), he states:

_Asc for the Šâhiḥayn, the ḥadîth scholars have come to a consensus that everything in them with an _isnâd_ back to the Prophet is absolutely authentic, that [the two books] are attested by massive transmission back to their authors, and that anyone who detracts from their standing is a heretic (mubtadî’) not following the path of the believers._

This represents the first moratorium on criticism of the Šâhiḥayn. Although Abū Mas`ūd al-Dimashqî, Ibn al-Ṣalâh, al-Nawawî and Ibn Ḥajar had all rallied to al-Bukhârî’s and Muslim’s defense, they had never condemned criticism of the Šâhiḥayn as

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71 Shâh Wâlî Allâh, _Hujjat Allâh al-bâligha_, 1:134. For a discussion of the use of this verse as a proof text for ījâma’, see Abû Zahra. _Ibn Taymiyya_ (Cairo: Dâr al-Fîkr al-`Arabi, [1964]), 469 ff.
inherently unacceptable. Even after the consolidation of the canonical culture in the seventh/thirteenth century, no one attacked the critiques of Ibn Taymiyya or the virulent criticisms of Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ as violations of the canonical orthodoxy. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī had struggled to protect the Ṣaḥīḥayn because the books had become crucial institutions in Sunni scholarly culture. Yet in the relative stability of Mamluk Cairo, attacks by critics like Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ held little consequence for the sturdy and blossoming Sunni religious culture of the period.

For Shāh Wali Allāh, the stakes had become much higher indeed. Although we do not know exactly to whom he directed his warning about criticizing the Ṣaḥīḥayn, only a merchantman’s ride away across the Indian Ocean in Yemen his contemporary al-Ṣan’ānī was flagrantly dismissing the canonical culture that had been constructed to protect the institution of the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Although Shāh Wali Allāh was a ḥadīth-oriented reformist who sought to limit the divisive effects of the madhhab, he appreciated the roles of such institutions in maintaining social, intellectual and political order in a beleaguered umma. It is not difficult to imagine that he had come across the iconoclastic thought of the young Ṣan’ānī while in the Ḥijāz, perhaps in the classes of their common teacher Abū Ṭāhir b. Ibrāhīm al-Kurdi (d. 1732-3), and later sensed the danger it posed for his reformist agenda. While we can hardly contend that Shāh Wali Allāh’s harsh condemnation of criticizing al-Bukhārī and Muslim was an actual response to al-Ṣan’ānī’s writings, it might as well have been. What al-Ṣan’ānī reviled as “the heresy of madhhabism,” and the baseless premises of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canonical culture, Shāh Wali Allāh saw as essential institutions for the Islamic revival.

Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī was born in 1914 in Shkodër, Albania, to a family of staunchly Ḥanafī scholars. When he was nine years old, however, his family emigrated to Syria. There the young Albānī followed in his father’s footsteps and studied Ḥanafī jurisprudence with other Albanian students in Damascus. As a young man, he entered a bookstore near the Umayyad Mosque one day and found a copy of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghanī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s reformist journal al-Manār. An article written by Rashīd Riḍā in particular struck al-Albānī. Riḍā was criticizing the great champion of classical Sufism, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, for his Sufi teachings and his use of unreliable ḥadīths to justify them. Al-Albānī also found the ḥadīth scholar Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Īrāqī’s (d. 806/1404) book detailing those weak ḥadīths that al-Ghazālī had included in his classic Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn (Revival of the Religious Sciences). These works sowed the seeds of mistrust in al-Albānī’s heart for Sufism and weak ḥadīths; for him they were loopholes through which ‘inauthentic’ practices could enter Islam. Attracted by al-Manār’s call for the purified, Arab Islam of the Prophet’s time, he began studying the ḥadīth sciences independently.

Like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb before him, al-Albānī turned against the practices of popular Sufism and the strict adherence to one school of law in the face of contradicting ḥadīths. He read through all of Ibn ‘Asākir’s mammoth Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq and, discovering that the Umayyad Mosque had formerly been the Church of St.

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John built on his tomb, refused to pray there. Like other Salafis, al-Albānī considered incorporating graves into worship *bid’ā*.

These non-conformist ways eventually angered al-Albānī’s father, who told him he needed to choose between “disbelief and monotheism (*al-kufr wa al-tawḥīd*).” Al-Albānī replied that equally he must choose between “the sunna [of the Prophet] and *taqlīd*.” Cast out penniless by his father, al-Albānī became a watch repairer and began spending long hours in the Zāhiriyā Library in Damascus (founded by Tāhir al-Jazā’irī) poring over ḥadīth manuscripts.

Al-Albānī devoted himself to ḥadīth scholarship in the Salafi idiom. He undertook what became an extensive project that he would later dub “bringing the sunna within reach of the umma (*taqřīb al-sunna bāyn yaday al-umma*),” the principal aim of which was to remove what he deemed weak ḥadīths from important classical Islamic texts. It was the deleterious effects of these weak ḥadīths that had allowed the Muslim community to stray so far from the authentic legacy of the Prophet. This Salafi philosophy is best glimpsed in al-Albānī’s massive, thirteen-volume work identifying weak ḥadīths entitled *Silsilat al-ahādīth al-ḏa’īfa wa al-mawdū‘a wa ta’thīrihā al-sayyi‘ fi al-umma* (The Series of Weak and Forged Ḥadīths and Their Negative Effect on the Umma). He also composed books identifying the weak ḥadīths found in famous works such as al-Mundhirī’s (d. 656/1258) *al-Tarḥīb wa al-tarḥīb*, al-Bukhārī’s *al-Adab al-

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75 Al-Albānī compares his breaking with his father’s legal school with Abraham’s leaving his father’s idolatrous ways; see al-Albānī, “Tarjamat al-Shaykh al-Albānī – 2.”
mufrad and finally the famous Four Sunans of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā‘ī and Ibn Mājah.76

Al-Albānī combined such focused ḥadīth scholarship with intensive scholarly activism. Through his books and preaching, he sought to reform the community around him by calling them to heed the Qur‘ān and the Prophet’s sunna above all things. He traveled from city to city, speaking and writing in his attack on what he called “corrupting morals, illegitimate forms of worship and false beliefs.”77 He called on the predominantly Ḥanafi scholars around him to ensure that their school’s rulings accorded with the sunna of the Prophet as expressed in the ḥadīth corpus. A mufīṭ might advocate his school’s position on a question, but he should always provide direct evidence from the Qur‘ān and the ḥadīth before doing so.78 His books attacked innovative religious practices (bīḍa‘) and sought to eradicate them from social institutions such as funerals, wedding ceremonies, and the annual pilgrimage. His criticisms extended to state interference in religious affairs, for he rejected the Syrian government’s support for the Ḥanafi legal code as embodied in the Ottoman Majelle as well as the position of scholars who allowed interest for the sake of facilitating modern finance.79 Eventually he was

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79 Al-Albānī, “al-Taqfīd,” and “Silsilat as’ilat Abī Ishāq al-Ḥuwaynī.”
imprisoned in Syria, where he wrote a major work on al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ, and was forced to emigrate to Jordan in 1980.

Al-Albānī, like Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Shāh Wałī Allāh, telescoped the normative dimension of time in Islamic religious history. He rejected the atavistic logic of the Islamic intellectual tradition and considered himself qualified to review the work of the classical scholars of Islam. Al-Albānī was not calling for intellectual anarchy or the neglect of scholars; like all Muslim scholars, he clearly identified a certain group known as “the people of knowledge (ahl al-īl)” to whom everyday Muslims should turn for religious expertise. Nor was he rejecting the work of classical Muslim scholars; indeed al-Albānī relied entirely on earlier criticisms of hadīths and their transmitters in his reevaluation of the contents of famous works. Although he considered himself qualified enough to reexamine classical texts, he could not recreate the intimate access that classical scholars had to the minutiae of hadīth criticism. Al-Albānī’s books, such as the Sīlsilat al-ḥadīth al-dā’fā, thus apply the opinions of classical hadīth masters and later critics such as Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ to texts. They are thus replete with citations from the whole range of Sunni authorities, including al-Shāfi‘ī, Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Ḥazm.

This telescoped vision of religious history centered on the study of hadīth as a continuous and living tradition in a constant state of reevaluation. When asked about his controversial criticism of a famous hadīth transmitter from the early Islamic period, al-

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80 See al-Albānī, Fatāwā al-shaykh al-Albānī, ed. ‘Akāsha ‘Abd al-Mannān al-Ṭayyibī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1414/1994), 162. Here the author states that one scholar’s position cannot be taken over another’s simply because he lived earlier.

81 See, for example, al-Albānī, Sīlsilat al-ḥadīth al-dā’fā wa al-mawḍū‘a, 13 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1422/2002), 1:141, where he draws from Ibn Ḥazm’s al-Iḥkām fi wusūl al-akhām.

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Albānī replied that the science of ḥadīth criticism “is not simply consigned to books (maṣṭūr ʿī al-kutub),”\(^{82}\) it is a dynamic process of critical review. Al-Albānī explained that one of the principles of Islamic scholarship is that “religious knowledge (ʿilm) cannot fall into rigidity (lā yāqbalu al-jumūd).”\(^{83}\) It is thus not surprising that al-Albānī and his students are the first Muslim scholars in centuries to produce massive collections evaluating Prophetic traditions.

Al-Albānī’s career has certainly been one of the most controversial in modern Islamic intellectual history. In both his legal rulings and ḥadīth evaluations, al-Albānī broke with the communal consensus of the madhhab traditions. Like Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, he was thus attacked for breaking with the infallible ijmāʾ of the umma.\(^{84}\) Although he drew almost entirely on the work of classical scholars, his reevaluation of ḥadīths long considered sound or relied on by elements of the Muslim community provoked controversy. Madhhab Traditionalists recoiled at his influential and barbed criticisms of the traditional schools of jurisprudence, broad rejection of Sufism and controversial legal rulings. His prohibition on women wearing gold bracelets, otherwise considered a female prerogative, angered traditionalists, while his statement that women need not cover their faces drew the ire of conservatives who might otherwise embrace his

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\(^{82}\) Al-Albānī, “Silsilat as ʿīlat Abī ʾIshāq al-Ḥuwaynī liʾl-shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī.”

\(^{83}\) Al-Albānī, Sahīḥ al-Targhib wa al-tarhib, 1:4.

fundamentalist calling. A According to even his own students, al-Albānī’s personality could be caustic.

A plethora of books have thus appeared attacking al-Albānī and refuting his positions, most of them from the pens of Madhab Traditionalists. The Jordanian Ash‘arī theologian, Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Saqqāf, for example, composed a book entitled Qāmūs ṣhata‘īm al-Albānī (Dictionary of al-Albānī’s Slanderings). Other scholars have more specifically criticized al-Albānī’s rulings on the authenticity of ḥadīths in his Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-da‘ifā, his Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīha, and his listing of weak reports from the Four Sunans. 86

Al-Albānī’s sometimes autodidactic education was a further affront to many Muslim scholars, who absolutely required a student to read texts at the hands of a scholar trained within an interpretive school and to eventually receive license (ijīza) for his understanding of that book. In the same way that Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1356) had accused Ibn Taymiyya of not learning the proper interpretation of classical texts from qualified transmitters, so have many scholars attributed al-Albānī’s unacceptable positions to his lack of ijīzas. 87

85 Al-Albānī, Fatawā, 593 ff.


87 Al-Subkī, al-Sayf al-ṣaqīl, 63. Muḥammad Abū Zahra has convincingly argued against this accusation leveled at Ibn Taymiyya. See Abū Zahra, Ibn Taymiyya; 111 ff., 118.
VIII.7. Against the Canon: Al-Albānī’s Criticism of the Ṣaḥīḥayn and His Detractors

Al-Albānī used the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon for the same dialectical purposes as generations of Muslim scholars before him: they provided him a trump card in debates over the authenticity of ḥadīths. He acknowledged the rhetorical power of the two books, saying that “it has become like a general convention (ṣūr ṣum ‘ain)” among Sunni scholars that anything included in the Ṣaḥīḥayn is without a doubt authentic.88 When asked about several pro-Shiite ḥadīths asserting ‘Alī’s rightful place as the Prophet’s successor, al-Albānī replied that if someone really believes these reports, he should “lay out the Ṣaḥīḥayn before him” and find the ḥadīths in one of them as proof.89 Yet like the Damascene firebrand Ibn Taymiyya, al-Albānī openly undermined any iconic status for the two works beyond their convenience as authoritative references in debate. He rejected the practice of some less thorough jurists who, like al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, would manipulate the legitimizing power of the “standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim” by claiming that a ḥadīth met these criteria simply if the transmitters in its isnād were found in the Ṣaḥīḥayn.90 As his Egyptian student Abū Ishāq al-Ḥuwaynī explained, jurists cannot simply look up the narrators found in an isnād in a dictionary of transmitter criticism and declare the ḥadīth authentic if none of them have been impugned. The

89 Al-Albānī, “al-Taqlīd.”
90 Al-Albānī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhib wa al-tarhib, 1:70.
science of ḥadīth evaluation requires that one explore any corroborating or contrasting narrations of the ḥadīth to determine its reliability.⁹¹

In March 1969, al-Albānī published an edition of ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Mundhirī’s Mukhtāsar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim as part of his efforts to provide the Muslim community with accessible versions of classical ḥadīth works expunged of all weak material. His extreme respect for al-Bukhārī and Muslim is evident, for he adds, “That is with the exception of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, due to the scholars’ approval of these collections and their being free of weak or uncorroborated reports (al-aḥādīth al-da’īfa wa al-munkara)....”⁹² This statement, however, clearly did not accurately represent the author’s stance on the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Drawing on well-known earlier criticisms, such as the problem of Abū al-Zubayr al-Makki’s taldīs, al-Albānī notes in brief footnotes that about two dozen narrations in Muslim’s collection contained flaws due to vagaries in their chains of transmission.⁹³ As al-Albānī’s conflict with the Madhhab Traditionalists developed, he also criticized, in his lectures and writings throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s, ḥadīths from al-Bukhārī’s collection for isnād and content reasons, such as the report of the Prophet marrying Maymūna while in a state of pilgrimage.⁹⁴


⁹⁴ Al-Albānī, ed., Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwīyya, 23.
Al-Albānī’s empty homage to the consensus on the Ṣaḥīḥayn and his use of the two books as measures of authenticity in polemics despite his many criticisms mirror the rhetorical duplicity with which the canon was employed in the classical period. Al-Albānī’s reliance on well-established criticisms of the Ṣaḥīḥayn does, however, clarify the seeming contradiction between such critiques and his condemnation of “Westernized” Modernist scholars who reject ḥadīths that “the umma has accepted with consensus”: he did not feel that he himself was actually criticizing any of al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s ḥadīths. Rather, he was simply noting existing critiques made by the historical giants of ḥadīth scholarship. As he stated in defense of his noting a flaw in one of al-Bukhārī’s isnāds earlier critiqued by al-Dhahabī, “I am not the innovator (mubtadi‘) of this criticism...”

Nonetheless, the outcry from the Madhhab Traditionalists over al-Albānī’s perceived attack on the Ṣaḥīḥayn was ferocious. In the early 1970s, the Syrian Ḥanafī ḥadīth scholar ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997) published a tract against al-Albānī’s reevaluation of the Ṣaḥīḥayn. In 1987 the Egyptian ḥadīth scholar Maḥmūd Saʿīd Mamduḥ published a work entitled Tanbih al-muslim ilā taʿaddī al-Albānī ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Alerting the Muslim to al-Albānī’s Transgression upon Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). The Lebanese scholar and staunch defender of the traditional Islamic schools of law, Gibril Fouad Haddad, has dubbed al-Albānī “the chief innovator of our time” and accused him

of bid'a for publishing "corrected' editions of the two Sahih of al-Bukhari and Muslim... in violation of the integrity of these motherbooks."98

The works of two of al-Albâni's critics are particularly instructive in examining the dynamic between the canon and criticism. The most persistent detractor of al-Albâni's hadith scholarship has been Maḥmūd Saʿīd Mamdūḥ, who studied with two of the scholar's bitterest adversaries, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda and the Moroccan Sufi ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī (d. 1993). Mamdūḥ has written at least four rebuttals of al-Albâni's work on different subjects, but al-Albâni's impudence in criticizing the Sahihayn has proven the lodestone for Mamdūḥ's attacks.99 The most incisive and comprehensive defense of the Sahihayn canon, which perforce addresses al-Albâni's criticisms, is the monumental Makānat al-Sahihayn (The Place of the Sahihayn) of the Medinan scholar Khālīl Mullā Khāṭîr.

For Madhhab Traditionalists, al-Albâni's criticism poses two main challenges. First, it threatens the important role of the Sahihayn canon in scholarly culture. Second, it undermines the institutions of consensus, scholarly hierarchy and the vision of history on which the canon rests. At the root of the Traditionalists' refutations of al-Albâni's scholarship in general is his willingness to question the established practices and presuppositions of the Sunni scholarly tradition. Rejecting al-Albâni's condemnation of using weak hadiths in Islamic law and ritual, Mamdūḥ declares:

98 See www.sunnah.org/history/Innovators/al_albani.htm, last accessed 5/31/04.

99 An additional example of Mamdūḥ's rebuttals of al-Albâni is his Wustūl al-tahānī bi-ithbāt sunniyyat al-sibḥa wa al-radā' 'alā al-Albānī. For a tangential discussion of al-Albâni's inappropriate criticism of al-Bukhārī, see Mamdūḥ, al-Naqd al-sahih li-mā u turiḍa 'alayhi min aḥādīth al-Masābiḥ, 16-7 (see Ibn Ḥajar, Fath #’s 843 and 6329).
Indeed, I have concluded that his methods disagree with those of the jurists and hadith scholars, and that he is creating (yuḥḍīthu) great disarray and evident disruption in the proofs of jurisprudence both generally and specifically. He lacks trust in the imāms of law and hadith, as well as in the rich hadith and law tradition handed down to us, in which the umma has taken great pride.  

In contrast, Mullā Khāṭir reiterates the predominant non-Salafi view of Islamic religious history, in which later generations are only worthy of imitating the great scholars of yore. "Al-Bukhārī is a mujtahid," he explains, "and contemporary people are imitators (muqallid), walking according to his principles and constraints, as well as those of others like him from among the people of knowledge."  

Concerning al-Albānī's removal of weak hadiths from al-Bukhārī's work al-Adab al-mufrad, Mamdūh asks rhetorically, "I wonder, was al-Bukhārī, God bless him, unable to select the hadiths of al-Adab al-mufrad as he did with his Sahīḥ?"  

Mullā Khāṭir, who is too polite to name al-Albānī specifically, merely talks of an "upstart at the end of time..."  

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100 Mamdūh, al-Taʾrif bi-awhām, 1:14.  
101 Mullā Khāṭir, Makānat al-Sahīḥayn, 494.  
103 Mamdūh, al-Taʾrif bi-awhām, 1:31.
who impudently challenges the umma’s consensus on the 
\(\text{\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}\)’s absolute authenticity.\(^{104}\)

The practical manifestation of the authority of tradition in Sunni scholarship is the notion of consensus, which transforms received opinion among scholars into a direct manifestation of God’s authority as deposited in His chosen umma. One of the primary faults that \textit{Madhhab} Traditionalists find in al-Albānī’s criticism of the \(\text{\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}\) is thus his rejection of the consensus declared on the two works’ authenticity. Mamdūh states unequivocally in his \textit{Tanbīh} that al-Albānī’s deigning to “examine critically (\(al\text{-}\textit{naz\text{a}r} \, fi\))” the \(\text{\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}\) constitutes an affront to the umma’s acceptance of the two works and attacks the \textit{ijmāˈ} that ḥadīth scholars since the early 400/1000s have declared on the two works. Even considering the possibility that some of the \textit{isnāds} in the \(\text{\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}\) contain flaws is to doubt the defining characteristic of the two books: all the material they contain is ṣaḥīḥ by very dint of its inclusion.\(^{105}\) The absolving power of \textit{ijmāˈ} provides the answers to any criticisms al-Albānī might raise about the \(\text{\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}\), such as the question of \textit{tadhkīs} in the two works. Invoking the charitable declarations made by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī, Mamdūh explains, “The rules of ḥadīth have determined that al-Bukhārī and Muslim were correct, and the umma has agreed on this.”\(^{106}\) He adds that al-Albānī “throws out the \textit{ijmāˈ} of the umma and the craft of its ḥadīth masters, entering into a matter settled long ago and whose authenticity was agreed on centuries ago.”\(^{107}\)

\(^{104}\) Mullā Khāṭir, \textit{Makānat al-\textit{Sa\'\text{h}i\text{h}ayn}}, 127.


\(^{106}\) Mamdūh, \textit{Tanbīh al-muslim}; 24, 53.

Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s canonical function as the exemplum of excellence in ḥadīth scholarship also serves as an exhibit in the canon’s defense. Their work defines the rules of ḥadīth scholarship, so who is al-Albānī to question their judgment? Mūllā Khāṭir states:

Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, may God bless them, they are the *imāms* of this science, the stallions of its arena, without peer in their time, the heroes of their age, in mastery, criticism, research, examination and in encompassing knowledge... there can be no objection to the *Shaykhayn*.108

In addition to breaking with consensus, critics of al-Bukhārī and Muslim thus face the impossible task of superseding their ultimate expertise in ḥadīth.109 Mūllā Khāṭir correctly adds that nowadays ḥadīth scholars cannot access all the material that al-Bukhārī and Muslim had at their disposal but has since vanished.110 How can al-Albānī thus dare to correct these vaunted masters?

Like Shāh Wālī Allāh’s defense of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* canon, Mambūḥ and Mūllā Khāṭir also reject al-Albānī’s criticisms because they threaten the canon’s well-established utility. Mūllā Khāṭir notes that one of the properties of the two works is that one can act on their ḥadīths without any need to prove their authenticity.111 Perhaps his greatest objection to al-Albānī’s scholarship is the very notion of “correcting the *Ṣaḥīḥ* (*tashīh al-Ṣaḥīḥ*),” to which Mūllā Khāṭir devotes an entire chapter in his book. For him the very notion of qualifying the phrase “al-Bukhārī/Muslim included it”

108 Mūllā Khāṭir, *Makānat al-Ṣaḥīḥ*; 246, 256.
110 Mūllā Khāṭir, *Makānat al-Ṣaḥīḥ*; 488.
111 Mūllā Khāṭir, *Makānat al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 80.
with the comment “and it is authentic” represents unmitigated effrontery to the purpose of the canon. Mamdūh seconds this concern for any threat to the role of the Sahihayn as authoritative references. “You see the ḥadith masters (ḥuffāz),” he states, “if they cite a ḥadith from one of the Sahihayn, that was sufficient to rule that the ḥadith was authentic, so you do not see them researching the isnāds.”

Al-Albānī’s criticism of the Sahihayn also manifests the Salafi threat to the principles of following an established madhhab (taqlīd) and the hierarchy of scholars so valued among Madhhab Traditionalists. Mamdūh asserts that al-Albānī’s criticizing the Sahihayn invites further criticism of the two works and is a call for unconstrained independent reasoning (ijtihād) instead of the proper reliance on qualified scholars (taqlīd). Criticizing these established institutions of Islamic scholarship “opens a door we cannot easily shut.” Furthermore, it represents a challenge to the hermeneutic hierarchy of the madhhabs and their system of authorized interpretation of texts. Mamdūh states that al-Albānī’s statements contain “great dangers” since he has given “to any claimant the right to judge the ḥadiths of the Sahihayn by what he sees as within the bounds of the scientific principles of ḥadith.” Mullā Khāṭir’s final evaluation of correcting the Sahihayn is thus that criticizing “what the umma has agreed on is pure

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112 Mullā Khāṭir, Makānat al-Sahihayn, 474-6.
113 Mamdūh, Tanbih al-muslim, 7.
114 Mamdūh, Tanbih al-muslim, 13-14.
115 Mamdūh, Tanbih al-muslim, 24.
calumny and misguidance, the greatest of losses (al-khusrân al-mubîn) and the fatal blow (qāsimat al-zahr).”

VIII.8. Conclusion: Al-Albâni’s Reply and the Continuity of Iconoclastic Ḥadîth Criticism

Al-Albâni replied to his critics with defiance. He responded to Mamdûh’s condemnation of his reevaluation of some of Muslim’s narrations by exclaiming, “As if, by Muslim’s inclusion of these ḥadîths, they acquired some immunity (himmân) from criticism. That is without a doubt a mistake.” In the last edition of his Mukhtâsar Ṣâḥîh al-Bukhârî, Al-Albâni states:

It is essential that I put forth a word of truth for the sake of scholarly integrity (li’l-amâna al-îlmiyya) and exoneration from blame (tabri’a li’l-dhamma, sic): a scholar must admit an intellectual truth expressed by Ima’m al-Shâffî in a narration attributed to him: God has forbidden that any except His Book attain completion (abâ Allah an yatimma illa kitâbuhu). After describing a problematic ḥadîth in al-Bukhârî’s collection, he adds that this is but one of dozens of examples that demonstrate the ignorance “of those impudent ones who chauvinistically acclaim al-Bukhârî’s Ṣâḥîh, as well as that of Muslim, with blind loyalty and say with complete certainty that everything included in those two books is authentic.”

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116 Mullâ Khâṭîr, Makânat al-Ṣâhîhayn, 488.

117 Al-Albâni, ed., Mukhtâsar Ṣâḥîh Muslim, 17. Here al-Albâni seems to be directly quoting the seventh/thirteenth-century scholar of Marrakesh, Ibl al-Qaṭṭân al-Fâsî (d. 628/1231) in his massive ḥadîth work Bayân al-wahm wa al-îhâm. See Ibl al-Qaṭṭân al-Fâsî, Bayân al-wahm wa al-îhâm, 4:298.

118 Al-Albâni, ed., Sharh al-‘Aqîda al-‘Ahâwiyya, 23; idem, Mukhtâsar Ṣâḥîh al-Bukhârî, 2:5-6.

Here we see al-Albānī repeating essentially the same quote cited by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī nine centuries earlier as he defended his right to criticize al-Bukhārī’s identification of transmitters (although al-Khaṭīb cites al-Shāfī‘ī’s student al-Muzanī as the source). Both deny that any book other than the Qurān can be free from error or attain immunity from criticism. Al-Khaṭīb played a crucial role in constructing the Ṣahihayn’s canonical culture, but he reserved the scholar’s right to correct his predecessors. No work can achieve an impervious iconic status, for scholars always reserve the right to scrutinize it critically. Al-Albānī thus explains that “Ṣahih al-Bukhārī, despite its glory and the scholars’ acceptance of it..., has not been totally free of criticism from some scholars.”

Responding to the attacks of the Ḥanafī Abū Ghudda, al-Albānī correctly points out that the Ḥanafī school has a long and persistent history of criticizing the Ṣahihayn.

Al-Albānī clarifies that his intention is not to reduce the utility of ḥadīth collections or question the authority of Prophetic reports. He is merely noting existing criticisms of ḥadīths found in the Ṣahihayn for the benefit of the reader. Many such criticisms pertain only to one narration of the ḥadīth and not to the Prophetic tradition itself. In fact, he says that by showing that some ḥadīths criticized in works like Ibn Mājah’s Sunan actually have authentic and reliable versions, he “has saved hundreds of ḥadīths from the weakness that some of their isnāds entail.”

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120 Al-Albānī, Mukhtasār Ṣahih al-Bukhārī, 2:7.
123 Al-Albānī, Mukhtasār Ṣahih al-Bukhārī, 2:5.
For al-Albānī, exempting the Ṣaḥīḥayn from critical review constitutes a betrayal of “scholarly integrity.” Embracing a canonical culture that sacrifices critical honesty for the security of scholarly institutions violates a Muslim scholar’s responsibility. The acceptability of criticizing the Ṣaḥīḥayn enunciates the contrast between this Salafi attitude towards the canonical culture and that of its staunch supporters. When Ibn al-Jawzī declared some ḥadīths from Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad forgeries because their contents seemed to contradict tenets of the faith, the great champion of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon, Ibn Ḥajar, wrote that we must try to reconcile this material and not dismiss it. “For if people open that door to rejecting ḥadīths,” he wrote, “it would be claimed that many ḥadīths from the Ṣaḥīḥayn were false, but God most high and the believers have refused to let this happen.”124 In contrast, the Salafi ḥadīth scholar Ṭāhir al-Jaza’īrī argues that Ibn Taymiyya justifiably criticized a ḥadīth from al-Bukhārī’s collection for unacceptable content. Al-Jaza’īrī expresses surprise and concern over scholars who try to suppress discussion of mistakes in the Ṣaḥīḥayn because they think that allowing criticism of the matn will open the door to the “people with agendas (ahl al-ahwā’).” He disagrees, saying that proper criticism is a worthy practice.125 Al-Albānī echoes this sentiment, saying that proper criticism based on the principles of ḥadīth scholarship is never inappropriate. He quotes Mālik as saying that “there is not one among us who has not rebutted or been rebutted except the master of that grave [i.e., the Prophet] (ṣ).”126

124 Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nukat ‘alā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 158.


126 Al-Albānī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-tarhib, 1:25.
Between al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s invocation of the notion that no book except the Qur’ān is above criticism and al-Albānī’s repetition of this mantra almost a thousand years later, we see a continuous strain of iconoclastic ḥadīth scholarship that survived alongside the burgeoning canonical culture of the Sahihayn. The work of al-Dāraqutnī before the canonization of the Sahihayn, and of al-Māzarī, al-Jayyānī and Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ after it, represents the continued application of the critical methods of ḥadīth scholarship despite the protective culture constructed around the icons of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Those scholars who elaborated and defended the canonical culture did so because they believed that the canon fulfilled certain crucial purposes in the scholarly community. Iconoclastic ḥadīth scholars like Ibn al-Murāḍal and Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ did not concede to prioritizing the canonical culture above the critical standards of ḥadīth criticism.

Yet, if criticism of the Sahihayn canon was not novel, why do vociferous condemnations of these critiques only begin in the early modern period? In the case of Shāh Wali Allāh, defending the canon was an act of protecting and consolidating the truly unifying institutions of Islam in the besieged and beleaguered Indian subcontinent. Possibly in the work of Shāh Wali Allāh, and certainly in the case of the Madhhab Traditionalists, we see that attempts to quash criticisms of the Sahihayn truly represent the efforts of scholars committed to protecting the institutions of classical Islamic scholarship from iconoclastic reformists to whom these institutions mean little. The Sahihayn canon was both a product of and a response to the needs of the Sunni legal and theological schools as they solidified in the fifth/eleventh century. The authority of al-
Bukhārī and Muslim rested on the power of *ijmā'*. The *Madhhab* Traditionalists' categorical rejection of criticizing al-Bukhārī and Muslim stemmed from their perception that an attack on the two books was a manifestation of the Salafi attack on consensus, scholarly hierarchy and even the valued notion of time itself. This dimension of criticizing the canon only appeared with the tremendous wave of revival and reform movements in the eighteenth century and the concomitant reemergence *en force* of the iconoclastic Salafi strain of ḥadīth scholarship with men like al-Ṣan‘ānī and al-Albānī. Only in response to the unprecedented threats they posed to the unifying institutions of classical Islamic religious culture did these increasingly beleaguered institutions find it necessary to defend themselves.
IX.

CANON AND SYNECDOCHE: THE ṢAḤĪḤAYN IN NARRATIVE AND RITUAL

IX.1. Introduction

So far, we have discussed the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon as a practical and powerful tool of scholarly debate and exposition. It is the kanon of truth, the measure of authenticity through which the redemptive media of the Prophet’s legacy can be applied decisively. It is the authoritative reference and exemplum that can be invoked to set the rule of a genre. Yet to remain focused solely on jurisprudence or the study of ḥadīth inexcusably limits the role of the Prophet’s sunna in Muslim life. It ignores important dimensions of how text, authority and communal identification can interact through the medium of the Prophet’s charismatic legacy. Our view has also been limited to the form of canonicity that Sheppard and Folkert conceived of as a criterion of distinction (Canon 1). As we widen our lens beyond the scholarly world, we must examine what functions al-Bukhārī and Muslim fulfilled in their capacity as Canon 2: a fixed collection and delimited set of texts.¹

The Prophet’s persona has cast a commanding shadow in Islamic civilization, but it has often remained intangible. In the centuries after their canonization, the Ṣaḥīḥayn would thus meet a pressing need beyond their strictly scholarly functions: that of a trope representing the Prophet’s legacy in the broader Sunni community. In both the realms of

ritual and the construction of historical narrative in Islamic civilization, al-Bukhārī and Muslim would symbolize the Prophet’s role as the pure spring of the faith and the liminal point through which his community could access God’s blessings. The two works would be the part that symbolized and essentialized the whole, a synecdoche for Muḥammad himself.

As a literary trope, synecdoche closely resembles metonymy, or the replacement of one word with another because of some common association between them. Scholars like Hayden White, however, have distinguished between metonymy’s function as a part representing the whole and synecdoche’s function as a part essentializing it.2 ‘Fifty sails’ indicates fifty ships metonymically, but the synecdoche of ‘the English Crown’ is the part of the royal person that essentializes the power and sovereignty of the British state. Due to the tremendous veneration that the Șahiḥayn had earned in Sunni Islam as the most authentic reservoirs of the Prophet’s legacy, they were ideally suited to essentialize it.

IX.2. Delimiting the Infinite: Managing the Sunna through the Ḥadīth Canon

As Norman Calder observed, “One feature of Muslim tradition is that it acknowledges an indeterminately large body of ḥadīth literature.”3 The Prophet’s oral legacy within his community is amorphous and boundless, subsuming an almost infinite number of reports ranging from the most well authenticated ḥadīths to common

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household sayings popularly attributed to the Prophet. As Ibn Taymiyya noted at the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century, any claim to have encompassed all the extant hadiths attributed to the Prophet was absurd.\(^4\) In order to fulfill its important role in society, ritual and law in Islamicate civilization, the Prophet’s sunna thus needed to be contained in a manageable form. It is in this capacity that the \(Sahihayn\) canon, and the Sunni hadith canon as a whole, has served admirably.

To the extent that there existed a simple need for some sort of synecdochic delimitation, the Sunni hadith canon has been relatively elastic. Beyond the \(Sahihayn\), we thus find common references to the canonical units of the Five or Six Books. Any delimited unit could theoretically stand in for the Prophet’s sunna as a whole. When the great Ilkhanid vizier and historian Rashid al-Dīn (d. 718/1318) sought to properly honor God’s revelation and the sunna of the Prophet in one of his pious endowments, he ordered the custodians of his mosque to produce one copy of the Qur’ān and one copy of Ibn al-Athīr’s \(Jami‘ al-usūl fi aḥādīth al-rasūl\) (Compendium of the Texts of the Prophet’s Ḥadiths) every year.\(^5\) Rashid al-Dīn’s reason for choosing the Qur’ān for this purpose is obvious, but why did he select Ibn al-Athīr’s \(Jami‘ al-usūl\)? The minister must have felt that the work, which condenses the hadiths from the \(Sahihayn\), the collections of al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā’ī, Abū Dāwūd and Mālik, effectively symbolized the Prophet’s legacy and was the proper counterpart to God’s revealed word. Earlier, the Alexandrian


\(^5\) Rashid al-Dīn stipulated that the two books then be placed between the pulpit and the prayer niche (mihrāb) and that an invocation be said for him, so that he might receive blessings for all those who benefited from them; Rashid al-Dīn, \(Vaqfna-ye rob-e rashidi: al-waqfiyya al-rashidiyya be-khatt al-waqef fī bayān sharā‘et omūr al-waqf wa al-maṣāref\) (Tehran: Ketāb-khāne-ye Mellī, 1350/[1972]), 167.
ḥadīth scholar Abū Tāhir ʿAbd al-Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Silāfī (d. 576/1180) had equated the Prophet's legacy synecdochically with the Five Books of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasāʿī and al-Tirmidhī. He stated that those who opposed (mukhālif) these five books on which the umma had agreed opposed the Prophet himself and are like Islam's adversaries in Christian and pagan lands (dār al-ḥarb). 6

For al-Silāfī, these five books symbolized the Prophet's very words and the normative legacy that bound the Sunni community together. To disagree with their status was thus to forgo membership in the Prophet's umma. In al-Silāfī's statement, we can clearly perceive the unambiguous role that this set of authoritative texts played in defining the boundaries of the orthodox community. Like Moshe Halbertal's "text centered communities," the borders of al-Silāfī's 'Abode of Islam (Dār al-Islām) "are shaped in relation to loyalty to a shared canon." 7

IX.3. Synecdoche in Ritual: Usage of the Ṣaḥīḥān Canon in Ritual Contexts

Having been endowed with a substantial religious authority in the fifth/eleventh century, al-Bukhārī's and Muslim's collections were well situated to dramatize religious meaning. The Ṣaḥīḥān canon has thus found plentiful usage in the realms of political, calendrical and supplicatory rituals. How would these two voluminous ḥadīth books,

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7 Halbertal, 129. We should note that this synecdochic use of a ḥadīth collection to represent the Prophet himself was not strictly limited to the Ṣaḥīḥān or canons in which the two books formed the core. Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), for example, is reported to have said that if you had his Jāmiʿ in your house, it is as if the Prophet himself was speaking in your home. Such claims, however, have been rare; the vast majority of synecdochic representations of the Prophet's sunna have centered on the Ṣaḥīḥān or one of the two books; al-Dhahābī, Tadhkirat al-huffāẓ, 2:155.
however, be employed in a ritual setting? Kendall Folkert insightfully identified the two manners in which a canonical text can serve as a vehicle for meaning in ritual. First, a canonical text can function as a collection of scriptures accessed during the ritual. Second, the physical text of the canon can function as an actual participant in ritual. In this case, rather than just being a storehouse of authoritative writings, the canon can actually serve as a carrier of that authority in physical space. In addition to the contents of the books per se, the book itself can wield power as a symbol or icon. Reading al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ over a sick person to heal him involves the first function of the canon; the contents of the book provide some communion with a higher power and access to God’s blessings. An army carrying al-Bukhārī’s collection before it like an ark, however, utilizes the second mode of canonical function; the physical book is a central participant in the ritual.

When used in the first mode, the Ṣaḥīḥayn have served as scripture in public or private readings. Reading a book in public has long been the centerpiece of the Islamicate educational and collective religious experience. Just as Halbertal describes the Jewish text-centered community, Islamic religious books have been “a locus of religious experience” whose readings have constituted “a religious drama in and of itself.” As Michael Chamberlain and Jonathan Berkey have shown in their studies on knowledge and society in medieval Damascus and Cairo respectively, the public reading of books

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8 Folkert, “The ‘Canons’ of ‘Scripture,’” 178.

9 Halbertal, People of the Book, 7-8.
was one of the main forms of cultural production in the Islamicate world. Even today in madrasas from Morocco to Indonesia, students gather to hear their teacher read a text or comment on a senior disciple’s (sārid) reading. At Friday prayers or lessons convened in the mosque for the general public, a professional reading of the Qur’ān, ḥadīth or pietistic texts serves as the crux of the performance or lesson. Books could also be read in private settings, either by individuals, in the households of notables or in the palaces of rulers for the sake of private appreciation or exclusive access to blessings.

The Sahihayn, however, are not works of creative scripture, narrative or liturgical prose. They are essentially synecdochic segments cut out of the endless continuum of the Prophet’s sunna, discrete instances of his normative legacy selected and arranged by al-Bukhārī or Muslim. Consisting of page after page of Prophetic ḥadīths with rare commentary, there is little beyond the editorial choices of the two scholars to provide any tangible notion of authorship. Reading the Sahihayn is thus literally reading a synecdoche of the Prophet’s legacy, the value of which has been assured by the two great canonical figures of the Sunni ḥadīth tradition.

Although the Sahihayn could represent the sunna in a manageable form, the two works are nonetheless massive. Even professional ḥadīth scholars like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī who devoted themselves to ceaseless study sessions of al-Bukhārī’s work

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required at least several days to complete hearing the collection from a teacher. As a result, public readings of al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s works could take a more accessible private-public form, with a select group of religious devotees gathering in a mosque or Sufi lodge to read the bulk of the text and the general public only participating in the culmination (khātm) of the book. Just as the congregation attending the nightly reading of the Qurʾān during Ramadan swells at the khātm of the holy book on the twenty-seventh night of the month, the putative Night of Power, so would the khātm of a Ṣaḥīḥ be the public ritual focus of its reading. As a result, from the late 800/1400’s we see a proliferation of books on performing the khātm of the Ṣaḥīḥayn and other major ḥadith works as well as providing vignettes about the lives of their authors, such as that of ‘Abd al-Salām b. Māḥmūd al-‘Adawī (d. 1033/1623) on al-Bukhārī’s collection and that of al-Sakhāwī on Abū Dāwūd’s or al-Nasā’ī’s Sunans.

Let us now examine the three main vectors of ritual activity that have employed the Ṣaḥīḥayn: supplicatory, calendrical and political. In all three cases, ritual use of the Ṣaḥīḥayn seems to have begun in force during the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, approximately two to three centuries after their canonization. There is scant evidence of ritual usage for the two books in sources covering the earlier period between the careers of al-Bukhārī and Muslim and the late sixth/twelfth century, like al-

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12 Al-Dhahabī, Tadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāz, 3:222.

13 See, for example, Yūsuf al-Kattānī, Madrasat al-Bukhārī fī al-Maghrib, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Līsān al-‘Arab, [198-]), 2:549.

Khaṭīb’s *Tārikh Baghdād*, ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī’s *Tārikh Naysābūr*, Ibn al-Jawzī’s *al-Muntażam* or ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Rāfiʿī’s (d. 623/1226) *al-Tadwīn fi akhbār Qazwīn*. It is not completely clear why ritual use of the *Ṣaḥḥāy ān* began in this period, but exploring the nature of their usages may offer explanations.

IX.3. a. *Supplicatory and Medicinal Rituals*

Supplicatory rituals are rites through which people call on the supernatural for assistance. This genre of ritual activity overlaps with rituals of exchange and communion, in which humans undertake an act in the hope or expectation that the supernatural will reciprocate. Employing the *Ṣaḥḥāy ān* canon in supplicatory or medicinal rituals seems to be the earliest ritual usage of the two books. This role of the books came on the heels of the ritual attention paid in particular to al-Bukhārī’s grave itself. Al-Bukhārī’s place of burial near Samarqand was a locus for intercession and miracles within a century of his death, as the *Tārikh Samarqand* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Astarābādī (d. 405/1015) informs us. The Andalusian muḥaddith Abū ʿAlī al-Jayyānī (d. 498/1105) recounts that one Abū al-Fatḥ Naṣr b. al-Ḥasan al-Samarqandī (fl. 470/1080) visited him in Valencia in 464/1071-2 and described how the people of Samarqand had been afflicted by a terrible drought. This was only alleviated when the people of the city went to al-Bukhārī’s grave and invoked God’s mercy.

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An unusual ritual usage seems to have appeared for Muslim’s *Sahih* in the early sixth/twelfth century, when it became the vehicle for an apparently isolated ordeal of mourning. When the son of the scholar Abū al-Qāsim Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad al-Taymī (d. 535/1140-1) died, he buried him and then read *Sahih Muslim* by his grave in Hamadhān. In an act reminiscent of a ritual rejoining of the community after a transitional ordeal, the day al-Taymī finished his reading he set up a large table with sweets and food and invited all his friends to join him in a feast.\(^{18}\) We have no other evidence, however, of the *Sahihayn* being used in this manner.

By the 700/1300s al-Bukhārī’s *Sahih* had become a well-known tool for people seeking God’s intervention in times of illness and hardship within the cultural orbit of Mamluk Egypt and Syria. The Damascene Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) notes that the book was “a refuge from predicaments (*mu‘ālāt*) and well-tried for responding to needs,” adding that “this is a well-known matter, and if we were pushed to mention all this and what occurred with it, the explanation would be too lengthy.”\(^{19}\) In 790/1388, one of the many instances in which the bubonic plague struck Cairo, the Shāfi‘ī chief judge ordered al-Bukhārī’s work read in the Azhar Mosque as a plea for relief. When the plague continued, he ordered it read again two weeks later in the Mosque of al-Ḥākim. In a final, desperate petition for divine succor, the judge convened a reading three days later in the Azhar Mosque with orphaned children in attendance.\(^{20}\) Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-


\(^{19}\) Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 2:234.

Kirmānī (d. 786/1384) explains that he decided to write his onamastically focused commentary on al-Bukhārī because “a certain sultan from an important Muslim land (baʿīl ummahāt bilād al-Islām)” (probably the Mamluk sultan) fell ill and wanted al-Bukhārī’s work read over him so that its blessing (baraka) might cure him. The scholars charged with the reading, however, could not confidently read the isnāds without stumbling over the unvoweled names of the transmitters.21 The Cairene Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī reported that his teacher Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Ḥamza was told by a “mystic (ārif)” that “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī has not been read in a time of severity except that this has been relieved, nor [has it ever been read] when embarking a ship that sank.” He adds that Ibn Kathīr says that al-Bukhārī’s collection can be read as an invocation for rain (istisqāʾ).22

In the Ottoman Hijāz, the Ḥanafī émigré from Herat, Mullā ʿAlī Qārī (d.1014/1606), tells us that al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ had been dubbed “the well-tried antidote (al-tiryaq al-mujarrab).” He quotes one Sayyid Aṣīl al-Dīn as saying, “I have read al-Bukhārī one hundred and twenty times for events (waqāʿi) and important tasks (muhimmāt) of mine and of others, and the desired result occurred and the needs were met….”23 The reputation of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ had spread as far as India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Shāh Wali Allāh’s son, Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d.

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21 Al-Kirmānī, al-Kawākib al-darārī, 1:5.

22 Ibn Ḥajar, Ḥady al-sārī, 14; al-Qaṣṭallānī, Irshād al-sārī, 1:29.

23 Mullā ʿAlī Qārī, Mirqāṭ al-mafāṭīḥ, 1:13.
1824), says that reading the work in times of severity, fear, illness, famine or drought “is a tried and tested cure.”\(^24\)

There is much less evidence for widespread use of Muslim’s book in medicinal or supplicatory rituals. Nonetheless, the collection did attain at least a portion of the fame of its more illustrious counterpart. The famous Central Asian hadith and Qur’ān scholar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Jazārī (d. 833/1429), for example, read part of Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ at Muslim’s grave for baraka.\(^25\)

IX.3. b. Calendrical Rituals

Calendrical rituals impose a framework of human significance on the abstract dimension of time or the endless cycles of nature. In general, such rituals are either based on the seasons or on commemorating important moments in a community’s collective experience. In the Islamic calendrical system, where the calendar year has been deliberately severed from the solar year and planting seasons, religious holidays serve as anchors in the Muslim sense of time. The month of Ramadan and the Night of Power are thus two markers of the Islamic year.\(^26\) As we shall see, a three-month reading of the Ṣaḥīḥayn would also effectively create a ritual ‘season.’

The use of the Ṣaḥīḥayn in calendrical rituals seems to have begun slightly later than the books’ supplicatory role. From the available evidence, it seems that around the

\(^{24}\) Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī, Bustan al-muhaddithīn, 75.


\(^{26}\) Bell, Ritual, 103.
early eighth/fourteenth century al-Bukhārī’s book, and to a lesser extent Muslim’s, was being read in mosques to mark the consecutive months of Rajab, Sha’bān and Ramadan, climaxing with the celebration at the end of the holy month. In Cairo, the Mamluk sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq (d. 801/1399) hired a scholar to read the Šaḥīḥayn in his newly founded Zāhiriyya Mosque during Sha’bān and Ramadan.27 In 1515 CE, the madrasa of al-Sayfī Baybars was founded in Cairo and a scholar was hired specifically to read Šaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī during Rajab, Sha’bān and Ramadan.28

Even in the far-flung Songhay Empire of Mali, with its grand mud-built capital at Timbuktu, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdallāh al-Sā’ī (d. after 1065/1655-6), an imām in Jenne and administrator in Timbuktu, tells us that the Šaḥīḥayn were read in mosques during these three months. This is not surprising, since Mali’s scholars traveled and studied in the Maghrib, Egypt and the Hijāz, bringing ritual practices back with them. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad Aqīt of Timbuktu (d. 991/1583) recited the Šaḥīḥayn during Rajab, Sha’bān, and Ramadan annually for over twenty years.29 His contemporary, the ḥadīth scholar Aḥmad b. al-Ḥājj Aḥmad b. ‘Umar, was also known as “the reciter of the two Šaḥīḥs in the Sankore mosque.”30 Across the vast dune sea to the northwest, an

27 Berkey, The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo, 213.
28 Berkey, The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo; 17, 75.
29 John O. Hunwick, Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: al-Sa’ī’s Ta’rīkh al-sūdān down to 1613 and other Contemporary Documents (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 61. For more on scholars in Timbuktu, see Elias N. Saad, Social History of Timbuktu: the Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables 1400-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 58-126.
30 Hunwick, Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire, 46.
anonymous mid-ninth/fifteenth century scholar in Marrakesh would read al-Bukhārī’s Șaḥīḥ to the descendents of the Prophet in the city during Ramadan.31

Even in Syria in the late 1800s, al-Bukhārī’s Șaḥīḥ was read in the Naṣr Dome of the Umayyad Mosque in Rajab, Sha’bān and Ramadan with great attendance and fanfare.32 In Morocco during the same period, main mosques and Sufi lodges began reading the Șaḥīḥ in Rajab, continued through Sha’bān and finished on the Night of Power in Ramadan.33 Al-Bukhārī’s collection was also read on other important religious occasions. In 1119/1707-8, for example, ‘Abdallāh b. Sālim al-Bāṣrī (d. 1722) was assigned to read the work at the Grand Mosque in Mecca upon its renovation by the orders of the Ottoman Sultan Aḥmad III.34

IX.3. c. Political Rituals

One of the most dramatic usages of the Șaḥīḥayn canon has been in the realm of political ritual, which generally serves two primary functions. First, rites of political ritual create a sense of coherence and common order among a collectivity of people. Second, they legitimize this sense of political community by establishing a link between it and the higher orders of the cosmos.35 The usage of the Șaḥīḥayn in political ritual seems to have begun in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries in Mamluk

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31 Hunwick, Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire, 69-70.
33 Al-Kattānī, Madrasat al-Bukhārī fi al-Maghrib, 2:544-5.
34 Voll, “‘Abdallah b. Salim al-Basri and 18th Century Hadith Scholarship,” 360.
35 Bell, Ritual, 129.
Egypt and Syria. The Mamluk army that marched out of Cairo against the Ilkhanid Mongols at the beginning of the eighth/thirteenth century was led by a person carrying Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Ibn Katḥīr says that in Sha‘bān 766/1365, when the amīr Sayf al-Dīn Baydar (the Mamluk sultan’s erstwhile deputy in Syria) returned to Damascus to take up the governorship of the city, prominent citizens received him with a large public celebration. These festivities involved public readings of the final sections of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ (khatmat al-Bukhārīyyāt) in the Umayyad Mosque and other locations in succession at different mosques all day. Meanwhile Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim was being read at the Ḥanbalī miḥrāb at the Nūriyya madrasa near the Umayyad Mosque. Ibn Katḥīr was responsible for arranging all this, and he said that this had not taken place at any other time in recent years. When the army of the Moroccan Sa’dian dynasty marched out of their ochre-colored southern capital of Marrakesh to fight the invading Portuguese in 998/1589-90, scholars performed a public khatm of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ as the army left the gates.

Perhaps the most consistently cunning exploiter of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon for political ritual has been the reigning ‘Alawid dynasty of Morocco. Deriving their political legitimacy from their descent from the Prophet, ‘Alawid rulers have turned to al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ as a physical manifestation of Muḥammad’s legacy. The true founder of the dynasty, the conqueror and statesman Mawlā Ismā‘īl (d. 1727), sought to transform


37 Ibn Katḥīr, al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya, 14:326-7.

38 Al-Kattānī, Madrasat al-Bukhārī fi al-Maghrib, 2:549.
his patrimony from a family of raiders dependent on the ephemeral loyalties of local Berber tribes into a true state with a dependable standing army. He thus built up a core unit of African slave soldiers, originally captured in the conquest of gold-laden Timbuktu, to serve as the centerpiece of his army. This unit grew in size, as Mawlah Ismā‘īl had their sons trained by artisans and then enlisted in the ranks upon reaching the age of ten, until it reached the awesome size of 150,000 men. Mawlah Ismā‘īl dubbed these soldiers “The Slaves of al-Bukhārī (ʿAbīd al-Bukhārī),” for it was upon the Sahīh and its representation of the Prophet’s sunna that their loyalty to their ruler was based.

The Moroccan archivist and historian Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Nāṣirī (d. 1315/1897) explains that in his efforts to free himself of reliance on the fickle loyalties of tribal forces, Mawlah Ismā‘īl gathered the leaders of his slave regiment around a copy of al-Bukhārī’s Sahīh. He said:

I and you are slaves to the sunna of the Messenger of God (ṣ) and his sacred law as collected in his book (i.e., the Sahīh), so all that he has commanded we will do, and all that he has forbidden we will forsake, and by it we will fight (wa ʿalayhi muqātil).

He then took their oaths by al-Bukhārī’s book. At one end of the great parade ground that the ruler built for his praetorian at his hilltop imperial palace in Meknes, Mawlah Ismā‘īl constructed a madrasa named after al-Bukhārī. He ordered that copy of the Sahīh

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on which the soldiers’ oaths had been taken preserved there and that they carry it “like the Ark of the Children of Israel (tābūt banī Isrāʾīl)” when they went out on campaign.40

The ‘Alawid dynasty has maintained the prominent place of Ṣāḥīḥ al-Bukhārī in political rituals. When King Ḥasan I came to Rabat on Eid al-Fitr in 1873, he ordered festivities including the reading of the Ṣāḥīḥ and culminating in a large public gathering with all the city’s notables. The king also did this upon the completion of his royal palace in Rabat.41

The ‘Alawid dynasty has relied on its claim of descent from the Prophet as the central pillar of its political legitimacy in Morocco. Basing the esprit de corps of his praetorian on al-Bukhārī’s Ṣāḥīḥ and maintaining the collection as the unit’s mascot reinforced Mawlā Ismāʿīl’s chosen role as heir to the Prophet’s political authority. The Ṣāḥīḥ’s ability to stand in for the Prophet’s persona in ritual, literally carried before the king’s advancing army, was central to the logic of this political ritual. Similarly, the esteemed station of the Ṣāḥīḥayn allowed Ibn Kathīr to help transform the arrival of the Bahrī Mamluk governor in Damascus into an evocation of religious significance.

IX.4. The Ritual Power of the Ṣāḥīḥayn: The Muḥammadan Blessing

In Islam, God is the source of all baraka, what Josef Meri calls “the stuff of faith.”42 It is the blessing by which men’s felicity is ensured in both the earthly life and


41 Al-Kattānī, Madrasat al-Bukhārī fī al-Maghrib, 2:547.

Proximity to God through either piety or some link to a liminal figure entails greater access to His baraka. As the receptacle of revelation and the bridge between the divine and the temporal, the Prophet is the ultimate liminal figure in Islam. As the perfect human, possessed of “tremendous character (Qur’an 68:4),” and on whom God and the angels “shower their prayers (Qur’an 33:56),” the figure of Muhammad has enjoyed the greatest access to baraka. His persona is the most completely endowed with “the capacity to mediate between humanity and the Deity.” Imitating his lifestyle and obeying his commands as embodied in the Sharia enables Muslims to approach this locus of God’s blessings. Gaining physical or aural proximity to the Prophet’s words, his relics or members of his family provides extended access to his liminality. Similarly, pious individuals who have themselves earned a station close to God and His blessing themselves become loci of liminality and baraka for others.

Like saints, who wield extraordinary powers through their proximity to God, books enjoying such proximity are also a “nexus of baraka, miracles and mediation....” Michael Chamberlain describes religious knowledge (‘ilm) as a source of blessing (baraka) that Muslims of all social standings tried to acquire. The pursuit and study of

44 Gellner, Saints of the Atlas, 70.
46 Taylor, In the Vicinity of the Righteous, 127.
47 Chamberlain, Knowledge and Social Practice, 122.
Philosophy was thus a ritual practice, equated with forms of worship such as ritual remembrance of God (dhikr) and canonical prayer, and thus requiring the same levels of ritual purity. Acquiring knowledge was a “collective liminal experience” in which the attempt to grasp and appreciate God’s will brought the audience closer to Him.48

Reading or listening to a performance of a hadith collection was thus to increase one’s proximity to God’s blessings as deposited and dispensed through His Prophet. As J. Z. Smith states, “Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest.”49 In the ritual logic of the audience, reading Muhammad’s words is to give his person and legacy attention. To consider his example is to please God as the Prophet had pleased Him and incur that blessing that God showered upon him. It is to walk that path of liminality. The ritual of listening to or acting on a hadith becomes a metaphoric act of accessing the blessings the Prophet enjoyed.50

The conspicuous Muslim habit of calling God’s peace and blessings down upon the Prophet after every mention of his name in either written or oral expression emphasizes the role of the Prophet as a channel for access to God’s baraka. In activities such as the Sunni canonical prayer, in fact, invocations for the Prophet’s sake equal or supersede the performer’s set prayers for himself or herself. Here Muhammad becomes a proxy for the believer’s own personal invocations. The Egyptian Shafi’i al-Sakhawi (d. 902/1497) notes that the purpose of such intense prayer on the Prophet is “growing close

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48 Chamberlain, Knowledge and Social Practice, 127-9.


50 See Edmund Leach, Culture and Communication (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 30 ff.
to God most high by imitating His act [of blessing the Prophet] and fulfilling the right
due the Prophet (ṣ).” Al-Sakhawi quotes one Abū Muḥammad al-Marjānī as saying, “In
calling your prayers on him [the Prophet], you are, in truth, because of the benefits that
these prayers return to you, praying for yourself.”51 The benefits of calling God’s peace
and blessings down upon the Prophet extend to the scholarly realm of those who write
books in addition to their audiences. Abū Tahir al-Silafi mentions a ḥadīth that
guarantees baraka for an author who writes “may the peace and blessings of God be upon
him” after the Prophet’s name. The ḥadīth states that “whoever prays (ṣallā ‘alayya) for
me in a book, angels will continue to pray for him as long as my name is in that book.”52

In ritual, the Sahihayn thus act synecdochically as a channel for God’s blessings
as transmitted through the Prophet. The Mamluk sultan whom al-Kirmānī mentioned as
having fallen ill hoped the baraka of Sahih al-Bukhārī would cure him.53 We find in the
letter of the Moroccan scholar ʿAbd al-Kabīr b. Muḥammad al-Kattānī (d. 1333/1914–5)
instructions to read through al-Bukhārī’s Sahih in mosques and houses in order to get the
“Muḥammadan intercession (al-shafāʿa al-muḥammadiyya).”54 Mullā ʿAlī Qārī quotes
Sayyid Aṣīl al-Dīn as crediting the miraculous powers of the Sahih “to the barakat of the

51 Al-Sakhawi, al-Qawl al-badiʿ fi al-ṣalāt ‘alā al-ḥabīb al-ṣhafiʿ (Beirut: Maḥba’at al-Inṣāf,
1383/1963), 25. “Indeed God and His angels pray upon the Prophet; O you who believe shower prayers
and blessings upon him (Qurʾān 33:56).”

52 Al-Silafi, al-Wajiz fi dhikr al-majāz wa al-mujiz, ed. Muḥammad Khayr al-Biqāʿī (Beirut: Dār al-
Gharb al-İslāmī, 1411/1991), 95.

53 Al-Kirmānī, al-Kawākib al-darārī, 1:5.

most noble of the nobles (the Prophet) and the source of felicity, may the most favored prayers and most perfect greeting be upon him.\footnote{Mullā 'Alī Qārī, \textit{Mirqāt al-mafāthīn}, 1:13.}

The synecdochic function of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥayn} in these rites provides the best explanation for why ritual usage of the canon began on any appreciable scale only in the seventh/thirteenth century. Marshall Hodgson notes that at this time Islamicate civilization in the Nile-Oxus region had reached some critical distance from the faith's epicenter in the person of the Prophet. Society required new vehicles for bridging this divide and accessing the Prophet's \textit{baraka}, and the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries thus witnessed an intensified interest in pilgrimages to Muhammad's grave in Medina, those of his purported descendents throughout the Islamic world and other local saints.\footnote{Hodgson, \textit{The Venture of Islam}, 2:453; Taylor, \textit{In the Vicinity of the Righteous}, 14.} The \textit{Ṣaḥīḥayn} provided a textual alternative.

The popularization of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥayn} in public rituals such as readings during Ramadan mirrors the wider popularization of communal ritual such as those practiced by Sufi brotherhoods, which began flourishing in their institutional \textit{tariqā} form in the 600/1200s.\footnote{J. Spencer Trimingham, \textit{The Sufi Orders in Islam} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9-10; J.O. Hunwick et. al., \textit{"Taṣāwuf"}, \textit{EI}.} Similarly, the initiative that the Mamluk rulers took in organizing and funding public readers of the \textit{Ṣaḥīḥayn} dovetails with their general sponsorship of popular religious practices, such as building major Sufi lodges in Cairo and Damascus.\footnote{Taylor, \textit{In the Vicinity of the Righteous}, 12 ff.}
IX.5. The Canon and Synecdoche in Narrative: A Salvational Trope in a Narrative of Decline and Salvation

Just as the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* represented the Prophet’s liminality and charisma, granting access to the *baraka* to which he was the key, al-Bukhārī and Muslim also became a synecdochic trope for scholars constructing narrative in Islamic history. Ḥadīth literature is not limited to the dry compilation and criticism of Prophetic reports. It encompasses a network of genres that either orbit the collection and evaluation of reports or mold these activities into forms that address specific needs. Ḥadīth-oriented biographical dictionaries like *Tārīkh Baghdād*, works on *īlal* and the technical terms of Ḥadīth evaluation fit into the first category. The second category includes specific types of Ḥadīth collections that could channel the Prophet’s charisma through an individual scholar’s personal religious expression. *Mustakhrajs*, personal *müjams* documenting all the lands to which a collector had traveled (*riḥla*) and all the teachers from whom he had heard (*mashyakha, barnīmāj*), as well as the great Ḥadīth collections themselves fall into the second. All these genres, however, together weave a meta-narrative that serves as the shared culture of Ḥadīth scholars or those other Muslim sages or laity who trade on their domain.

This is a romantic narrative of decline and salvation. It constantly replays what Marshall Hodgson called “the old man’s view of history,” in which the community seems bound inevitably towards religious and moral entropy but clings to a lingering hope for
the survival of the true faith through the uniquely pious efforts of the scholar. 59 “The best of generations is the one in which I was sent, then that which comes after it, then that which follows”; this Prophetic tradition embodies the Sunni vision of religious history, as the Muslim community drifts farther and farther in time from the epicenter of the Prophet’s mission. Each successive age after that greatest community has a more tenuous grasp of the Prophet’s salvational message.

Ibn Hibbān (d. 354/965) thus complains that his surroundings were flooded with ever-multiplying attributions to the Prophet and dilettantes who could not tell authentic hadiths from forged ones. 60 His student al-Ḥākim writes in the beginning of his Ma’rifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth:

Indeed, when I saw heretical innovations in religion (bidaʿ) increasing in our time, and the people’s knowledge of the fundamentals of the sunna decreasing... this called me to compose a small book including all the branches of the sciences of ḥadīth that students of reports might need.... 61

In the introduction to his commentary on Sahih al-Bukhārī, al-Khaṭṭābī says:

I contemplated the recourse for the affairs of our time, such as the scarcity of ʿilm, the prevalence of ignorance (jahl), and the dominance of the people of religious heresies (bidaʿ), that many of the people’s affairs have deviated towards their different schools of thought (madhāhib) and turned away from the holy book and the sunna. I feared that this matter would become more severe in days to come, that knowledge will be more preciously rare (ʿaʾizz) due to the paucity of those whom I see today... attending faithfully to [ḥadīth] and attaining a sound (sāliḥ) level of knowledge in it. 62


60 Ibn Hibbān, Sahih Ibn Hibbān, 1:38.

61 Al-Ḥākim, Ma’rifat ʿulūm al-ḥadīth, 2.

Writing over a century later in Khurasan, al-Baghawi (d. 516/1122) similarly describes the crises of heresy and ignorance on his environment: “Nothing remains of the religion except its outlines (rasm), nor of knowledge except its name, to the point that falsity is considered to be the truth among most people in our time, and ignorance is confused with knowledge.”63

In the face of this decline, the struggle of the ‘true Sunni scholars’ to preserve the legacy of the Prophet represents the only hope for personal and communal salvation. One of the most frequently quoted hadiths in the introductions to works of hadith literature thus prophesies, “One party from among my umma will always stand by the truth unharmed by those who forsake them, until the command of God comes.”64 Ibn Hanbal is frequently quoted as identifying this sect with the ahl al-hadith, whom al-Hākim describes as “trumping the people of heresy with the sunna of God’s messenger.”65 Only by stubbornly clinging to the continuous study and repetition of the Prophet’s legacy can the hadith tradition fulfill its destiny as the sole guardians of Islam’s pure origins.

Moreover, it is always the author’s own immediate efforts that embody this hope of salvation. Al-Baghawi thus offers his huge legal compendium of hadith (Sharḥ al-


64 “Lā tazı‘lu tā ‘ifā min ummati zāhirin ‘alā al-ḥaqq lā yaḍurruhum man khadhalahum ḥattā ya‘tiya amr Allāh”; Sahih Muslim: kitāb al-imrāra, bāb qawlīhī (5) lā tazı‘lu tā ‘ifā.... For another version, see al-Hākim, Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm al-hadīth, 2.

sunna) as an attempt to revive the path of the righteous forbears who established the religion, acting as “one striving to light a lamp in the encompassing darkness, [so that] the perplexed can be guided by it or someone seeking guidance can find the path.”

The notion of the šaḥiḥ movement as the pinnacle of ḥadīth scholarship, evident after the writings of Ibn Manda (d. 395/1004-5), provided a convenient trope in this narrative. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim in particular came to represent the acme of critical rigor in ḥadīth study. Majd al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) describes how, while the number of ḥadīth collections blossomed in the wake of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s careers, their authors were pursuing all sorts of agendas (aghārād, maqāṣid) and the glorious age of the Shaykhayn had vanished (inqārāda). Even with the continued work of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasāʾī, it was as if the age of al-Bukhārī and Muslim “was the sum of all ages in terms of the acquisition of that science (ʿilm), and it ended with it. Afterwards that quest waned.”

Because they represented the pinnacle of achievement in the ḥadīth tradition, the Šaḥiḥayn could serve as the perfect symbol for the Prophet’s legacy in the narratives that scholars spun around the tension between the ‘authentic teachings of the Prophet (sunna)’ and ‘heretical innovation (bidʿa)’ in Islamic religious culture. Writing within a Sunni community that acknowledged the two works’ unparalleled status, scholars could wield

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66 Al-Baghwā, Shahr al-sunna, 1:3-4.

67 Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ, 1:42.
them as representations of the salvation that came through embracing the Prophet’s authentic legacy.68

IX.5. a. Khwāje Ābdallāh al-Anṣārī and the Beginning of Synecdoche in Narrative

The earliest extant example of Muslim scholars utilizing the Sahihayn as a synecdoche for the Prophet’s legacy in narrative comes from the fifth/eleventh century writing of Abū al-Faḍl al-Maqdisī (d. 507/1113). His teacher in the Khurāsānī city of Herat, the fierce über-Sunni Khwāje Ābdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089), cuts an interesting figure in Islamic intellectual history. A staunch Ḥanbalī who condemned the cultivation of speculative theology in a massive multivolume book, he was also a committed Sufi who penned a complex work on the technical terminology of mysticism and the progressive stages toward complete consciousness of God.69 Al-Dḥābabī cites an apparently lost text from al-Maqdisī describing the famous Seljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk summoning Khwāje Ābdallāh to a debate in Herat. Both the vizier and his master, the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan, had arrived in Herat on a visit and had heard complaints from Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī scholars about Khwāje Ābdallāh’s intolerant über-Sunnism. He had stated, for example, that he would curse anyone who denied that God was physically above the earth. Nizām al-Mulk demanded that Khwāje Ābdallāh respond to his

68 We must note that al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s function as a synecdoche in this context in no way resembles Hayden White’s analysis of tropology in Modernist European historical writing, where synecdoche describes a manner in which a historian can manipulate and transition between ideas. Rather, the Sahihayn were quite literally a synecdoche for the Prophet’s authentic legacy as valued by Sunni Muslim scholars.

detractors in a debate, and the scholar agreed on one condition: that he be allowed to
debate his opponents only with what he had in his two sleeve pockets (kumm). Niẓām al-
Mulk asked what the pockets contained, and Khwāje ‘Abdallāh replied, “The Book of
God,” pointing to his right sleeve (kumm), “and the sunna of the Messenger of God,”
pointing to his left. From his right sleeve Khwāje ‘Abdallāh then produced a copy of the
Qurʾān, and from his left the Sahihayn. Al-Maqrīzī continues, “So the vizier looked at
[Khwāje ‘Abdallāh’s opponents], seeking a response, and there was no one from among
them who would debate him in this manner.”

Al-Maqrīzī’s story makes clear use of the Sahihayn as a synecdoche for the
Prophet’s sunna. Almost a century after their canonization, al-Maqrīzī and perhaps even
Khwāje ‘Abdallāh himself understood the symbolic power of al-Bukhārī and Muslim
within the wider Sunni community. In the face of the Ḥanafī and Shāfī‘i schools’
‘heretical’ use of reason and indulgence in speculative theology, al-Maqrīzī portrays
Khwāje ‘Abdallāh as standing by the two pure sources of the faith: God’s revelation and
its authoritative interpretation as transmitted through the Prophet’s ḥadiths. The

70 Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkira al-huffāz, 3:250-1. It seems bizarre that someone could fit books as
massive as the Sahihayn in their sleeve, but scholars routinely wrote out such books in print so small that
they could fit into one volume. Even a much later hadith scholar like Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sindī (d. 1773) used
to produce one copy of Sahih al-Bukhārī every year in one small volume; ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Mizjāji,
262. We can reliably date al-Maqrīzī’s dramatic story to the late fifth/eleventh century when al-Maqrīzī
was writing. We should certainly not treat it as a reliable transcript of an historical event, however, for the
über-Sunni al-Maqrīzī shared his teacher’s leanings and furnished a highly partisan account of the debate.
Moreover, although al-Maqrīzī himself studied with Khwāje ‘Abdallāh, he reports this story second-hand
through “one of our colleagues (ashabīna).” There is no reason to suspect that al-Dhahabi was citing a
forged source from a later period, however, since most of al-Maqrīzī’s prolific oeuvre has not survived for
our examination. This absence of evidence should therefore not lead us to doubt al-Maqrīzī’s authorship.
Even if al-Maqrīzī himself creatively altered the report of his teacher’s debate, we can nonetheless still date
it to his career in the late fifth/eleventh century. For the most comprehensive list of al-Maqrīzī’s works,
see al-Maqrīzī, Kitāb al-muqaffā al-kabīr, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-
canonical text of the Qurʾān is small and easily manageable. The Prophet’s sunna, however, is not. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s books thus serve as its commonly acknowledged physical manifestation in the arena of debate. Just as they functioned as an authoritative reference and measure of authenticity, so did the Ṣaḥīḥayn serve as a symbolic convention as well.

IX.5. b. Al-Ghazālī’s Return to the Straight Path: The Ṣaḥīḥayn as Synecdoche

The seminal Shafiʿi/Ashʿarī jurist, theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) has proven one of the most powerful and controversial figures in Islamic intellectual history. He became a central pillar of the Shafiʿi/Ashʿarī orthodoxy, and has been honored as “the Proof of Islam (ḥujjat al-Islām)” by the multitude of later scholars who have shared his doctrinal leanings. Scholars from a wide range of temperaments, however, have also criticized him heavily for his laxity in using ḥadīths, his excessive mystical bent and his wholesale adoption of logic as a tool in Islamic thought. Al-Māzarī took al-Ghazālī to task for attributing to saints miracles that befitted the Prophet alone. The Mālikī Abū al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī, who said he had met al-Ghazālī, described him as a great scholar who had foolishly “become a Sufi, departing from the sciences and the scholars, entering the sciences of inspiration (al-khawātir), the mystics (arbāb al-qulūb), and the murmurings of the Devil.” Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) criticized him for ignorance in the science of narrating ḥadīths and for including forged reports in his Iḥyā’

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Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) faulted al-Ghazālī for placing logic at the forefront of the Islamic sciences as the common language of scholarly discussion. Al-Dhahabī was one of al-Ghazālī’s most outspoken critics, arguing that his penchant for sciences originally foreign to Islam and straying into the realm of philosophical speculation plagued the scholar throughout his career. 73

In efforts to salvage al-Ghazālī’s image from these serious critiques, narrative about the scholar’s life became a microcosm of the Sunni romance of decline and salvation. One of the earliest attempts to repair al-Ghazālī’s reputation and draw it closer to the conservative Sunni tradition as embodied in the study of ḥadīth is ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī’s (d. 529/1134-5) biography of the scholar. 74 A ḥadīth-oriented Shāfiʿī who fondly and frequently identifies with the ahl al-ḥadīth, al-Fārisī nonetheless evinces profound admiration for al-Ghazālī. Yet his treatment of the great scholar, whom he had met more than once, focuses more on his concern for al-Ghazālī’s failings. 75 Struggling to salvage al-Ghazālī’s valuable works in fields such as jurisprudence and dogma, al-Fārisī limits his critique to al-Ghazālī’s mystical and esoteric works. He states that al-Ghazālī went astray from the bases of Islam in books like his Persian ethical treatise Kemyā-ye saʿādat (The Alchemy of Felicity). 76 Al-Fārisī argues that he should never

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74 This has survived in part in an abridgement of his history of Naysābūr and more fully in the works of Ibn ‘Asākir, al-Dhahabī and al-Subkī.


76 ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī, Tārīkh Naysābūr al-muntakhab min al-Siyāq, 84.
have entered into such esoteric matters because they might confuse the masses of Muslims and negatively affect their conception of proper belief.77

The chief thrust in rehabilitating al-Ghazālī, however, comes at the end of al-Fārisī’s biography. It both portrays al-Ghazālī as returning to the sound path of Sunnism and affirms al-Fārisī’s own ḥadīth-oriented, Sunni identity. Al-Fārisī states that in the last years of his life, al-Ghazālī occupied himself with study of ḥadīth and poring over the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Had he lived longer, al-Fārisī opines, al-Ghazālī would have become the master of this noble science. Playing on al-Ghazālī’s honorary title, he adds, “It is these two [books, the Ṣaḥīḥayn,] that are the Proof of Islam (ḥujjat al-Islām).”78

Establishing al-Ghazālī’s repentance from his heretical musings in philosophy and Sufism by associating him with the Ṣaḥīḥayn became a central tool for rehabilitating his reputation. The Shāfi‘ī biographer Abū Sa‘d al-Karīm al-Sam‘ānī (d. 562/1166) of Merv included a report in his entry on al-Ghazālī that portrays him inviting one ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Rawwāsī (d. 503/1109) to stay at his house in Ṭūs in order to provide extended private lessons on the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Even avid defenders of al-Ghazālī, however, such as al-Subkī, considered this report to be a blatant

77 Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 19:326-7.

78 ʿAbd al-Ghafir al-Fārisī, Ṭārīkh Naysābūr al-muntakhab min al-Siyāq, 84; al-Subkī, Tābāqāt, 6:210-11; Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 55:204.

Al-Sam'ānī most probably included it in his zealous efforts to affirm al-Ghazālī’s devotion to the hadith tradition. Although the Ḥanbālī Ibn al-Jawzī is extremely critical of al-Ghazālī, he also notes that late in life he occupied himself with learning the “ṣaḥīḥ collections (al-ṣiḥāḥ).” The great apologist for the Shāfi’ī/Ashʿarī tradition, al-Subki (d. 771/1370), leaves us the most exhaustive defense of al-Ghazālī’s legacy in his two-hundred page biography of the scholar in the Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿīyya al-kubrā. Al-Subki’s defense of al-Ghazālī centers on the same theme advanced by al-Fārisī: al-Ghazālī’s evident recantation from the unrestricted use of speculative theology in the last years of his life and simultaneous decision to devote himself to the study of the Ṣaḥīḥayn. The Ḥanafī hadith scholar and theologian Mullā ʿAlī Qārī provides an even more dramatic depiction of al-Ghazālī’s final return to the straight path: al-Ghazālī died with copy of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī on his chest.82

IX.5. c. Al-Dhahabi’s Narrative of Islamic History: The Ṣaḥīḥayn as Synecdoche

The Salafi-oriented Shāfiʿī scholar Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) shines as one of the most intelligent and influential figures in Islamic intellectual history. A member of the remarkable Damascus circle of Ibn Taymiyya, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī and Ibn Kathīr, his works and those of his associates have exercised an inordinately powerful effect on the course of Sunni thought. Through his

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80 Al-Subki, Ṭabaqāt, 6:215.
82 Mullā ʿAlī Qārī, Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-akbar, 30.
many studies on the ḥadīth sciences and remarkable biographical dictionaries, al-Dhahabī elaborated an independent ḥadīth-oriented vision of Islamic history that angered more staunch devotees of the legal and theological schools as much as it provided them indispensable benefit.\(^{83}\) Al-Dhahabī rejected the tradition of speculative theology as well as what he perceived as the over-involved and self-indulgent complexities of the Sunni scholarly edifice. In his biography of al-Ghazālī he urges a ḥadīth and piety-based minimalism, telling the reader that all a Muslim requires to attain success and salvation are the Qurʾān, the Ṣaḥīḥayn, al-Nasāʾī’s Sunan and al-Nawawī’s two pietistic works, Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn (The Gardens of the Righteous) and the Kitāb al-adhkār (Book of Prayers).\(^{84}\)

Al-Dhahabī’s Tadhkirat al-huffāz (Aide-Mémoire of the Ḥadīth Masters) provides a concise glimpse into the scholar’s conception of Islamic civilization’s historical course. Unlike his gigantic Tārīkh al-islām (History of Islam) or his expansive Siyar a lām al-nubalāʾ (The Lives of the Noble Figures), the Tadhkira consists of only a few volumes devoted solely to a chronological treatment of those figures who emerged as prominent participants in the Sunni ḥadīth tradition. In rare comments at the end of some outstanding generations, al-Dhahabī includes his own evaluations of the umma’s unfolding history. At the end of the first generation to succeed the Companions, for

\(^{83}\) For a harsh criticism of al-Dhahabī by one of his students, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, who also relied on him heavily in his Tabaqāt al-shāfiʿīya, see al-Subkī, “Qāʿida fi al-jaḥ wa al-taʿdīl,” in Arbaʿ rasāʾil fī šūʿūr al-ḥadīth, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 6th edition (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1419/1999), 37 ff. For praise of al-Dhahabī from Indian Ḥanafīs, see al-Laknawi, a-rājūs a-takmil, 286. See also, Makdisi, “Hanbalite Islam,” 240.

\(^{84}\) Al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 19:340.
example, he describes how at this time Islam had become powerful and glorious, "having conquered the lands of the Turks in the east and Andalusia in the west."85

After the fifth generation, consisting of scholars like Ibn Jurayj and Abū Ḥanīfa who died between 140 and 150AH, al-Dhahābī writes, "Islam and its peoples were endowed with total might and profuse knowledge, the standards of jihād spread wide and the sunna (sunan) widespread." He adds that "heresy (bid‘a) was suppressed, and those constantly speaking the truth were many. The servants [of God] were plentiful in number and the people were living at the height of prosperity with security...."86 But after the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma‘mūn, the two sons of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, the strength of the state waned. Accompanying this political division, the state of the faith deteriorated. The power of the Shiites and Mu‘tazilites increased and the Baghdad Inquisition occurred.

The star of Shiism rose and revealed its enmity (abdā saḥatahu), the dawn of speculative theology broke, the philosophy (ḥikma) of the ancients, the logic of the Greeks and astrology were all translated into Arabic. A new science thus emerged for the people, abhorrent, destructive, incongruous with the knowledge of Prophecy and not in accordance with the unity of the believers that had held the umma in well-being.87

With the narrative of entropy and decline into religious ruin set, al-Dhahābī bemoans the weakening of scholarship since the heady days of Ibn Ḥanbal’s and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s greatest generation. Al-Dhahābī specifically complains about the state of Islamic knowledge in his own time, condemning blind imitation (taqlīd) in law and the

85 Al-Dhahābī, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:56.
86 Al-Dhahābī, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:179.
87 Al-Dhahābī, Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:240.
obsession with empty speculative theology (*kalām*). In such times, he concludes, “may God bless that individual who devotes himself to his task, who shortens his tongue, draws near to reading his Qurʾān, cries over his time (*zamānihi*) and pores over the *Sahihayn*.”

In his grief over the deterioration of scholarship and piety, al-Dhahabi thus calls for a return to the twin roots of Islam: the Qurʾān and the sunna of the Prophet. The route to salvation, if only on the individual level, is to embrace the holy book and those volumes that had come to represent synecdochically the Prophet’s true legacy, the *Sahihayn* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

**IX.6. Conclusion**

In its roles as a measure of authenticity, authoritative reference for non-specialists and exemplum, the *Sahihayn* canon functioned as Canon 1: a criterion between truth and falsehood. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s books, however, played another crucial role beyond the limited circles of jurists and ḥadīth scholars. The two collections came to synecdochically represent the Prophet’s legacy itself within the wider Sunni community. Ironically, in their denial of the existence of a ḥadīth canon, both Wheeler and Weiss alluded to the important function that the major Sunni collections served in their capacity as Canon 2: they delimited the vast expanse of the Prophet’s sunna and embodied it in a manageable form. Whether the canonical unit of the Five Books or just the *Sahihayn*, this circumscription drew the boundaries of the greater Sunni community. Loyalty to the canon meant loyalty to the umma.

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The *Šahihayn*’s synecdochic representation of the Prophet rendered the books invaluable in both scholarly and lay interaction with the heritage of Muḥammad. In the narratives that ḥadīth-oriented Sunni scholars developed to describe the historical course of Islamicate civilization, al-Bukhārī and Muslim became a trope for the straight path of adherence to the Prophet’s sunna in the face of the ever-multiplying threats of heresy and iniquity. In the Sunni narrative of decline from the halcyon days of the righteous early community, the *Šahihayn* represented salvation through a return to their teachings. More importantly, by the seventh/thirteenth century al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s collections had taken on prominent roles in political, calendrical and supplicatory rituals. Again, the two works symbolized the Prophet’s legacy. For Mawlā Ismā‘īl they symbolized loyalty to the Prophet and the ‘Alawid state that governed in his name. For the scholars who read the *Šahihayn* during Rajab, Sha‘bān and Ramadan in Timbuktu, Cairo, Mecca or Damascus, the *Šahihayn* imbued a set period of the year with the religious significance of the Prophet’s persona. In all these instances of ritual use, but perhaps most palpably in their roles as tools of supplication, the *Šahihayn* synecdochically represented the Prophet’s access to divine blessing. Like relics or Muḥammad’s descendents, the ḥadīth collections personified the Prophet’s role as the intercessor between humanity and the divine.
X.

CONCLUSION

X.1. Problems in Approaches

Here at its conclusion, a reader may have noticed that this study has been imbued with the corporeal language and organic idiom of biology. ‘Needs’ have been ‘felt’ and ‘met.’ Sunnism ‘matured,’ and ‘strains’ within it ‘developed.’ The canon ‘emerged’ and fulfilled certain ‘functions.’ Using such phrasal representations to move from one thought to another or from particulars to the general betrays certain assumptions about the nature of the hadith canon and Islamic civilization. Are we justified in treating a human society or a faith tradition as organisms that are born and mature until they attain some state of advancement?

This assumption may not have been accurate when British scholars like E.B. Tylor (d. 1917) and J.G. Frazer (d. 1941) described the global phenomenon of religion as a stage in the maturation of human consciousness. I believe it does, however, serve us faithfully in a study of Islamic intellectual history. Inquiring into the history of the Ṣaḥīḥayn is a natural reaction to their conspicuous prominence in Sunni Islam today. Yet the fact is that Islam existed as a religion and faith tradition before al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and it flourished for at least another century without paying the two books or their authors any remarkable attention. We are thus inevitably faced with a question of change, of growth or emergence in our comparison of the two books’ status now and their
standing during their authors' time. Like the compound of Sunni orthodoxy itself, the
canon was not then and is now. Faced with such a stark instance of transformation or
change, examining the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim as a linear process of
maturation and subsequent tensions seems reasonable or even inevitable.

Perhaps the most dangerous pitfall of employing a biological metaphor for the
movement of history consists of the ambiguous status it grants human agency. One could
describe a 'canon emerging' without identifying the specific individuals or class who
promulgated it. One could mention a community 'feeling needs' without stipulating
exactly how they were expressed. We have tried to avoid these problems by adhering
closely to the textual sources of history and emphasizing the role of individuals in the
development of the canon. We have relied on historical actors to explain their own
actions either directly through their own words or indirectly by reading their works
critically against an established context. We have avoided attributing individuals' actions
to broader political, cultural or economic forces unless there exists some explicit
evidence for such a link. Certainly, we may speculate about the manner in which
political context or the allocation of resources affected the canon, but we cannot
definitively explain the canon as the direct result of these factors without some
discernable evidence.

Instead of summarizing the results of this study in abstract form (see the Thesis
section in the Introduction), we conclude in a manner more useful to students of Islamic
civilization and its magnificent tradition of ḥadīth scholarship. As the present study
proceeded, teachers, scholars and students consistently posed the same questions about
the Șahîhayn canon and its historical development. I have thus attempted to use these questions as a framework for summarizing the conclusion of this study.

X.2. Why the Șahîhayn and Not Other Books?

Asking why one text achieves membership in the canon and another does not poses trenchant questions about the forces that drive intellectual history and the possibility of objective scholarly evaluation. Can historians always explain choices made in the past through a materialist lens, or can historical actors establish and act on sets of aesthetics independent from material surroundings? One might contend that there is nothing intrinsic in the writings of Shakespeare that makes them better than the works of other playwrights or poets. The canonical status of Romeo and Juliet might ultimately hinge on the number of copies of the text that were produced at some crucial point in time, the nature of the network that distributed and performed the play, the charisma of those scholars who promoted its study or its resonance with some great social issue of the day. Another, better play written by a now-unknown litterateur may have disappeared into history for similar reasons. Canonicity, from this perspective, is the product of material forces and the accidents of history. It is not a matter of objective quality.

This perspective robs the critic or the scholar of his right to aesthetic evaluation; eminently a creature of the material world around him, he is no more able to escape these constraints than the texts he purports to judge. Is this perspective accurate, or must we allow for the serendipitous variable of scholarly preference? Should we acknowledge that a well-respected critic or sincere scholar could rise above the material constraints of
his day and pronounce an influential verdict on a book based on purely aesthetic
grounds? It seems that the Sahihayn canon was the product of both the material accidents
of history and the explicit judgments of influential Muslim scholars as to which hadith
collections provided the best understanding of the Prophet's charismatic legacy.

To isolate the factors that shaped the Sahihayn canon, let us review the fate of
four hadith collections written by prominent transmission-based Sunni scholars of the
Sahih movement between 250/865 and 350/960 in the Khurasan region: the Sahihayn, the
Sahih of Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923) and the Sahih of Ibn Hibban (d. 354/965). All these
hadith scholars were Sunnis who compiled comprehensive legal and doctrinal references
on hadith restricted to only what they considered authentic reports. All four had
comparable visions of what Islam and the sunna of the Prophet 'should' be. By the
eighth/fourteenth century, all four collections had won approval from the Sunni scholarly
community. As our judge of canonicity, let us turn to al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, whose
seminal study of the Sahihayn in fact sparked their canonization. While al-Hakim viewed
al-Bukhari's and Muslim's collections as the pinnacle of critical stringency and
excellence in hadith evaluation, he dismissed both the Sahih of his teacher Ibn Hibban
and that of his exemplar Ibn Khuzayma.

Ibn Hibban's work seems to have been the victim of the accidents of history. Al-
Hakim condemned the work of his teacher, a belated participant in the Sahih movement,
due to the presence of unknown transmitters in its isnads. As we know, however, early
members of the Sahihayn Network had also been unable to identify some of al-Bukhari's
transmitters. Only after several generations of study were these 'unknown' narrators
identified. For al-Ḥākim, the absence of unknown transmitters in the Ṣaḥīḥayn proved central to his claims on the books’ authority. Had Ibn Ḥibbān lived a century earlier and produced his Ṣaḥīḥ at the same time as al-Bukhārī, perhaps scholars could have identified his unknown transmitters as well.

In the case of Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ, however, we cannot explain its exclusion from the canon as the result of material forces or ideological pressures. Influential scholars who evaluated Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ simply did not approve of his quality selections. Ibn Khuzayma was the axis of transmission-based jurisprudence, theology and ḥadīth study in Khurāsān during the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries. Our earliest sources on the period accord him accolades that dwarf those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.¹ Yet when al-Ḥākim was asked about whether or not Ibn Khuzayma was a reliable judge of the authenticity of Prophetic reports, he replied, “That I do not say.”² Al-İsmā‘īlī had preferred al-Bukhārī’s legal analysis to Muslim’s relative impartiality, and Ibn ‘Uqda had favored Muslim’s isolated focus on Prophetic ḥadīths to al-Bukhārī’s insistence on providing incomplete reports as legal commentary. Yet both these critics explicitly stated that al-Bukhārī and Muslim provided the community with eminently reliable representations of the Prophet’s sunna. Ibn Khuzayma’s Ṣaḥīḥ never attracted the scholarly interest heaped on the Ṣaḥīḥayn, and its exclusion from the Six Book canon seems undeniably to be the result of his failure to inspire the same confidence in the community that canonized al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹ Al-Ḥākim, Tārīkh Nīshābūr, 120.
² Al-Khaḥīlī, al-İrshād, 313.

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Why the Šahīḥayn played such a salient role in ritual and narrative as opposed to other canonical ḥadīth books grew out of the unique status they achieved at the dawn of the fifth/eleventh century. In Islam, an object becomes religious through a perceived link to God and His Prophet. As the community of God’s final messenger, guarded against communal error by God Himself, the umma can further enunciate His will through claims of consensus (ʾijmāʿ). Goldziher thus astutely recognized that ʾijmāʿ was the bedrock on which Sunnism was founded.³ Claims based on the umma’s consensus underpinned the Šahīḥayn canon, and no other book after the Qur’ān could boast such recognition. As objects endowed with religious significance, the Šahīḥayn were ideally suited to dramatize religious meaning in acts of ritual or represent it in historical narrative.

X.3. What Forces Led to the Canonization of the Šahīḥayn?

We have asserted that canons form at the nexus of text, authority and communal identification. By authorizing texts, communities express, delineate and affirm their identities or boundaries. The creation of a canon thus stems from a twofold need to embody authority in text and delineate community through text. We have also contended that the communal drama in which the canonization of the Šahīḥayn played a salient role was the articulation of Sunnism in the medieval period. Scott C. Lucas has suggested that discovering how such initially controversial figures (from a Sunni perspective) as al-Bukhārī and Abū Ḥanīfa achieved ‘Sunni’ status remains an important but unanswered

³ Berkey, Formation of Islam, 189-90; Goldziher quoted in Makdisi, “Hanbalite Islam,” 253. This observation is reminiscent of the Azhar adage that ʾijmāʿ is ‘al-rukn al-rakin yastanidu ilayi al-ʿām.’
question in the study of this community’s history. We might rephrase the question to ask how Sunnism adapted to adopt these figures into its fold.

Sunnism began as the exclusive worldview of the transmission-based scholars, whose fixation with ḥadīths and their literal interpretation was intractably rigid. The über-Sunni credo of Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī or Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘ilī brooked no school of thought that had either elaborated a more varied set of interpretive tools for understanding the cosmos, like the Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arīs, or defined the Prophet’s sunna by means other than a stubborn obsession with ḥadīths, like the Ḥanafīs.

To explain how the conservative ethos of these ‘people of the sunna and community (ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā‘ī)’ expanded to include the relatively diverse four schools of Sunni law as well as the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools of theology, it may be useful to conceive of Sunnism more as a rhetorical mantra than a rigid doctrine. As it solidified in the fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, Sunnism certainly required the espousal of certain specific beliefs: the proper ranking of the Four Rightly Guided caliphs (Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān then ʿAlī) and the belief that the Qur‘ān was uncreated, for example. Beyond such limited dogmatic tenets, however, we can envision Sunnism as an austere rhetorical call to stand fast by the Qur‘ān, the Prophet’s sunna and the ways of the early community in the face of foreign innovations in faith, thought and practice.

As a rhetorical mantra, Sunnism eventually proved charismatic and flexible enough that differing schools of law or theology were able to take it up in order to affirm

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4 Personal communication.
their identification with a perceived traditionalist orthodoxy even though their own
doctrines or practices might at times differ significantly from it. The theological and
epistemological school of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6) epitomizes this
rhetorical flexibility. Although this scholar publicly repented his Muʿtazilite rationalist
ways and embraced the traditionalist beliefs of Ibn Ḥanbal and the ahl al-sunna wa al-
jamāʿa, the school that developed from his writings (and perhaps his writings themselves)
continued to delve deeper into speculative theology and Hellenistic epistemology.⁵

While the über-Sunni strain of the transmission-based school was parochially
limited, the legal and theological tradition that coalesced around the teachings of al-
Shāfiʿī was more open to methods of analogical reasoning and eventually Hellenistic
logic and speculative thought. Just as al-Shāfiʿī himself had accommodated analogical
legal reasoning (qiyās) in the transmission-based methodology, so were later
Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarīs like Abū Ishāq al-İsfarāyīnī or al-Juwaynī able to elaborate systems of
legal theory or theology derived significantly from Muʿtazilite rationalism while making
convincing arguments for their loyalty to the hadith-centric Sunni worldview. An Ashʿarī
who had written extensively on speculative theology, al-Juwaynī could when necessary
also avow his membership in the ahl al-sunna by trumpeting the mantra that “the
foremost [calling] is following the Salaf and rejecting religious innovation (bidʿa)....” ⁶

⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul: Dār al-Funūn,
[1928]), 280-1.

⁶ See, for example, al-Juwaynī, al-ʿAqīda al-Nizāmiyya fi al-arkān al-islāmiyya, ed. Muḥammad
Eventually, the Hanafi school could also imitate the Shafi'i/Ash'ari orthodoxy and take up this elastic Sunni mantra. The Hanafi interpretive tradition had initially been anathema to the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'ā*. Original ‘Sunni’ scholars had in fact reviled early pivots of the school like Abū Ḥanīfa and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) as heretical Jahmī rationalists. When a mid-third/ninth century Hanafi scholar named Ibn al-Thaljī (d. 265/879) dared to use Prophetic reports to buttress his school against *ahl al-sunna* opponents, Ibn Ḥanbal and his followers devastatingly dismissed him as an ‘unbeliever.’ The situation had changed dramatically by the time the Sunni edifice was established in its most concretely permanent state in the eighth/fourteenth century. By that time some Hanafis had recast Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī as a proto-Sunni who had advocated the literal interpretation of the Qur‘ān and ḥadīth on issues of God’s attributes.

This notion of Sunnism as a rhetorical touchstone within arm’s reach of a variety of interpretive schools explains the tremendous, almost inconsistent diversity within the later Sunni tradition. A phenomenon unimaginable in the fourth/tenth-century world of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and *ahl al-ra'y* is exemplified by Mullā ‘Alī Ṭārī (d. 1014/1606), a loyal Ḥanafī who, in the space of one book, quotes Ibn Ḥanbal to condemn speculative theology and logic, embraces the Ash‘arī figurative explanation of God’s attributes and

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7 Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī, for example, is quoted as calling Abū Ḥanīfa, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Shaybānī and Abū Yūṣuf ‘Jahmī,’ al-Khaṣīb, *Tārikh Baghdaḏ*, 2:176.


describes the Shafi‘i/Ash‘ari Sufi ‘Abd al-Karîm al-Qushayrî as being on the path of the Salaf."

The development and function of the Sahihayn canon mirror the development of Sunni identity. What began as the limited interest of a network of Shafi‘i scholars developed into a strong and shared identification with these two hadith collections among Shafi‘i and Hanbali students of al-Hâkim al-Naysâbûrî. Representatives from both these schools agreed on the Sahihayn as a common ground for identifying the Prophet’s authentic legacy. The other schools of Sunni Islam gradually adopted this convention of al-Bukhâri and Muslim as a measure of authenticity, authoritative reference and exemplum. Finally, even the Hanafis acceded to identifying with the Sahihayn as the common language for Sunni discussions of hadith. Although the Shafi‘is, Mâlikîs, Hanbalîs and Hanafis had relied on their own bodies of hadiths in their elaboration of law and dogma, they all acknowledged the Sahihayn as rhetorically paramount in interaction between the schools. In the seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries, when the popular religious institutions of Sunnism such as Sufi brotherhoods were coalescing, the Sahihayn too became vehicles for public ritual activity.

By acknowledging the Sahihayn as authoritative, the collection of legal and theological schools within Sunni Islam turned the two works into touchstones of communal identification. In order to understand how the forces of a developing sense of communalism created the canon, we must quickly review how the nature and needs of the

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Muslim scholarly community developed from al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s lifetime to the mid-fifth/eleventh century, when the Șahīhayn canon found widespread use and acceptance.

In the years after the deaths of the Shaykhayn, Abū Zur'a and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī continued to ply their scholarly trade in their native Rayy. The two scholars were very conservative members of the transmission-based ahl al-hadīth, drawing from the scholarship of Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Shāfi‘i equally. Although their study of legal texts like al-Muzanī’s Mukhtasar or Ibn Ḥanbal’s responsa certainly informed the two Rāzīs’ legal and doctrinal opinions, their views were ultimately shaped by their own study and interpretation of ḥadīths back to the Prophet. Like the other major transmission-based scholars of their time, such as Abū Dāwūd, they each constituted their own school of ḥadīth criticism. When Muslim brought his freshly penned Șahīh to Abū Zur'a, he looked through it with the eye of a scholar confidently following his own methodology of evaluating the authenticity of Prophetic reports.

Two hundred years later, the scene of Sunni scholarship had transformed dramatically. Unlike the two Rāzīs, scholars like the Shāfi‘i/Ashʿarī Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī were no longer willing to draw indifferently from what had become the very distinct Ḥanbalī and Shāfi‘i legal schools. Yet despite this solidification of boundaries, the Sunni universe had expanded beyond the exclusive circle of self-sufficient, über-Sunni ḥadīth-based jurists to include figures like al-Juwaynī, a practitioner of dialectical theology and a jurist loyal to a specific body of substantive law. Abū Zur'a and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī had personally vouched for the strength of their ḥadīths with the confidence their critical
expertise inspired in their followers, but in the expanded Sunni world of the fifth/eleventh century a more institutionalized convention was required for discussing attributions to the Prophet. There existed a real need for a means to compell others to acknowledge a representation of the Prophet’s authoritative legacy. The Sahihayn provided this common measure of authenticity. Unlike the Rāzīs, al-Shīrāzī and al-Juwaynī were unable to critically vet their own corpora of hadīths; they needed to turn to authoritative references to provide commonly accepted reports.

In the fifth/eleventh century, and later when the Ḥanafi school adopted the canon, the Sahihayn acted to both facilitate and define the expanded Sunni community. The two books provided a common source and reference through which different schools could address one another in debates and polemics. More importantly, however, the Sahihayn also functioned as a mantra of communalism. When the Shāfī‘/Ashʿarīs Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Juwaynī, the Ḥanbali/über-Sunni Abū Naṣr al-Wā‘ilī, and the Mālikī Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī proclaimed independently that ‘the community of Muḥammad (al-umma)’ had agreed on the Sahihayn as totally authentic vessels for the Prophet’s authoritative legacy, they affirmed their own loyalty to that shared Sunni community. More importantly, they acknowledged the membership of others who made that claim. When the Ḥanafī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī attested that al-Bukhārī’s opinion on the authenticity of a hadīth was absolutely definitive, he too took up this canonical mantra of Sunnism. When the Mamluks salaried scholars to read the Sahihayn for three months in the mosques of Cairo or placed al-Bukhārī’s collection at the vanguard of their army, the two books embodied Sunni ritual and political communalism.

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Although the pressures of communal identification create the canon, it is the
canon that then defines the community. As evident in al-Sila\text刺客’s declaration that anyone
who disagrees with the Five Book hadith canon places himself outside ‘the Abode of
Islam,’ the canon could certainly delineate the boundaries of the Sunni pale. Although
the permissibility of criticizing the \textit{Sahihayn} constituted the norm for centuries, the
perceived fragility of the Sunni community in early modern India led Sh\textash Wali All\textash to
equate belittling al-Bukh\textash and Muslim with “not following the path of the believers.”
The ability of texts to determine and shape community, however, is predicated on the
compelling power of those books. Neither al-Sila\text刺客 nor Sh\textash Wali All\textash could have
made their statements before the canonization of the \textit{Sahihayn} at the dawn of the
fifth/eleventh century. The relationship between canon and community is dialogic, but
only after the community brings the canon into existence.

\textbf{X.4. Why Did the Canon Form at the Beginning of the 5th/11th Century?}

That the \textit{Sahihayn} canon formed and found its immediate application in the early
fifth/eleventh century is not accidental. The emergence of the canon as an institution was
both a part and product of the coalescence of the new Sunni order in this period, one that
was characterized by the institutionalization of education, modes of patronage and clearly
delineated schools of thought. The frustrating ambiguity of the fourth/tenth century, with
its fluctuating and languishing categories of the \textit{ahl al-hadith} and \textit{ahl al-ra\textash y}, and the
regional laws school, faded as more concrete divisions solidified. The two strands of the
transmission-based school, the conservative \textash-Sunnis and the more moderate strain
associated with the Shāfīʿi tradition, gelled into the guild-like Ḥanbalī and Shāfīʿi schools. By approximately 425/1035 the Ashʿarī school of theology had blossomed into a mature form. By 480/1090 the Mālikīs, Ḥanafīs, Shāfīʿis and Ḥanbalīs had all composed definitive texts on legal theory, substantive law and ḥadīth and had staked their dogmatic positions in relation to one another. The proliferation of madrasas, founded and funded by wealthy patrons often associated with the Seljuq state, furnished a new institutional setting for the study of the religious sciences. Unlike the merchant and landlord scholars of previous generations, the salaried teachers and stipended students in these madrasas could pursue scholarship in a professional setting.

The institutionalization of Sunnism that spread rapidly from the fifth/eleventh century on occurred on a grand and massively important scale. As Marshall Hodgson recognized, it was in the period from 945 to 1250 CE that Islamicate civilization grew from its adaptive adolescence into a viable institutional framework for a world-civilization. Richard Bulliet has seconded this emphasis on the theme of institutionalization in the fifth/eleventh-century emergence of Sunnism. He explains that this development was “actually the first stage in the dissemination of religious institutions and the standardization of Sunni religious norms that becomes the hallmark of later Islamic history.” In particular, Bulliet highlights the transition from the cultivation of ḥadīths with living isnāds (Bulliet’s ‘orality’) to the study of ḥadīth collections and the

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11 Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, 2:3.


13 I believe that the term ‘living isnād’ more accurately describes the phenomenon that Bulliet addresses, namely a focus and reliance on direct chains of transmission back to the Prophet as opposed to collections of ḥadīths compiled by authors and then transmitted. A shift to employing books of ḥadīths did...
appearance of the *madrasa* system as the twin faces of the revolution that redefined Sunni Islam in the late fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. He links this institutionalization of education, in both the transition from living *isnāds* to books and the spread of the *madrasa*, with the formation of the Sunni ḥadīth canon, since *madrasas* relied on these collections as part of their curricula.¹⁴

*Madrasa* curriculum, however, cannot tell us why the *Ṣahīḥayn* achieved canonical status in this period. In cities like Qazvīn, ḥadīth study generally continued in large mosques, not *madrasas*. Furthermore, *madrasas* from Egypt to India utilized a large and varied selection of books for instruction. None of these, however, attained the ubiquitous and unparalleled status of the *Ṣahīḥayn*. Instead, we must look to the needs created by the Sunni scholarly community’s act of self-delineation and its search for the tools required to facilitate internal coherence. Al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s books had received concerted study in the long fourth century because they provided a network of influential Shāfi‘ī scholars with the ideal vehicles for expressing the nature and quality of their command of the Prophet’s legacy. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī exploited this network’s assiduous study of the *Ṣahīḥayn* to transform al-Bukhārī and Muslim into widely recognized stamps of authenticity. This *kanon*, he claimed, met the authenticity requirements of both the Sunnis and the single greatest threat to their transmission-based worldview: the Mu‘tazilite attempt to limit the role of Prophetic ḥadīths in elaborating law and dogma.

While the needs and contributions of the Sahihayn Network and al-Ḥākim in particular produced the canon, they cannot explain its wider proliferation. The canon flourished among al-Ḥākim’s students and other major participants in the Sunni orthodoxy of the fifth/eleventh century because the Sahihayn fulfilled specific needs created by its solidification. The need for ḥadīths and ḥadīth collections that could function as epistemologically certain loci of consensus, felt generally in the fourth/tenth century, became more pronounced when distinct legal schools that shared a common Sunni worldview required a common convention for their ceaseless debates over the proper interpretation of the Prophet’s sunna. With the institution of the madrasa and the division of labor among Sunni scholars in the mid fifth/eleventh century, accepted references for ḥadīth criticism also became necessary for non-ḥadīth specialists. The two books provided a common language and reference for discussing ḥadīths among the Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī schools in the fifth/eleventh century, with the Ḥanafī school adopting this convention only in the early eighth/fourteenth century.

The adoption of the canon as a common convention for ḥadīth study was certainly related to the shift from the living isnād to the transmission of books. It seems, however, that this shift occurred after the canonization of the Sahihayn. Al-Khalīlī (d. 446/1054) and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), two scholars who readily employed the canon, still focused much more on living isnāds than books in the entries of their mid-fifth/eleventh-century biographical dictionaries. Our sources for the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, however, indicate that circa 465/1072 a marked shift occurred toward noting the ḥadīth books that scholars studied as opposed to their living isnāds to
the Prophet. In his history of Naysabur, 'Abd al-Ghafir al-Farisi (d. 529/1134-5) mentions only ten people studying the *Saheehayn* from 385/995 to 465/1072, but from 465/1072 to 545/1150 (some material was added after the author's death by al-Sarifin [d. 641/1243-44]) he mentions fifty-five (a 450% increase). Between 385/995 and 465/1072 he mentions only eight other hadith collections, such as the *Sunans* of al-Nasawi and Abū Dawūd, being studied. Between 465/1072 and 545/1150 he mentions twenty (a 150% increase). In his Iraq-Khorasan-centric *al-Muntazam*, Ibn al-Jawzi mentions only nine instances of a scholar studying a hadith book in the two hundred years between 285/898 and 485/1092. In the period of only eighty years between 485/1092 and 565/1170 he mentions seventeen (a 90% increase). Yet we know that despite these statistically dramatic changes, a strong attachment to the living *isnaad* endured. Well into the 500/1100s, scholars like Ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqi (d. 565/1169-70) still defined hadith scholarship as the living transmission of individual hadiths from the Prophet as opposed to the study of hadith collections.

Although it is difficult to date precisely two such intangible events, it thus seems that the emergence of the *Saheehayn* canon in the early fifth/eleventh century preceded the first indications of a shift from living *isnaad* to the transmission of books by at least fifty years. We can see this clearly in the case of scholars who employed the canon while still depending wholly on their own living *isnaad* to the Prophet. Scholars like Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066) and al-Khaṭīb did not need hadith books to provide the content of their hadith works; these they filled with their own full-length living *isnaad*. They did need collections like the *Saheehayn*, however, to guarantee the authenticity of these
ḥadīths. The canon formed because scholars needed a stamp of approval for ḥadīths, and this could only come from consensus on a ḥadīth collection.

X.5. Did the Canon Emerge from Ferment and Strife?

Studies of canons and canonization have often identified periods of ideological ferment or strife as the seedbeds of scriptural canons. Just as a proclamation of orthodoxy arises as a response to perceived threats of interpretive plurality, so does a canon emerge as an attempt to dominate the textual landscape of a religious tradition. As a corollary, this combative emphasis in canon studies has led to a focus on canons as “heavy weapons,” tools for control and exclusion. Western scholars have thus not fully appreciated the capacity of canons to create common convention and bridge rifts. Menzies alone argued that canons may well form in the reconstructive wake of conflict. Indeed, just as the Sahīḥayn provided a common language for Sunnism, the canon resulted from the institutional consolidation of an expanded orthodoxy in the wake of tumultuous plurality.

The consistent intensification of the Sahīḥayn canonical culture after the careers of Abū Masʿūd al-Dimashqī and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in the late fourth/tenth and mid-fifth/eleventh centuries also coincides with the consolidation of Sunnism. As Jonathan Berkey states, Sunnism of the fifth/eleventh century was engaged in a process of

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15 Halbertal, 4-5; Hanaway, 3.

16 Hanaway, 3; Kermode, “Institutional Control of Interpretation,” 77.

17 Menzies, 91.
minimizing “sources of contention.” 18 The dogged creed of communalism that Hodgson states characterized Sunnism after this period perfectly describes the canonical culture’s goal of suppressing opinions that threatened the institutional roles of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Sunni communalism demanded “loyalty to the community and its acknowledged symbols… even at the expense of all other values.” Most assuredly, the canonical culture required Sunnis to affirm the community’s consensus on the Sahihayn at the expense of the established conventions of hadīth criticism and the historical record of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s pre-canonical images.19

X.6 Was the Canon a Response to Shiism or the Product of the Seljuq State?

Although the Sahihayn served as a unifying bond within the Sunni community, was this broad inclusivity the byproduct of an effort to exclude non-Sunnis? Many scholars have identified the emergence of institutional Sunnism in the fifth/eleventh century as a defensive reaction to the tremendous power of Shiism in the fourth/tenth century. Did the Imāmī Shiite Buyid dynasty’s dominanation of the Abbasid caliphate in Iraq and Iran, and the meteoric rise of Fatimid power in Egypt, Syria and the Ḥijāz, catalyze the institutional consolidation of Sunnism? Was this reaction instigated and encouraged by the threatened Sunni Seljuq state, many of whose leading functionaries fell before the daggers of Ismāʿīlī assassins?


Some scholars have deemphasized the place of state sponsorship in the consolidation of Sunnism. One of the architects of the notion of the ‘Sunni revival’ was George Makdisi, who viewed it as a victory of traditionalism and credited it to the tremendous popular appeal of the Ḥanbalī school in Baghdad, not to the Seljuq state.20

Others have understood the new Sunni order through a decidedly political lens. Hodgson associated it with Niẓām al-Mulk’s madrasa system, which epitomized the Seljuq-fostered framework that replaced the vanished Abbasid caliphal state with a new dispensation of uniformity. This state-sponsored madrasa system “carried on the task of maintaining essential unity in the community’s heritage” as bequeathed by the Prophet and his Companions.21

The construct of a state-sponsored Sunni revival has been intimately bound to the Seljuqs’ Shiite adversaries, both the ousted Buyids and the more immediately threatening Ismā‘īlī Fatimids. Lapidus thus concluded that the fifth/eleventh-century institutionalization of a Sunni orthodoxy was a politically led reaction to Shiite power. The Abbasid caliph al-Qādir, who promulgated the famously anti-Shiite Qādirī creed in the twilight shadows of Buyid suzerainty, the Seljuqs and their successor dynasties of the Ayyubids and Mamluks all promoted an institutionalized Sunni orthodoxy as part of a drive to unite society around a state-embraced Sunni cause. This was exemplified by Niẓām al-Mulk and Malikshāh’s efforts to mollify through patronage all the major non-Shiite factions in the various feuds on the Baghdad-Khurāsān circuit: the Shāfi‘ī/Ashʿarīs,


Hanjailis and Hanafis. Bulliet, however, disagrees with equating the Sunni revival with a reaction to Shiism. Instead, we should view it as an attempt to define Sunnism according to “centrally espoused dogma” (he thus admits that it is at least in some way the result of state policy). Jonathan Berkey follows Bulliet in downplaying the threat of Shiism or an anti-Shiite Seljuq policy as an engine for the crystallization of Sunnism. Bulliet and Berkey both point out that the Seljuqs often adopted a conciliatory attitude toward the powerful Imamī Shiite interests in cities like Baghdad. For example, Niẓām al-Mulk and his master Malikshāḥ both married their daughters to Shiite nobles and appointed Shiite ministers.

Neither Bulliet nor Berkey, however, sufficiently notes that it was the Ismāʿīlīs and not the relatively harmless Imamī Shiites who alarmed the Seljuq state and Sunni scholars alike. Sunni firebrands such as the caliph aI-Qādir certainly condemned Imamī Shiites, but, as Abū al-Ḥusayn Qazvīnī found himself insisting in his Ketāb-e nāqūd, it was the Ismāʿīlīs whom the Sunnis truly feared. It was Ismāʿīlī propaganda that proved so appealing to the intellectual elite in the major metropolises of the Seljuq realm, and Ismāʿīlī assassins who represented the single greatest external danger to the stability of the Seljuq dynasty. This threat had earlier sparked an unlikely alliance between the Sunni caliph al-Qādir, his Shiite Buyid overlords and the Imamī Shiite scholars of

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22 Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies; 164, 173-4.  

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Baghdad. In 402/1011 they jointly promulgated an anti-Ismāʿīlī manifesto directed at the encroaching Fatimid state.25

While the consolidation of Sunnism in the fifth/eleventh century may well have been a response to the Fatimid threat and Ismāʿīlī propaganda, we cannot identify any direct effect on the formation of the ḥadīth canon. Shiism, whether Imāmī or Ismāʿīlī, never surfaces in the various discourses surrounding the authorization of the Ṣaḥīḥayn. The canon was, in fact, a boon to Imāmī Shiites like Qazwīnī, who turned to al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s compelling authority in attempts to trump Sunni opponents by using their own proof texts against them. Ultimately, the Ṣaḥīḥayn were more a unifying element within Sunnism than a tool for excluding the Shiite other.

In the sense that the Ismāʿīlī threat and any resulting Seljuq patronage of non-Shiite schools helped bring Sunnism to institutional maturity, the canon can be seen as part of a response to Shiism. This perspective only holds true, however, at the most global level of analysis. Those scholars who participated in the various discourses that produced the ḥadīth canon did not exhibit any concern for a Shiite threat in their related writings or understand the Ṣaḥīḥayn as a tool for excluding non-Sunnis. To the contrary, the earliest recorded usages of the canon are directed at either Muʿtazilites or adherents of other Sunni schools with an emphasis on the inclusive consensus that those who wielded the canon claimed it enjoyed. Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, a member of the Ṣaḥīḥayn Network who was very familiar with al-Ḥākim’s work, thus did not refer to al-Bukhārī and Muslim in his manual for debating Imāmī Shiites. Although Abū Nuʿaym refers to

uddiths he argues are agreed on by all Muslims, citing the Ṣaḥīḥayn would simply have had no proof value for his Shiite opponents.

X.7. Was the Ṣaḥīḥayn Canon the Product of or Limited to a Specific Region?

The Ṣaḥīḥayn canon germinated in the scholarly circles of Naysābūr, Jurjān and Baghdad during the first half of the long fourth century. Its articulation and early usage took place in the writings and debates of scholars traveling between the great urban centers of the Nile-Oxus Islamicate heartlands. Beyond these early stages, however, the history of the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon does not diverge markedly from the course charted by Islamic history in general. Where Sunnism flourished, the canon followed.

Roy Mottahedeh has pointed out the prominence of Khurāsānī scholars in the articulation of the Sunni ḥadīth tradition in the third/ninth century.26 Richard Bulliet extends this geographical focus in both chronology and import, arguing that the institutions that characterized the Sunni revival in the great imperial center of Baghdad, such as the madrasa, were truly imports from the Iranian east.27

The ḥadīth canon, however, was not the product of eastern Iran alone. Certainly, figures central to the canonization of the two works such as al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī resided mostly in Khurāsān. The Ṣaḥīḥayn Network, however, that readied the two books for canonization, and the cadre of Shāfiʿi/Ashʿarī and Ḥanbali scholars who first promoted the canon, were first and foremost participants in the highly mobile and


27 Bulliet, Islam: the View from the Edge, 146.
cosmopolitan scholarly culture that dominated Islamic civilization from the third/ninth to the sixth/twelfth centuries. Khurāsān was only one province in this wider world. Al-Dāraquṭnī never voyaged east of Baghdad, Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyīnī divided his career between the Abbasid capital and Khurāsān, and both Abū Naṣr al-Wāʾilī and al-Juwaynī spent significant portions of their careers in the Ḥijāz.

Furthermore, the expanded Sunni community to which the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon proved so useful in the mid-fifth/eleventh century and beyond was just as present in North Africa, Baghdad, Egypt, or Isfahan as eastern Iran. Scholars in any city on the great scholarly/mercantile circuit that ran from Mecca to Transoxiana or westward to Andalusia would have appreciated the need for a common measure of authenticity, an authoritative reference or a standard of excellence in ḥadīth study. The Ṣaḥīḥayn canon was a product of these far-flung urban centers and dusty roads of the dominant Ḥijāz – Baghdad – Khurāsān – Transoxiana circuit of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries.

Oddly, the tremendous geographical distance between Andalusia and the central Islamicate heartlands proved unimportant in the spread and usage of the canon. While the rugged mountains between Jurjān and Naysābūr had restricted the movement of information on the Ṣaḥīḥayn in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, the vast expanses of desert, plain and ocean between Cordova and Baghdad were of little significance in the history of the canon. Not only did Andalusian scholars who had voyaged east, such as Qāsim b. Aṣbagh of Cordova and Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī of Badajoz, participate visibly in the Ṣaḥīḥayn Network and early applications of the canon respectively, the Ṣaḥīḥayn
attracted significant attention in Andalusia itself. *Šahih al-Bukhārī* first arrived in Andalusia not long after it achieved fame in the East. Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAṣīlī (d. 392/1002), a judge in Saragossa, received the book from Abū Zayd al-Marwazī in Mecca and brought it back to Andalusia.⁵¹ His teacher, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012), also brought the collection back to the North African city of Qayrawān. Their student al-Muhallab b. Abū Zayd al-Mawāzī, a judge in the Andalusian town of Almeria, wrote a commentary on *Šahih al-Bukhārī* that was in fact the first such work devoted to the book anywhere since al-Khaṭṭābī had written his *A Ḥām al-sunan* fifty years earlier.⁶⁰

Two generations later, al-Jayyānī (d. 498/1105) became an important participant in the study and development of the *Šahihayn* canon without ever leaving Andalusia.⁶¹ He collected six separate transmissions of al-Bukhārī’s *Šahih* through the author’s senior student, al-Firabī, as well as another prominent transmission from Ibrāhīm b. Maʿqīl al-Nasafi. Al-Jayyānī had the two most famous transmissions of *Šahih Muslim* as well (those of al-Qalānī and Ibn Sufyān).⁶² In addition, he had copies of al-Hākim’s *Tārīkh Naysābūr* and his *Maṣrafat ʿulūm al-hadīth*. Although he was writing only a few years after al-Khaṭṭābī al-Baghdādī’s death, al-Jayyānī also had a copy of the massive *Tārīkh Naysābūr*.¹

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⁵² Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 17:159.
Baghdād. Some of the most influential studies of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, such as al-Jayyānī’s study of al-Bukhārī’s teachers and al-Māzarī’s and al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād’s commentaries on Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, came from the Maghrib. Although he was famously unaware of al-Tirmidhī’s existence, Ibn Ḥazm rated the Ṣaḥīḥayn as the two best collections of ḥadīth. After madrasas were founded in the Maghrib, the Ṣaḥīḥayn became standard texts for ḥadīth study among the majority Mālikī school.

After madrasas were founded in the Maghrib, the Ṣaḥīḥayn became standard texts for ḥadīth study among the majority Mālikī school.

To the extreme east of the classical Islamic world, the Ṣaḥīḥayn canon was at the vanguard of ḥadīth scholarship in South Asia as it grew steadily from the seventh/thirteenth century on. The first Indian to leave any trace of studying the Ṣaḥīḥayn was also the first renowned Indian ḥadīth scholar in general. A native of Lahore, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghānī (d. 650/1252), penned a study of al-Bukhārī’s teachers, a commentary on his Ṣaḥīḥ and a famous combined edition of the Ṣaḥīḥayn, the Mashāriq al-anwar. Al-Ṣaghānī spent much of his time studying in the Ḥijāz and serving the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir, who sent him back to India from Baghdad as the Abbasid ambassador to the Delhi Sultanate. Otherwise, it was not until the 700/1300s that any real study of the Ṣaḥīḥayn started in South Asia proper. According to Muhammad Ishaq, the first mention of the two works comes in the work of Makhdūm al-Mulk Sharaf al-Dīn sometime between 741/1340 and 786/1384.

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33 Al-Jayyānī, al-Tanbih ’alā al-awhām al-wāqi’a fi Ṣaḥīḥ al-imām Muslim, 30-34.


35 Ishaq, India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature, 230.

36 Ishaq, India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature, 77.
This history of the *Sahihayn* in South Asia, however, reflects the study of ḥadīth in that region in general. Although there had been limited ḥadīth scholarship in Lahore under the Ghaznavids in the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries, it was the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate that marked the beginning of continuous Muslim scholarship in northern India. Even then, however, the study of ḥadīth was limited to al-Baghawi’s *Mašābīḥ al-sunna* and al-Ṣaghānī’s *Mashāriq al-anwār* (in effect, the *Ṣahihayn*), the two books that provided the narrow foundations of the ḥadīth curriculum in the new Nāṣirīyya and Muʿizzī colleges in Delhi.37 Ḥadīth scholarship in northern India was thus built on al-Bukhari’s and Muslim’s canonical status as manifested in al-Baghawi’s and al-Ṣaghānī’s digests of two works. ʿAbd al-Awwal al-Ḥusaynī al-Zaydūrī (d. 968/1560), who lived in Gujarat and Delhi, wrote the first Indian commentary on al-Bukhari’s collection: the *Fayḍ al-bārī fī sharḥ Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī*.38 In the wake of ʿAbd al-Ḥaq b. Sayf al-Dihlawī (d. 1052/1642), the Indian scholar who truly replicated the intense ḥadīth scholarship of the Islamic heartlands in India, ḥadīth study flourished in the subcontinent. From that point onward, almost every major Indian ḥadīth scholar produced a commentary on al-Bukhari’s or Muslim’s *Ṣahīḥ*. Many commentaries were written in Persian, with Sirāj Aḥmad al-Mujaddadī (d. 1230/1815) even translating *Ṣahīḥ Muslim* directly into Persian.39 In light of the prominent place of the *Ṣahihayn* in South Asian Islam, it is no surprise that the great Sufi scholar Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (d.

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37 Ishaq, *India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, 49.

38 Ishaq, *India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, 129.

39 Ishaq, *India’s Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, 143.
rebutted a ḥadīth used against him in a debate by stating only the contents of the Ṣaḥīḥayn are assuredly authentic.\textsuperscript{40}

X.8. Conclusion

The Muslim ḥadīth tradition and the manifold roles of ḥadīth in Islamic civilization can stretch the historian's analogical abilities to their limits. It is not difficult to imagine that reports from the Prophet Muḥammad played a central role in defining Islamic doctrinal and legal thought. As different schools matured and competed, it was natural that the authenticity of ḥadīths became an issue of great communal import. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim remain enduring symbols of the system of ḥadīth criticism and authentication that Muslim scholars from Andalusia to Transoxiana developed on so daunting a scale and with such internal consistency that it ranks among mankind's greatest intellectual accomplishments. Just as we admire the logical or ethical explications of Peripatetic philosophers regardless of the accuracy of their conclusions today, we need only shift our gaze slightly to examine in wonder the web of intersecting lines of transmission that weave downward and outward from the Prophetic singularity along the dome of time and space.

Yet beyond the role of ḥadīth in law and doctrine, it seems almost incomprehensible how such a large number of people from all reaches of society could devote themselves so totally to collecting and sifting through reports from the Prophet.

Histories like al-Khaṭīb’s تاریخ بغداد or al-Dhahabi’s تذکرات الحفاظ are replete with normal individuals who traveled for months simply to collect an additional version of a Prophetic report for which they already possessed one narration. Even more shocking is the obvious fact that most of these ḥadīth collectors had little concern for the actual authenticity of these reports.

Perhaps, however, the question of the canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim reminds us that such a distant and fantastic past is not actually far removed from us today. Even today, historical authenticity is not prized by all equally. Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī understood that in making authenticity paramount, one may sacrifice the tools necessary for communal coherence. As al-Albānī’s conflict with the traditional schools of law demonstrates, there are real questions as to what extent the institutional needs of the community trump ‘scholarly integrity.’ The Sahīhayn canon was shaped by communal needs and priorities as they shifted over time. What does the Muslim community need today?
APPENDIX I: REFERENCES FOR ȘAHIHAYN NETWORK CHART

This appendix provides the references for the material presented in Chapter Four’s Șaḥīḥayn Network Chart. It is organized by the regions shown in the chart, with chronological distribution within each region.

Baghdad:


Al-Dāraquṭnī, ʿAlī b. ʿUmar (d. 385/995): al-Ghassānī, Tanbih, 39; Brown, “Criticism of the Proto-Hadith Canon.”


Egypt and the Ḥijāz:

Ibn al-Sakān, Abū ʿAlī Ṣaʿīd b. ʿUthmān al-Bazzāz (d. 353/964): al-Dhahabī,
Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:100; idem, Tārīkh al-islām, 26:88-9.

Abū Dharr al-Harawī, ʿAbdallāh b. Alḥām (d. 430/1038): ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī,
Tārīkh Naysābūr, 607; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:201-3, 244.

Jurjān:

Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Abū Alḥām al-Jurjānī (d. 373-74/983-85): al-Khaṭīb,
Tārīkh Bağdād, 3:441; al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-islām, 26:549.

Ibn ʿAdī, ʿAbdallāh Abū Alḥām (d. 365/975-6): al-Khalīlī, al-Irshād, 291-2; al-Sahmī,
Tārīkh Jurjān, 106; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:102-3; idem, Tārīkh al-islām,
26:241.

Al-Ismāʿīlī, Alḥām b. Ibrāhīm Abū Bakr (d. 371/981-2): al-Khalīlī, al-Irshād, 291; al-
Sahmī, Tārīkh Jurjān, 87; Ibn al-Jawzī, Muntazam, 14:281-2; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Ṭabaqāt al-
fuqahāʾ al-shāfiʿīyya, 417-418; al-Dhahabī, Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:106-7; al-Subkī,
Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿīyya, 3:8.

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Naysābūr:


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Ibn al-Akhram, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Naysābūrī (d. 344/955): al-
Khāṭīb, al-Irshād, 315; al-Dhahābī, Ṭadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:55; idem, Ṭārīkh al-islām,
25:312-3; cf. Ibn Manda, Shurūṭ, 73.

Al-Ḥīrī, Abū Saʿīd Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr Muḥammad (d. 353/964): al-Khāṭīb, Ṭārīkh
Baḥrād, 5:225-6; al-Dhahābī, Ṭadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:89; idem, Ṭārīkh al-islām, 26:84.

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Naysābūrī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (d. 355/966): al-Dhahābī,
Ṭadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:68.

Al-Shārīkī, Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Shārīk al-Harawī (d. 355/966): al-
‘Abbādī, Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahāʾ as-Sāfī ṣaṣṣa, 58; Ibn al-Ṣalāh, Ṣiyānāt Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,
89; al-Dhahābī, Ṭārīkh al-islām, 26:227-8.

Al-Zaghūrī, Abū ʿAlī (d. 359/969-70): al-Khāṭīb, Ṭārīkh Baḥrād, 13:102; Ibn al-Ṣalāh,
Ṣiyānāt Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 71.

Baḥrād, 8:8-9; al-Dhahābī, Siyār, 16:360-1.

Ibn Dhuhl, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās al-Harawī (d. 378/988): al-
Khāṭīb, Ṭārīkh Baḥrād, 3:335-7; al-Dhahābī, Ṭārīkh al-islām, 26:634-5; idem,
Ṭadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:141, 158.

Al-Māṣarjī, Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad (d. 365/976): ʿĪzz al-Dīn Ibn al-
Aṭhīr, al-Lubāb fi tahdīḥ al-ansāb, 2:147-8; al-Dhahābī, Ṭadhkiraṭ al-ḥuffāẓ, 3:110-11;
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Baḥrād, 6:165-7; al-Dhahābī, Ṭārīkh al-islām, 26:289-90.

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Isfahān:


Transoxiana:


APPENDIX II: DIVORCE OATHS

Swearing to divorce one’s wife if one’s oath is not fulfilled was a topos in classical Islamic civilization. Among scholars, it functioned as a rhetorical device to emphasize a person’s certainty on an issue. Al-Ḥasan b. Ḥammād Sajjāda (d. 241/855-6), a ḥadīth scholar of Baghdad, thus told a man who had sworn to divorce his wife if he talked to an unbeliever that talking to someone who said the Qurʾān was created obliged a divorce.¹ This story was designed to equate belief in the created Qurʾān with disbelief. Scholars also used the divorce oath as a test case in many legal studies.² By the 700/1300s this type of oath had grown common enough to elicit a vehement rebuttal from Ibn Taymiyya, who did not consider such socially destructive oaths to have any effect on the marital status of their utterers.³

An early figure who often appears in the context of such vows was Abū Zur’a al-Rāzī (d. 264/878). In a story related in Ibn ‘Adī’s fourth/tenth-century source al-Kāmil concerning Abū Zur’a’s mastery of ḥadīth, the narrator of the story sees a man ask another man aboard a ship, “What do you say about a man who swears that he’d divorce his wife three times that you have memorized 100,000 ḥadīths?” The other man puts his head down for a while and says, “Go, you and he would be upstanding in your oath, but

¹ Al-Khaḍīb, Tārikh Baghdād, 7:306 (biography of al-Ḥasan b. Ḥammād).
³ Abū Zahra, Ibn Taymiyya, 428-430.
don’t bring such things up again.” The narrator asks, “Who is that man?” and the other person replies, “Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī.” In the Tārīkh Baghdad, this story is followed by another report in which a man swears by divorce that Abū Zurʿa has memorized 100,000 ḥadīths, so a group of people goes to Abū Zurʿa to know whether that man has really divorced his wife or not. Abū Zurʿa tells them that she has not been divorced.⁴

A later instance of a divorce oath being used to bolster a scholarly position occurred in the sixth/twelfth century. Abū al-ʿIzz Ahmad b. ʿUbaydallāh Ibn Kādish (d. 526/1132) al-ʿUkbarī (or al-ʿUkbarawī) said, “If someone swore an oath of final divorce (biʿl-talaq thalāthā) that God seats Muḥammad (ṣ) on the throne, then asked me for a legal opinion [on the validity of this oath], I would say, ‘You have stayed true to your word and been just.’”⁵

Al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) found himself faced with a fatwā request from someone who had sworn to divorce his wife if his claim that al-Shāfiʿī was the greatest imām of his time and that his school is the best madhhab were false. Al-Nawawī replies that divorce was not necessary here.⁶

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⁶ Al-Nawawī, Fatwâ al-imām al-Nawawī, 140.
APPENDIX III: THE QUESTION OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE \textit{Sahihayn}

Several scholars have argued that the texts of the \textit{Sahihayn} did not stabilize until some time after the deaths of their authors. In light of such realities as “organic texts, pseudepigraphy and long-term redactional activity,” Norman Calder claimed, “Apparently the product of the devoted and orderly activity of a single person, works like the \textit{Sahih} of al-Bukhārī and Muslim should probably be recognized as emerging into final form at least one generation later than the dates recorded for the deaths of the putative authors….”\cite{Calder} Based on his analysis of a partial fifth/eleventh-century manuscript of \textit{Sahih al-Bukhārī}, Alphonse Mingana concluded that the text was still in a relatively fluid form at that point in time. Yet there is little available evidence suggesting that, beyond the normal permutations of manuscript transmission for texts as large and detailed as the \textit{Sahihayn}, either al-Bukhārī’s or Muslim’s books were altered substantially after their deaths.

The \textit{Sahihayn} are two massive works, and the vagaries of manuscript transmission introduced the possibility of frequent variation even for a text transmitted intact from its author. Several generations of editors, such as Abū Dharr al-Ḥarawi (d. 430/1038), al-Ṣaghānī (d. 650/1252) and the Egyptian Ḥanbali al-Yūnīnī (d. 658/1260), thus played important roles in collating different transmissions of \textit{Sahih al-Bukhārī} into vulgate

\footnote{Calder, \textit{Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence}, 194.}
editions.² Such editorial review, however, was endemic to the pre-print world and does not reflect any instability specific to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.

Mingana based his assertion that al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* remained in fluid form through the early fifth/eleventh century on his observation that two of the chapters of the manuscript that he examined were out of normal order and that each narration began with “al-Bukhārī informed us...,” a feature not found in the dominant recensions of the text.³ Yet Mingana’s partial manuscript of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* consisted of only three chapters. We have no evidence that the ordering of the remaining ninety-four chapters was irregular.

Besides Mingana’s unconvincing evidence, there are other indications that al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* varied slightly in content as it was transmitted from its author through his various students. We know from al-Kalābādhi that al-Bukhārī was transmitting his *Ṣaḥīḥ* during his own lifetime. Al-Kalābādhi informs us that al-Bukhārī had been narrating his *Ṣaḥīḥ* to students for at least eight years before his death.⁴ As the author was almost certainly making adjustments to his work throughout his life, it should not surprise us that the different narrations of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* from al-Bukhārī’s students varied from one another. When compared with the enduring transmission of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* from al-Bukhārī’s most famous student, al-Firabrī, his other student Ḥammād b. Shākir’s (d. 290/902-3) recension of the text contained two hundred fewer narrations. Ibrāhīm b.


³ Mingana, *An Important Manuscript of the Traditions of al-Bukhārī*; 1, 6, 9, 14.

Ma'qil al-Nasafi’s (d. 295/907-8) was three hundred less.⁵ But according to Ibn Ḥajar’s count, the Ṣaḥīḥ contains a total of 9,082 narrations of all sorts.⁶ We should thus not consider a variation of three hundred narrations, roughly 3% of the Ṣaḥīḥ, evidence of an incomplete or fluid text.

The other major piece of evidence suggesting that al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ was edited significantly after his death has been Abū Ishāq al-Mustamli’s (d. 376/986-7) statement that, upon examining his teacher al-Firābārī’s copy of the Ṣaḥīḥ, he noticed that some sections were still in draft form. Specifically, several subchapter headings lacked ḥadīths, and several ḥadīths appeared with no subchapter headings. Al-Mustamli explains that he and his fellow students therefore tried to arrange the unsorted material in its proper place (fa-adora baʿd dhālik ilā baʿd).⁷ Al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ, however, contains ninety-seven chapters and approximately 3,750 subchapters. That al-Firābārī’s copy of the text had what seems to be a relatively small number of missing subchapter headings does not call into question the general integrity of the text.

Evidence suggests that Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ was also completed within his own lifetime, and there is little indication that the text mutated beyond the normal vagaries of transmission after his death. Al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) mentions that Muslim left his work without chapter titles, but we have no corroboration for this report, which postdates Muslim’s death by some four hundred years.⁸ Otherwise, Muslim’s students and

⁵ Al-ʿIrāqī, al-Taqīd wa al-Idāh, 26-7.
⁸ Al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1:129.
contemporaries considered his collection complete at the time of his death. Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī mentioned that Abū Bakr al-Faḍl al-Ṣā‘īgh (d. 270/883) had composed a mustakhraj of the Ṣaḥīḥ during Muslim’s lifetime. Muslim’s colleagues Ibn Rajā’ (d. 286/899) and Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Salama (d. 286/899) did the same. Presumably, mustakhrajs could only have been produced on the basis of completed template collections.

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