

Hadith

A **hadith** (/ˈhædiθ/^[1] or /hɑːˈdiːθ/^[2] Arabic: حديث *ḥadīth*, plural: **ahadith**, أحاديث, *ʾaḥādīth*^[3]) is one of various reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.^[3] The term comes from Arabic meaning a “report”, “account” or “narrative”. Hadith are second only to the Quran in developing Islamic jurisprudence,^[4] and regarded as important tools for understanding the Quran and commentaries (*tafsir*) written on it. Some important elements of traditional Islam, such as the five salat prayers, are mentioned in hadith.^[5]

The hadith literature is based on spoken reports that were in circulation in society after the death of Muhammad. Unlike the Qur'an the hadiths were not quickly and concisely compiled during and immediately after Muhammad's life.^[3] Hadith were evaluated and gathered into large collections during the 8th and 9th centuries, generations after the death of Muhammad, after the end of the era of the “rightful” Rashidun Caliphate, over 1,000 km (620 mi) from where Muhammad lived.

Each hadith consists of two parts, the *isnad* (Arabic: 'support'), or the chain of transmitters through which a scholar traced the *matn*, or text, of a hadith back to the Prophet.^{[6][7][8]} Individual hadith are classified by Muslim clerics and jurists as *sahih* (“authentic”), *hasan* (“good”) or *da'if* (“weak”).^[9] However, there is no overall agreement: different groups and different individual scholars may classify a hadith differently.

Different branches of Islam (Sunni, Shia, Ibadī) refer to different collections of hadith, and the relatively small sect of Quranists reject the authority of any of the hadith collections.^{[10][11]}

1 Etymology

In Arabic, the noun *ḥadīth* (Arabic: حديث *ḥadīth* IPA: [ħaˈdiːθ]) means “report”, “account”, or “narrative”.^{[12][13]} Its Arabic plural is *ʾaḥādīth* (أحاديث) (IPA: [ʔaħaːˈdiːθ]).^[3] *Hadith* also refers to the speech of a person.^[14]

2 Definition

In Islamic terminology, according to Juan Campo, the term *ḥadīth* refers to reports of statements or actions of Muhammad, or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence,^[15] though some

sources (Khaled Abou El Fadl) limit hadith to verbal reports and include the deeds of Muhammad and reports about his companions only in the *Sunnah*.^[16]

Classical hadith specialist Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani says that the intended meaning of *ḥadīth* in religious tradition is something attributed to Muhammad but that is not found in the Quran.^[17] Other associated words possess similar meanings including: *khabar* (news, information) often refers to reports about Muhammad, but sometimes refers to traditions about his companions and their successors from the following generation; conversely, *athar* (trace, vestige) usually refers to traditions about the companions and successors, though sometimes connotes traditions about Muhammad. The word *sunnah* (custom) is also used in reference to a normative custom of Muhammad or the early Muslim community.^[15]

See also: Categories of Ahadith

3 Components

The two major aspects of a hadith are the text of the report (the *matn*), which contains the actual narrative, and the chain of narrators (the *isnad*), which documents the route by which the report has been transmitted.^{[7][15]} The *isnad* was an effort to document that a hadith had actually come from Muhammad, and Muslim scholars from the eighth century until today have never ceased repeating the mantra “The *isnad* is part of the religion - if not for the *isnad*, whoever wanted could say whatever they wanted.”^[7] The *isnad* means literally 'support', and it is so named due to the reliance of the hadith specialists upon it in determining the authenticity or weakness of a hadith.^[18] The *isnad* consists of a chronological list of the narrators, each mentioning the one from whom they heard the hadith, until mentioning the originator of the *matn* along with the *matn* itself.

The first people to hear hadith were the companions who preserved it and then conveyed it to those after them. Then the generation following them received it, thus conveying it to those after them and so on. So a companion would say, “I heard the Prophet say such and such.” The Follower would then say, “I heard a companion say, 'I heard the Prophet.'” The one after him would then say, “I heard someone say, 'I heard a Companion say, 'I heard the Prophet...' and so on.”^[19]

4 Different schools

Different branches of Islam refer to different collections of hadith, though the same incident may be found in hadith in different collections:

- In the Sunni branch of Islam, the canonical hadith collections are *the six books*, of which *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* generally have the highest status. The other books of hadith are *Sunan Abu Dawood*, *Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, *Al-Sunan al-Sughra* and *Sunan ibn Majah*. However the *Malikis*, one of the four Sunni “schools of thought” (*madhhabs*), traditionally reject *Sunan ibn Majah* and assert the canonical status of *Muwatta Imam Malik*.
- In the Shi'a branch of Islam, the canonical hadith collections are *the Four Books*: *Kitab al-Kafi*, *Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, and *Al-Istibsar*.
- In the *Ibadi* branch of Islam, the main canonical collection is the *Tartib al-Musnad*. This is an expansion of the earlier *Jami Sahih* collection, which retains canonical status in its own right.
- The *Ahmadiyya* sect generally rely on the Sunni canons.

Some minor groups, collectively known as *Quranists*, reject the authority of the hadith collections.^{[10][11]}

The hadith also had a profound and controversial influence on moulding the commentaries (*tafsir*) of the Quran. The earliest commentary of the Quran known as *Tafsir Ibn Abbas* is sometimes attributed to the companion Ibn Abbas, but this is rejected by scholars. The hadith were used in forming the basis of *Shariah*. Much of early Islamic history available today is also based on the hadith and is challenged for lack of basis in primary source material and contradictions based on secondary material available.

5 History, tradition and usage

5.1 History

Traditions of the life of Muhammad and the early history of Islam were passed down mostly orally for more than a hundred years after Muhammad's death in AD 632. Muslim historians say that *Caliph Uthman ibn Affan* (the third *khalifa* (caliph) of the *Rashidun Empire*, or third successor of Muhammad, who had formerly been Muhammad's secretary), is generally believed to urge Muslims to record the hadith just as Muhammad suggested to some of his followers to write down his words and actions.^{[20][21]}

Uthman's labours were cut short by his assassination, at the hands of aggrieved soldiers, in 656. No sources survive directly from this period so we are dependent on what later writers tell us about this period.^[22]

According to British historian of Arab world *Alfred Guillaume*, it is “certain” that “several small collections” of hadith were “assembled in *Umayyad times*.”^[23]

In 851 the rationalist *Mu`tazila* school of thought fell from favor in the *Abbasid Caliphate*. The *Mu`tazila*, for whom the “judge of truth ... was human reason,”^[24] had clashed with traditionists who looked to the literal meaning of the Quran and hadith for truth. While the Quran had been officially compiled and approved, hadiths had not. One result was the number of hadiths began “multiplying in suspiciously direct correlation to their utility” to the quoter of the hadith (*Traditionists* quoted hadith warning against listening to human opinion instead of *Sharia*; *Hanafites* quoted a hadith stating that “In my community there will rise a man called *Abu Hanifa* [the *Hanafite* founder] who will be its guiding light”. In fact one agreed upon hadith warned that, “There will be forgers, liars who will bring you hadiths which neither you nor your forefathers have heard, Beware of them.” In addition the number of hadith grew enormously. While *Malik ibn Anas* had attributed just 1720 statements or deeds to the Muhammad, it was no longer unusual to find people who had collected a hundred times that number of hadith.

Faced with a huge corpus of miscellaneous traditions supported differing views on a variety of controversial matters—some of them flatly contradicting each other—*Islamic scholars* of the *Abbasid* sought to authenticate hadith. Scholars had to decide which hadith were to be trusted as authentic and which had been invented for political or theological purposes. To do this, they used a number of techniques which Muslims now call the science of hadith.^[25]

5.2 Shia and Sunni textual traditions

Sunni and Shia hadith collections differ because scholars from the two traditions differ as to the reliability of the narrators and transmitters. Narrators who took the side of *Abu Bakr* and *Umar* rather than *Ali*, in the disputes over leadership that followed the death of Muhammad, are seen as unreliable by the Shia; narrations sourced to *Ali* and the family of Muhammad, and to their supporters, are preferred. Sunni scholars put trust in narrators, such as *Aisha*, whom Shia reject. Differences in hadith collections have contributed to differences in worship practices and shari'a law and have hardened the dividing line between the two traditions.

5.2.1 Extent and nature in the Sunni tradition

In the Sunni tradition, the number of such texts is ten thousand plus or minus a few thousand.^[26] But if, say,

ten companions record a text reporting a single incident in the life of the prophet, hadith scholars can count this as ten hadiths. So Musnad Ahmad, for example, has over 30,000 hadiths—but this count includes texts that are repeated in order to record slight variations within the text or within the chains of narrations. Identifying the narrators of the various texts, comparing their narrations of the same texts to identify both the soundest reporting of a text and the reporters who are most sound in their reporting occupied experts of hadith throughout the 2nd century. In the 3rd century of Islam (from 225/840 to about 275/889),^[27] hadith experts composed brief works recording a selection of about two- to five-thousand such texts which they felt to have been most soundly documented or most widely referred to in the Muslim scholarly community.^[28] The 4th and 5th century saw these six works being commented on quite widely. This auxiliary literature has contributed to making their study the place of departure for any serious study of hadith. In addition, Bukhari and Muslim in particular, claimed that they were collecting only the soundest of sound hadiths. These later scholars tested their claims and agreed to them, so that today, they are considered the most reliable collections of hadith.^[29] Toward the end of the 5th century, Ibn al-Qaisarani formally standardized the Sunni canon into six pivotal works, a delineation which remains to this day.^{[30][31][32]}

Over the centuries, several different categories of collections came into existence. Some are more general, like the *muṣannaf*, the *mu'jam*, and the *jāmi'*, and some more specific, either characterized by the topics treated, like the *sunan* (restricted to legal-liturgical traditions), or by its composition, like the *arba'īniyyāt* (collections of forty hadiths).^[33]

5.2.2 Extent and nature in the Shia tradition

Shi'a Muslims do not use the six major hadith collections followed by the Sunni, as they do not trust many of the Sunni narrators and transmitters. They have their own extensive hadith literature. The best-known hadith collections are The Four Books, which were compiled by three authors who are known as the 'Three Muhammads'.^[34] The Four Books are: *Kitab al-Kafi* by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni al-Razi (329 AH), *Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih* by Muhammad ibn Babuya and *Al-Tahdhib* and *Al-Istibsar* both by Shaykh Muhammad Tusi. Shi'a clerics also make use of extensive collections and commentaries by later authors.

Unlike Sunnis, Shia do not consider any of their hadith collections to be sahih (authentic) in their entirety. Therefore, every individual hadith in a specific collection must be investigated separately to determine its authenticity.^[35]

5.3 Modern usage

The mainstream sects consider hadith to be essential supplements to, and clarifications of, the Quran, Islam's holy book, as well as for clarifying issues pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence. Ibn al-Salah, a hadith specialist, described the relationship between hadith and other aspect of the religion by saying: "It is the science most pervasive in respect to the other sciences in their various branches, in particular to jurisprudence being the most important of them."^[36] "The intended meaning of 'other sciences' here are those pertaining to religion," explains Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, "Quranic exegesis, hadith, and jurisprudence. The science of hadith became the most pervasive due to the need displayed by each of these three sciences. The need hadith has of its science is apparent. As for Quranic exegesis, then the preferred manner of explaining the speech of God is by means of what has been accepted as a statement of Muhammad. The one looking to this is in need of distinguishing the acceptable from the unacceptable. Regarding jurisprudence, then the jurist is in need of citing as an evidence the acceptable to the exception of the later, something only possible utilizing the science of hadith."^[4]

6 Studies

Main article: Hadith studies

Hadith studies use a number of methods of evaluation developed by early Muslim scholars in determining the veracity of reports attributed to Muhammad. This is achieved by analyzing the text of the report, the scale of the report's transmission, the routes through which the report was transmitted, and the individual narrators involved in its transmission. On the basis of these criteria, various classifications were devised for hadith. The earliest comprehensive work in hadith studies was Abu Muhammad al-Ramahurmuzi's *al-Muhaddith al-Fasil*, while another significant work was al-Hakim al-Naysaburi's *Ma'rifat 'ulum al-hadith*. Ibn al-Salah's *'Ulum al-hadith* is considered the standard classical reference on hadith studies.^[15]

6.1 Terminology: admissible and inadmissible hadiths

Main article: Hadith terminology

By means of hadith terminology, hadith are categorized as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound, authentic), *ḍa'īf* (weak), or *mawḍū'* (fabricated). Other classifications used also include: *ḥasan* (good), which refers to an otherwise *ṣaḥīḥ* report suffering from minor deficiency, or a weak report strengthened due to numerous other corroborating reports; and

munkar (denounced) which is a report that is rejected due to the presence of an unreliable transmitter contradicting another more reliable narrator.^[37] Both *sahih* and *hasan* reports are considered acceptable for usage in Islamic legal discourse. Classifications of hadith may also be based upon the scale of transmission. Reports that pass through many reliable transmitters at each point in the *isnad* up until their collection and transcription are known as *mutawātir*. These reports are considered the most authoritative as they pass through so many different routes that collusion between all of the transmitters becomes an impossibility. Reports not meeting this standard are known as *aahad*, and are of several different types.^[15]

Some hadith are also called *hadith qudsi* (sacred hadith), like *Ziyarat Ashura*. It is a sub-category of hadith which some Muslims regard as the words of God (Arabic: Allah). According to as-Sayyid ash-Sharif al-Jurjani, the hadith qudsi differ from the Quran in that the former are "expressed in Muhammad's words", whereas the latter are the "direct words of God". However, note that a *hadith qudsi* is not necessarily *sahih*, it can also be *da'if* or even *mawdu'*.^[38]

An example of a *hadith qudsi* is the hadith of Abu Hurairah who said that Muhammad said:

When God decreed the Creation He pledged Himself by writing in His book which is laid down with Him: My mercy prevails over My wrath.^[39]

6.2 Biographical evaluation

Main article: [Biographical evaluation](#)

Another area of focus in the study of hadith is biographical analysis (*ilm al-rijāl*, lit. "science of people"), in which details about the transmitter are scrutinized. This includes analyzing their date and place of birth; familial connections; teachers and students; religiosity; moral behaviour; literary output; their travels; as well as their date of death. Based upon these criteria, the reliability (*thiqāt*) of the transmitter is assessed. Also determined is whether the individual was actually able to transmit the report, which is deduced from their contemporaneity and geographical proximity with the other transmitters in the chain.^[40] Examples of biographical dictionaries include: Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi's *Al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal*, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* and al-Dhahabi's *Tadhkirat al-huffaz*.^[41]

7 Criticism

Main article: [Criticism of Hadith](#)

The major points of criticism of the Hadith literature is based in questions regarding its authenticity,^[42] as well as theological/philosophical critiques. Muslim scholars questioned the Hadith literature throughout its history, with Western academics also becoming active in the field later on.

8 See also

- [Prophetic biography](#)
- [List of hadith authors and commentators](#)

9 References

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- [19] *Ilm al-Rijal wa Ahimiyatih*, by Mualami, p. 16, Dar al-Rayah.
- [20] ^ Tirmidhi, "Ilm," 12.
- [21] ^ Collected in the Musnad of Ahmad (10\15-6\ 6510 and also nos. 6930, 7017 and 1720), Sunan Abu Dawud (Mukhtasar Sunan Abi Dawud (5\246\3499) and elsewhere.
- [22] Roman, provincial and Islamic law, Patricia Crone, p2
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- [26] See the references and discussion by Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah *Thalathatu rasa'il fi ulum al-hadith; risalat abi dawud ila ahl makkata fi wasf sunanihi*, pg 36, footnote. Beirut: *Maktaba al-Matbu'at al-Islamiyah*: 2nd ed 1426/2005.
- [27] The earliest book, Bukhari's Sahih was composed by 225/840 since he states that he spent sixteen years composing it (*Hady al-Sari*, introduction to *Fath al-Bari*, p. 489, Lahore: *Dar Nashr al-Kutub al-Islamiya*, 1981/1401) and also that he showed it to Yahya ibn Ma'in (p. 8, *ibid.*) who died in 233. Nasa'i, the last to die of the authors of the six books, died in 303/915. He probably completed this work a few decades before his death: by 275 or so.
- [28] Counting multiple narrations of the same texts as a single text, the number of hadiths each author has recorded roughly as follows: Bukhari (as in Zabidi's *Mukhtasar* of Bukhari's book) 2134, Muslim (as in Mundhiri's *Mukhtasar* of Muslim's book) 2200, Tirmidhi 4000, Abu Dawud 4000, Nasa'i 4800, Ibn Majah 4300. There is considerable overlap amongst the six books so that Ibn al-Athir's *Jami' al-Usul*, which gathers together the hadiths texts of all six books deleting repeated texts, has about 9500 hadiths.
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- [37] See:
- "Hadith," *Encyclopedia of Islam Online*;
 - "Hadith," *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world*.
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- [41] See:
- Robinson (2003) pp. 69–70;
 - Lucas (2004) p. 15
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11 Further reading

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12 External links

- Importance of hadith
- Hadith – Search by keyword and find hadith by narrator
- Hadith by Narrator – Find hadith by narrators
- Hadith Advanced Search – Search by keyword
- Hadith app, All 13 ahadith books
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13.1 Text

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