As for the pious Muslim there can be no question that Allah, vowing repeatedly to preserve His Book, would never have nominated a ‘defective’ language or script to carry the burden of His final revelations. In its literary vigor, depth of expression, poeticism, and orthographic and paleographic capacity, Arabic was sufficiently advanced that Allah blessed it as His choice from among all others. And from then it was the privilege of the Muslim masses to continue reciting it in the original, and to incorporate markings so that non-Arabs may also recite the original with ease.

Long have I alluded to the Islamic methodology and its pivotal role in preserving the qirāt of the Qurʾān and the sunna of the Prophet throughout the centuries. Examining this methodology in detail is the aim of my next chapter.

Chapter Thirteen

The Muslim Educational Methodology

The Jewish and Christian Scriptures suffered at the hands of the very people who were entrusted with its stalwart defense. Whereas in previous chapters our aim was to acquire familiarity with Muslim conduct towards both the Qurʾān and sunna, due appreciation of these endeavors might perhaps not come about until they are thrown into the sharpest relief through comparison with the biblical Scriptures. A detailed discussion of the Muslim educational methodology becomes indispensable in this regard—a unique science, unsurpassable even now, which was instrumental in the faithful preservation of the Qurʾān and sunna in compliance with the Divine Will:

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"We have, without doubt, sent down the message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]."

Because the Qurʾān explicitly affirms that the Scriptures were corrupted from within, the Muslim community felt a pressing need to safeguard the Qurʾān from all dubious influences. Throughout Islamic history the muḥafiz, committing the Book fully to heart and numbering in their millions, from adolescents to the elderly, served as one cornerstone of this safeguard; this alone was more than the Torah and Gospels ever enjoyed, but the precautions did not end there.

To write a book using a false name is tremendously easy; in the literary world the use of pen names is commonplace. Similarly, it is possible to tamper with someone else’s work then republish it under the original author’s name. How can such mischievous doings be prevented? In seeking

1 This chapter is highly specialized; its main purpose is to illustrate how Muslim scholars devised a unique system for transmission of knowledge, which proved vital in both evaluating the accuracy of the information as well as safeguarding it from internal and external corruptions. This is, in fact, a very brief discussion, and anyone with further interest in this topic is advised to refer to my forthcoming book, Islamic Studies: What Methodology? Inevitably there are other readers who will find this chapter taxing, and may indeed choose to skip to this chapter’s conclusion, as it will not hinder their understanding of subsequent chapters (though it may hinder their full appreciation of them).

2 Qurʾān 15:9.
an answer Muslims devised a working solution long ago, developing a watertight system which they employed faithfully for eight or nine centuries. Only with the weakening of Islam's political sway was this procedure discontinued and neglected. Examining this system entails entering the very heart of how Islamic knowledge was taught and learned.

I. The Hunger for Information

Before the advent of Islam, sources do not record the existence of any Arabic books in the Peninsula. The first book in Arabic was in fact the Qur'an. With its first revealed word یسیراُ (سراُ; read, the pursuit of knowledge became an obligation: to memorize at least a few suras by heart, regardless of whether one was Arab or otherwise, so as to perform the daily prayers. Upon reaching Madinah the Prophet hastened to accommodate this need, arranging for schools and ordering that anyone with even a minimal amount of knowledge should pass it on to others. The sixty scribes in his service are a tribute to this burgeoning literacy.4

During the time of the caliphs, and especially the first three till 35 A.H., Madinah functioned as the religious, military, economic and administrative center of the Islamic nation, casting its influence from Afghanistan to Tunisia, and from southern Turkey to Yemen, Muscat, and Egypt. Extensive archives dealing with the facets of government were introduced, catalogued and stored during 'Uthman's reign in a بیت al-Qasr (الکسیر), archive house). Administrative lessons, religious rulings, political and military strategies, and all of the Prophet's traditions, were passed on to subsequent generations through a unique system.6

2. Personal Contact: A Vital Element for Learning

Time is an essential reference for all events: past, present and future. The present moment instantly becomes part of the past; as soon as it does so, it is imperceptible. Most past incidents escape our grasp and remain intangible, but if they do approach us indirectly (such as through written material) then the accuracy of the information becomes a key concern. When the Prophet passed into history, and preservation of the Book and Sunnah came to rest on the Companions' shoulders, the community set up an intricate system to curtail the uncertainties inherent in the transfer of knowledge. This was based on the law of witness.

Consider this simple statement: A drank some water from a cup while standing. We know of this person's existence, but to verify this statement's truth based on reason is impossible. Perhaps A did not drink the water at all, or drank it by cupping his hands, or while sitting; none of these possibilities can be excluded by deduction. So the case hinges on the truthfulness of the narrator and his accuracy as an observer. Thus C, a newcomer who has not seen the incident, must rely for his information on the eyewitness account of B. In reporting this event to others C must then specify his source, so that the statement's veracity depends on:

1. B's accuracy in observing the incident, and his truthfulness in reporting it.
2. C's accuracy in comprehending the information, and his own truthfulness in reporting it.

Venturing into the personal lives of B and C would not generally interest the critic or historian, but Muslim scholars viewed the subject differently. In their opinion anyone making statements about A was testifying, or bearing witness, to what A had done. Likewise C was bearing witness to B's account, and so on with each person testifying about the preceding narrator in the sequence. Validating this report meant a critical examination of each element within this chain.

3. Beginning and Development of the Isnād System

This method was the genesis of the isnād (صِنَاد) system. Originating during the Prophet's lifetime and developing into a proper science by the end of the first century A.H., its foundations lay in the Companions' custom of relating hadith to each other. Some of them made arrangements to attend the Prophet's circle in shifts, informing the others of what they had seen or heard;1 in so doing they must naturally have said, "The Prophet did so and so" or "The Prophet said so and so". It is also natural that anyone hearing
such a second-hand report, in relaying it to a third person, would disclose his original source along with a full account of the incident.

During the fourth decade of the Islamic calendar these rudimentary phrases acquired significance because of the fina (aiss ordeal), i.e. the revolt against Caliph ‘Uthmān’ raging at the time.8 They were a safeguard for scholars who, becoming cautious, insisted on scrutinizing the sources of all information.9 Ibn Sīrin (d. 110 a.h.) says, “Scholars did not inquire about the inād [initially], but when the fina broke out they demanded, ‘Name to us your men [i.e. the hadith’s narrators’]. As for those who belonged to abī as-sunna, their hadiths were accepted and as for those who were innovators, their hadiths were cast aside”.10

Towards the close of the first century this practice had bloomed into a full-fledged science. The necessity of learning the Qurān and sunna meant that for many centuries the word ‘ilm (knowledge) was applied solely to religious studies,11 and in those earlier times the study of hadith gave birth to ar-rifā (the journey in pursuit of knowledge). Deemed one of the essential requirements of scholarship, we can gauge its importance from a remark by Ibnn Ma‘īn (d. 233 a.h.) that anyone who limits his studies to his city alone and refuses to journey, cannot reach scholarly maturity.12

Evidence for the transmission of ‘ilm in this manner comes from thousands of hadiths bearing identical wordings but stemming from diverse corners of the Islamic world, each tracing its origins back to a common source—the Prophet, a Companion, or a Successor. That this congruity of

8 The term fina appears in contemporary non-Muslim sources as well. An eighth-century Syriac manuscript explicitly mentions the word ‘fina’ (Syr. pena) following the death of Caliph ‘Uthmān, adding that it lasted 5 years and 4 months; the other pena in recount is after Yazid b. Mu‘awiya’s (Syr. Isād bar Mu‘awiya) reign, and this it states continued for 9 months [R.G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam, The Darwin Press Inc., Princeton, 1997, pp. 395-96]. Also in a seventh-century work attributed to Sibeh, there is a mention of the first Arab civil war taking place 656-661 c.e. [R.W. Thomson (tr.), The Armenian History attributed to Sibeh; Part II: Historical Commentary, Liverpool University Press, 1999, pp. 284-88]. An early ninth-century chronology by Nicetas (d. 828 c.e.), patriarch of Constantinople, cites four years of anarchy and was following the end of ‘Uthmān’s reign [Hoyland, op. cit., pp. 432-36].
9 The recent research of Dr. ‘Umar bin Hasan Fallūthah shows that even up to 60 a.h., it is difficult to find a fabricated hadith on the authority of the Prophet [al-Waṣfa fi al-Hadīth, Beirut, 1401 (1981)].
10 Muslim, Sahih, Introduction, p. 15; see also al-‘A‘zamī, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, p. 213.

content spread across so wide a distance, in an age lacking the immediacy of modern communication means, stands witness to the validity and power of the inād system.13

i. The Phenomenon of Inād: Proliferation

The proliferation of inād in the early centuries is electrifying. Suppose that in the first generation a single Companion was privy to a statement made by the Prophet. In the second generation there would presumably be at least two or three, perhaps ten, students of his transmitting this incident, such that by the fifth generation the period of the classical authors we may uncover thirty or forty people relating the same subject through different channels crisscrossing the entire Islamic world, with a few of them relating the information from more than one source. The pattern of proliferation is not constant for all hadiths: in certain cases there may be only a single authority transmitting a statement through each generation, though this is a rarity.14 Here is an example of a hadith relating to prayer:15

Abū Hurayra reported that the Prophet said, “The inād must be followed. So recite takbīr (بـ-س) when he recites it, and bow down when he bows. And when he says ‘Allah beaused to him who praises Him’, say ‘O Allah, our Lord, praise be to You’. And when he prostrates, you should prostrate. When he raises [his head] you should raise yours, taking care not to raise [your head] till he raises his. If he prays sitting, you must all pray sitting’.

This hadith, recorded at least 124 times, is reported by 26 third-generation authorities who unanimously trace its origin to Companions of the Prophet. In this same form or with the same meaning, it is found at ten locations simultaneously: Madīnah, Makkah, Egypt, Baṣra, Ḥims, Yemen, Kūfa, Syria, Wāṣiṭ (Iraq), and Tā‘if. Three of the 26 authorities heard it from more than one source. Existing documentation shows that this hadith was transmitted by at least ten Companions. Details of the transmission chain for seven of these, who eventually settled in Madīnah, Syria, and Iraq, are available to us.

13 Al-‘A‘zamī, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, p. 15, hadīth no. 3 (Arabic section). Not all hadiths spread so widely. On the other hand, thousands of books have been lost which would have provided evidence for the spread of information on a much larger scale.
14 For a detailed study of 50 hadiths see Studies in Early Hadith Literature, pp. 14-103 (Arabic section).
15 ibid., pp. 27-31.
these colossal chains of transmission, is of course for only one hadith out of tens of thousands.

4. The Authentication of Isnād and Hadith

In the minds of hadith scholars, the final acceptance of a report did not rest solely on its authenticity. In fact accuracy and authenticity were both insufficient in the eyes of the muhaddithun (scholars of hadith), for they sought three more conditions:

1. All narrators in the chain had to be shīqa (āt: trustworthy), 16
2. The chain of transmission had to be unbroken,
3. Positive support for the statement from all available evidence was a prerequisite.

i. Establishing Trustworthiness

Ascertaining a narrator’s reliability depends on two criteria: (a) morality and (b) sound knowledge.

a. Morality

Here is how the Qur’ān describes the qualifications of a witness:

"... and take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice."  

"... such as you approve of, for witnesses.”  

‘Umar used the phrase when addressing ‘Abdur-Rahmān bin ‘Auf (“To us you are righteous and approved of”). The word ‘adl (ṣadiq: of righteous conduct), delineating an Islamically sound character, is defined more concretely by as-Suyūṭī, 19

"[It refers to] a Muslim who has reached maturity, is mentally sound, free from the causes of indecency, and who abides by the standards and

16 The word ‘āt is here used in its linguistic meaning. It is not a hadith term.
17 Qur’ān 65:2.
18 Qur’ān 2:282.
19 As-Suyūṭī, Tadrīb, i:300.
norms of his community." Ibn al-Mubarak (118-181 A.H.) also defines personal character, stating that an acceptable narrator must:

- Pray in congregation (ṣalāt al-jama'a).
- Avoid nabiš (wine), a drink prone to fermentation if stored for long periods.
- Avoid falsehood throughout his adult life.
- Be free from any mental disqualifications.²⁰

A man may ascend the scholarly ladder to great heights, but if his morals are doubtful then a nabiš narrated by him is rejected even if it is true.²¹ The nabišin's consensus is that all scholars—with the exception of the Companions, whose character has been vouched for by Allah and His Prophet—require this testimony of righteous conduct if their word is to be accepted. Here is an example:

![Figure 13.2: A page from Nuskhat Abū az-Zubayr bin 'Adi al-Kūfī](image)

²⁰ Al-Kāfī, al-Kīfā, p. 79.
²¹ Al-A'ānimī, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, p. 305.

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This manuscript, Nuskhat Abū az-Zubayr bin 'Adi al-Kūfī, is well known to be spurious, even though the text of the hadiths themselves is not. Most of the material in this fraudulent copy actually consists of authentic hadiths narrated by Anas bin Malik, a renowned Companion. But the transmission chain is defective: Bishr b. Ḥussain, a narrator, claims to have learned these hadiths from az-Zubayr b. Ḥaddīth, who in turn was among Anas b. Malik's pupils. Bishr b. Ḥussain's reputation is so infamous that the nabišin have branded him as a 'liar' and demonstrated that this narrative chain never occurred, being a pure fabrication on Bishr's part. The page shown contains ten nabišin: al-Bukhārī and/or Muslim have cited the core text of six as genuine, with three others cited by Ahmad b. Hanbal. But the forged hadith, though appended to authentic sayings of the Prophet, invalidates the book's value as a reference.²²

Discovering a narrator's duplicity, through inspection of historical data and the scrutiny of books and the kinds of papers and inks used, is often too difficult. In most cases one is forced to rely on the narrator's contemporaries to uncover his morality and characteristics. Given that enmity or favor may sometimes influence the recommendation of peers, scholarly deliberations have resulted in guidelines which allow the reader to proceed with due caution.²³

B. SOUNDNESS OF KNOWLEDGE (TESTING LITERARY ACCURACY)

Most narrators' mistakes cannot be ascribed to malice, but naturally these errors must be catalogued in the course of assessing the narrator. Testing accuracy entails extensive cross-checking. To grasp the full scope of this we turn to the celebrated scholar Ibn Ma'in (d. 233 A.H.), in a case likely belonging to the second century. He went in to see Affān, a pupil of the great scholar Ḥamīd b. Salama (d. 169 A.H.), to read the works of Ḥamīd back to him. Surprised that a scholar of Ibn Ma'in's caliber was approaching him, Affān inquired whether he had read these books to any of Ḥamīd's other students. He replied, "I have read these to seventeen of his students before coming to you". "By Allah," Affān exclaimed, "I am not going to read them to you". Unfazed, Ibn Ma'in answered that by spending a few dirhams he could travel to Baṣra and read there to other students of Ḥamīd. True to his word Ibn Ma'in soon found himself amid the busy streets of Baṣra, and went to Mūsā b. Ismā'īl (another of Ḥamīd's pupils). Mūsā asked him, "Have you not read these books to anyone else?"²⁴ He answered, "I have read them completely to seventeen of Ḥamīd's students and you are the eighteenth".

²³ Al-Ya'ämī, at-Tanāsīs, pp. 52-59.
²⁴ One may wonder why these two pupils asked Ibn Ma'in the same question. The reason was simple: for Ibn Ma'in, a giant scholar of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, to approach a lower grade of teachers for reading a book was certainly cause for astonishment.
Mūsā wondered what he intended to do with all these readings and Ibn Ma'in replied, "It was said that Mālik, while committed errors and his students compounded a few more to his. So I wanted to distinguish between Mālik's mistakes and those of his students. If I find all of Mālik's pupils committing a mistake unanimously, then the source of the mistake is Mālik. If I find the majority saying one thing, and a lone student saying another, then that student is responsible for that particular error. In this way I can distinguish between his mistakes and those of his students".25

Following this protocol enabled Ibn Ma'in to grade the various students and determine their individual competence. Such was the fundamental basis for assessing hadīth narrators and placing them into categories. Ibn Ma'in did not invent this method nor was he the first to apply it, but as far as I know he was the first to express it clearly. In fact this scheme was in usage from the time of Caliph Abū Bakr, and though there was a difference in the quantity of documents cross-referenced, the quality of these efforts remained.26

C. Classification of Narrators

The pairing of 'ṣid and sound knowledge within a person earned him the general title of 'trustworthy' (ṣid). Among the muḥaddithin some graded more specifically by using these traits to establish twelve categories. Ibn Ḥajar for instance grouped narrators into the following classes, the first six of which can be construed as passing marks:27

1. The Companions, listed foremost for their preeminence.
2. Narrators of confirmed exemplary status, signified by such labels as أئلة الناس (āliya an-nās) (exemplary among the people) and مولى غزوة (molī ḏi ḍawāt) (trustworthy with exceptional memory).
3. Those extolled with a single adjective such as ṣid (trustworthy), ثابت (steady of tongue and reasoning) and مهتم (one who has mastered the subject).
4. Those of slightly lesser grade, among them موقود (truthful) and ذهبت (of no objectionable quality).
5. Of lower rank still, including صدف_category (truthful but with faltering memory) and دمذد (truthful but prone to errors). Also in this category are those accused of innovations such as Shī'ī and the Jāhmiyyah (a sect which denied certain attributes of Allāh though it may be confirmed in the Qur'ān and the sunna). Their affiliation to such sects must be made clear.
6. Those whose output is meager but to whose discredit nothing is known. They are classed as مقبول (acceptable).

7. Those who have been transmitted from through more than one channel, but have not been assessed, so that they are أهل تأويل (of unknown qualification).
8. One whose status has not been gauged by a recognized authority, but who has been otherwise labeled inadequate even if this allegation was not further clarified. Such an individual is مهتم (weak).
9. A person who has not been assessed and who has not been transmitted from, except through a single channel, is branded as مولى غزوة (unknown).
10. The designation here is مولى غزوة (abandoned) or مولى غزوة (dropped).
11. Whoever is accused of falsehood.
12. Whoever is a proven كذاب (liar) or مولى غزوة (fabricator).

This emphasis on the ranking of narrators necessitated access to the biographies of the transmitters involved, and to accommodate this a new science evolved, علامة النسب (al-ṣīrah), offering a massive biographical library which ran into thousands of volumes.28

ii. The Unbroken Chain

As the narrator's trustworthiness is the first prerequisite for accepting a report, so the presence of an unbroken chain is the second. This chain is the isnad. Establishing the value of any isnad first involves a study of the participating transmitters' biographies (in our previous example, persons A, B and C); once they pass the checks on morality and sound knowledge we are ready to judge the isnad itself. We must confirm that the individuals learned the statement from one another: if C did not learn directly from B, or if B never came into contact with A, then the chain is clearly defective. If we do discover an unbroken chain however, our analysis is not yet complete.

iii. Supporting or Negating Evidence

The final step is a comprehensive cross-examination of other isnads. Suppose we have another pair of trustworthy scholars, E and F, who also transmit from A, such that we have the chain A-E-F. If they convey a statement about A which matches that of A-B-C, then this further strengthens our case, called مطابقة (matābaqa). But what if the two are not congruous? If E and F are of an even higher caliber than B and C, this weakens the latter's report; in this case the A-B-C transmission is classed as شاذ (shād). The presence of a third or fourth chain complementing A-E-F's version helps solidify the
argument against A-B-C, if scholars E and F are of the same caliber as B and C, however, then A will be cited as msjadi (مصدق). Should A-B-C state something which contradicts A-E-F but is in line with hundreds of other reports (from sources other than A), then A-E-F’s account is discarded.

iv. A Test Case with a Misleading Isnād

Very odd stories are occasionally conceived. Lacking a strong knowledge of chain criticism, numerous scholars (and in rare instances even famous muhađżirin) bring forward a false report and expend much energy in its defense or refutation. For example adh-Dhahabi quotes from al-‘A’īshah, “I heard Anas b. Mālik [an eminent Companion] saying when told, ‘O Anas, it is not your custom to go to the mosque,’ he replied, ‘O Allah, and 892’ are the same.” Adh-Dhahabi claims the chain to be authentic, 29 and ‘Abdul-Salām Shāhīn, attempting to somehow validate this incident, attributes Anas’ response to the seven ayrif. 28 Yet according to the pioneers of hadīth criticism al-‘A’īshah never learned anything from Anas, as evidenced by his following remark:

Anas b. Mālik would pass by me every morning and evening. I used to tell him myself, ‘I will not stoop to learning from you Anas, for after serving the Prophet in his lifetime you approached al-Hajjāj for an appointment, till he agreed to appoint you’. Now I feel disgraced for I find myself transmitting information not even through him, but through his students. 30

Had he overheard a single comment from Anas he would have relayed it to others on his authority and not have pitted himself so. But thorough inspection of his biography has lead al-Mīzān and others to affirm that even though he saw him regularly, al-‘A’īshah never gained a kernel of knowledge from him, 31 leaving us to conclude that the episode is either an outright fabrication or an error on the part of one of al-‘A’īshah’s pupils. 32 To authenticate this or any incident, and arrive at an educated verdict, requires strict observance of isnād criticism.

5. The First Generations of Scholars

Before advancing any further, it is best to define the generational terms which were (and still are) used by Muslim scholars.

• The first generation, having accompanied the Prophet and known him personally, are of course ‘Companions’. In the Sunni school of thought all Companions are considered islahi (الصحابي) because Allah praised them without exception, vouching for their character in the Qur’ān repeatedly.

• The second generation, learning from the Companions, are called tabi’in (تابي) or ‘Successors’. Generally they belong to the first century of Hijra and up to the first quarter of the second century, and their transmissions are accepted provided they are found trustworthy. No further checking is required since they are relaying statements from the Companions.

• The third generation, abdal at-tabi’in (ابن التابي) or ‘Succeeding Successors’, extends mostly to the first half of the second century a.h. Unless the narrations of a third generation transmitter are verifiable through other sources, they will be branded gharib (غريب: strange).

• Regardless of his repute, the statements of a fourth generation transmitter are rejected unless they are verifiable through independent means. Some of the people in this category have transmitted up to 200,000 hadīths, with barely two or three in their collections (if not less) lacking support through other isnāds. Ultimately a narrator from this generation is considered weak if many of his hadīths cannot be independently confirmed. 34

Though recorded in the Prophet’s lifetime it was not until a generation later, during the second half of the first century, that hadīths were categorized by subject into books. In the wake of these the second century saw works of an encyclopedic nature, including the Mushaf of Mālik, Mushaf of Shāhāb, Abī, Abū Yūsuf, Jami of Ibn Wahb, and Kitab of Ibn Mājah. The third century finally heralded the arrival of voluminous tomes such as the Mushaf of al-Bukhārī and Musnad of Ibn Hānbal. The generational outline above imparts a rough idea of the valuation of isnāds and illustrates the tremendous difficulty, and implausibility, of a fabricated hadīth surviving unnoticed by the meticulous scholars who penned these works.

29 See adh-Dhahabi, Tabaqāt al-Qurān, i, 85.
31 See adh-Dhahabi, Tabaqāt al-Qurān, i, 84.
33 This report can also be refuted logically. If true, the statement must have taken place between 61 a.h. (birth of al-‘A’īshah) and 93 a.h. (death of Anas b. Mālik). Let us arbitrarily assume 75 a.h., with al-‘A’īshah an adolescent of fourteen. Distributing his Mushaf in 25 a.h., ‘Uthmān gave stringent orders for the elimination of all earlier copies; no authenticated report has ever shown the Companions contradicting the ‘Uthmānī Mushaf. For Anas b. Mālik, a member of the Mushaf committee, to make such a casual remark about such a weighty topic, at a time when the Muslim world had been united under a single text for fifty years, is untenable.
34 See adh-Dhahabi, al-Kāfira, pp. 77-78.
6. Preserving Books from Adulteration: A Unique System

To preserve them from the glosses and addendums of future scholars, a unique method was applied to these works which is still unparalleled in literary history. Based on the same concept as the transmission of hadiths, it entailed that any scholar relaying a collection of hadiths had to be in direct contact with the person he was transmitting from, since he was essentially bearing witness about him in written form. To use a book without hearing it from the author (or conversely, reading a copy to the author) made the culprit guilty of giving false evidence.

Bearing in mind the law of witness, the following modes were recognized for obtaining knowledge of hadith. Each bore its own rank, some requiring more extensive contact than others and consequently receiving a superior status.

a) Samā' (سما). In this a teacher reads to his students, and it includes the following sub-features: oral recitation, reading of texts, questions and answers, and dictation.

b) Adar (ادر). Here the students read to the teacher.

c) Munāwala (مناعلا). To hand someone the text, allowing him to transmit that material without the involvement of any reading.

d) Kitāba (كتاب). A form of correspondence: the teacher sends hadiths in written form to other scholars.

e) Wajīya (واجي). Entrusting someone with a book of hadith, which can then be transmitted on the original owner's authority.

During the first three centuries the first and second methods were most common, followed by munāwala, kitāba, and finally wajīya. Later periods witnessed three additional modes:

f) Ijāza (إجازة). Transmitting a hadith or book on the authority of a scholar who grants permission expressly for this, without actually reading the book.

g) Plām (플ام). To inform someone about a particular book and its contents. (Most scholars did not concede this as a valid basis for transmitting hadiths.)

h) Wiyāda (وييذا). This pertains to the discovery of texts (for example, old manuscripts) without having read them to the author or obtained consent for their transmission. Here the scholar must publicize that the book was found, and list its contents.

Each method enjoyed its own terminology, which served to disclose the mode of transmission to future scholars. The contents of hadith books were to some degree shaped by this approach, as the transmitter's name became part of the text and any defects perceived in his character naturally affected the document's integrity. Just as each hadith integrated its own chain of narrators leading back to the Prophet or a Companion, so each book possessed its own chain of transmitters leading back to the author who originally compiled the work. This chain was mentioned either on the title page, at the start of the book, in both places, or perhaps as an amendment to each hadith. Consider the following example.36

35 Refer back to Naubah Abü al-Walid b. 'Adi al-Kufi, the spurious copy mentioned in pp. 209-11.
The first few lines read: 37

"مَسِيحَةَ اللهُ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيْمِ محمدُ بن يَحْيَى طَلِبًا رَحْمَةً وَلَطَاءً مَسِيحَةَ..."

This translates to:

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Muhammad bin Bahr Abū Talha read to us, stating that 'Abdal-Man'im bin Idris read to us on the authority of his father, from Abū Iyās, who narrated from Walīb bin Munābīh, who said, "When the delegations began approaching the Prophet to declare their embrace of Islam, 'A'īd bin Zatrā went to his father Zatrā bin 'A'īd..."

Here the transmitters' names have become a permanent addendum to the very beginning of the text. This is also discerned in the Sahīh of al-Bukhārī and the Sunan of an-Naṣā'ī for example, but it is by no means the only pattern. Certain works go further by inserting the original author's name at the start of every hadith in the book, such as the Musannaf of 'Abdus-Razzāq, Musannaf of Ibn Abī Shāiba, and (for the most part) Sunan of at-Tirmidhī. A third variety in fact cites the book's entire chain of transmitters at the beginning of each hadith. Obviously with the passing of generations the inclusion of this entire chain will become prohibitively long, so occasionally only the author and the first few transmitters are inserted. Let us examine the Musawwā'at of Mālik bin Anas according to the recension of Suwaid bin Sa'id al-Hadathānī (d. 240 A.H.). The chain of transmission given at the Musawwā'at's beginning is (1) Thābit bin Bundār al-Baqqāl, from (2) 'Umar bin İbrahim az-Zairī, from (3) Muḥammad bin Gharij, from (4) Ahmad bin Muḥammad al-Washta, from (5) Suwaid bin Sa'id al-Hadathānī, from (6) Mālik bin Anas, the original author.

At the start of each hadith lies an abbreviated version of this chain:

Muḥammad read to us that Ahmad relied on the authority of Suwaid, who narrated from Mālik... 38

Following this is the isnād proper for that hadith, culminating in the core text of the hadith itself. Though this pattern is not uniformly observed across the wide array of manuscripts, the transmitters' names always gain inclusion into the text.

37 ibid. p. 118.
38 See any page in Musawwā'at of Mālik, recension of Suwaid.

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To teach or utilize a text, among the sternest requirements was for the scholar to adhere exclusively to the copy which bore his name in the reading certificate. This certificate was his license, proof that he had attended the relevant lectures wherein his teacher relayed that manuscript. 39 While free to make a duplicate of his teacher's book or to employ the book of a higher authority along the same chain, the use of all other copies was strictly forbidden. Suppose A is the original author, and his book is spread through the following channels.

![Figure 13.4: A, the original author has L, H and G as students.](image)

Despite all these copies originating from A, we find that M is not entitled to use the copy of R or N, or of H or L. Instead he must limit himself to the copies of G, M or A; attempting to break out of this restriction will bring disgrace. Additionally, after scribing a copy for himself he must go through the original text and make corrections as necessary, and should he decide to use it without the benefit of a thorough revision then he must make this clear, or else risk soiling his name.

### ii. Gloses: the Addition of External Material

Students possessing their own copies occasionally appended material to the fixed text to clarify an obscure word, provide fresh evidence not quoted by the original author, or some such thing. Because these extra items were marked off by a completely different isnād, or at the least the inserter's name, there was no danger of spoiling the text. A very clear instance is reproduced in one of my works, wherein the copyist added two lines before completing the sentence. Other examples include the placing of two lines into al-Muḥabbūr...
iii. Establishing Authorship

When confronted with a manuscript, the fingers that scribbled it now long deceased, how do we establish that the contents really do belong to the supposed author? Just as an elaborate system of checks must validate each ḥadīth, so the same roughly applies to every compilation of ḥadīths. Below is a manuscript’s title page, followed by a summarized translation.

Kitāb al-Adrība [the book of various drinks] by Abū Abdullah Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ḥanbal, read to Abū al-Qasim Abdullah bin Muhammad bin ‘Abdul-ʿAzīz al-Baghdādi ibn bint Ahmad bin Manī.

[Second Page:]

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Beginning of Kitāb al-Adrība. Abū al-Qasim Abdullah bin Muhammad bin ‘Abdul-ʿAzīz al-Baghdādi ibn bint Ahmad bin Manī. The Baghdādi read to us in Baghdad, stating that Abū Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal read to him in the year 238 from his book.

The normal procedure for establishing this work’s authenticity is:

a. To examine the original author’s biography (Ahmad bin Ḥanbal), much of which will undoubtedly stem from his contemporaries. The focus of our search is two-fold. First, to uncover whether Ibn Hanbal ever authored a book titled Kitāb al-Adrība; second, to organize a list of all his pupils and determine if Abū al-Qasim ibn Ahmad...

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42. Al-Bukhārī, Sahīh, ii:107. For other examples see Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, Ḥadīth no. 2386; Muslim, Sahīh, Sahīh 63, p. 304.
7. Certificates of Reading

As discussed previously, scholars faced stringent limitations on which books they were free to use in the form of a ‘license’ or reading certificate. In promulgating hadith books a regular attendance record was always kept, written either by the teacher or one of the famous scholars present, and this furnishes exact details of attendance such as who had listened to the entire book, who joined in partially and which portions they missed, the women and children (and even the maids and servants) who participated, and the dates and sites of these readings. Any attendee younger than five was listed with his age and the designation hadar (حضر: attended); if older he was mentioned as a regular student. A signature at the book’s conclusion terminated this reading certificate, indicating that no further entries could be made therein.46 To the mushaddidin this certificate was jihāq (نجبا), an exclusive license for those listed within to read, teach, copy, or quote from that book.

In this manuscript dated 276 a.h. the reading certificate contains sundry information. Note that the attendees have now become a permanent addendum to the very title of the work.

Figure 13.6: Jami’ of Ibn Wabib, with a reading certificate from 276 a.h. Source: The Egyptian Library, Cairo.

46 There were various means of issuing these certificates, which consisted mostly of essential and necessary details, though the sequence of information was up to the writer’s discretion.

From the certificate we can extract the following:

Teacher: Abu Isāq Ibrāhīm bin Mūsā
Title of book: Kitāb as-Sams
Participants: 'Ali bin Yahyā
             'Abdullāh bin Yūsuf
             Muḥammad bin Ismā‘īl
             Sulaimān bin al-Ḥasan
             Naṣr, client of 'Abdullāh...
             Asbaq bin Ja‘far
             Lakhm, client of Şālih
             Ḥasan bin Miskin bin Shu’ba
             Ḥāmid bin Isāq
             Ḥātim bin Ya‘qūb
             'Abdul-‘Azīz bin Muḥammad
             'Ali bin Maslama
             Muḥammad bin Muḥayyib
             al-Ḥasan bin Muḥammad bin Şālih
City: Asna
Date: Khāf al-Awwal 276 a.h.
Pedigree: “I copied these two volumes from the book of Abu Isāq
           Ibrāhīm bin Mūsā.”47
Original author: [Abdullāh b. Wabib]

The book begins:

“This is Kitāb as-Sams, part of the Jami’ of Ibn Wabib. In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. [The chapter about] speaking when a matter should not be spoken of, and when it does no good [to speak of it]. Abu Isāq informed us that Ḥarmal bin Yahyā stated that ‘Abdullāh bin Wabib told him...”46

1. The Importance of Reading Notes

Meant to safeguard hadith compilations from distortion, these certificates now provide the contemporary scholar with a sea of valuable facts. One can trace a book’s proliferation through these notes far better than by relying solely on bibliographical data, as I will show in the next few pages.

47 J. David Weill (ed.), Le Djāsiml’Ibn Wabib, Imprimerie De L’Institut Français D’Archéologie Orientale, Cairo, 1939, p. 77. I have arranged the information in this fashion for illustrative purposes.
46 ibid., p. 40.
A. MINGANA, ROBSON, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF ḤADĪTH ANTHOLOGIES

Rev. Mingana published a work on the diffusion of the Sahīh of al-Bukhārī, while James Robson worked on the transmissions of the Sahīh of Muslim, Sunan of Abu Dāwūd, Sunan of at-Tirmidhī, Sunan of an-Nasā’ī, and Sunan of Ibn Mājah. Though both works are riddled with grievous misconceptions I will cast aside my comments for the time being, and suffice by copying Robson’s diagram for the transmission of Sunan Ibn Mājah.69

![Diagram of the transmission of Sunan Ibn Mājah]

Figure 13.7: Robson’s diagram for the transmission of Ibn Mājah

A more promising diagram comes from Iḥṣāq Khān in al-Uṣūl al-Sitta wa Ṭarīqatuhā, though it still fails to convey the full scope of transmission. Here is the diagram relating to Ibn Qudāma only (the original is in Arabic):

Taken together, these two charts iniminate that less than a dozen students transmitted Sunan Ibn Mājah through the renowned Ibn Qudāma. Such a miserly perception can be dispelled, I believe, if we examine the manuscript of at-Taimurī, no. 522 at the Egyptian Public Library, Cairo.


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Figure 13.8: Khān’s diagram for the transmission of Ibn Mājah, as pertains to Ibn Qudāma only.

B. READING CERTIFICATES IN SUNAN IBN MĀJAH

Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 620 A.H.), author of one of the most celebrated encyclopedic books on Islamic jurisprudence, *al-Mugni* (printed in fourteen volumes), served as the scribe of this valuable manuscript. Dividing it into seventeen parts, he placed blank sheets after each part to provide sufficient space for reading certificates, which he copied with abridgement at each part’s conclusion while noting that the full certificate was written by the hand of another famous scholar, Ibn Ṭāriq (d. 592 A.H.). The certificates for the sixth part, for example, show that this portion was read by ‘Abdullah bin Ṭāriq, Ahmad bin Ahmad bin Ṭāriq, to Sheikh Abu Za‘ūr’s al-Wāsī al-Maqdisī, who in turn received it from Ibn Ṭāriq. The portion is signed by the same individuals, with the exception of the third, which is signed by Ibn Ṭāriq. Ibn Qudāma, Ahmad bin Ahmad bin Ṭāriq, and Ibn Ṭāriq, etc., Tuesday, 19 Rabi’ al-Akhīr, 561 A.H.

By copying this, even with abridgement, Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī establishes two points:

1. That he has the authority to use this manuscript for the purposes of teaching and quotation, since he learned it through the proper channels.

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61 Generally all such divisions were left to the scribe’s discretion: he could drop the divisions altogether, or devise his own scheme.
2. That this copy of Ibn Majah is a duplicate of the same original that was read to his teacher, so he is not violating any rules of transmission.

Below I have provided a summary of the notes for the sixth part; as the manuscript’s binding is no longer in good condition the pages have been tumbled and out of order for some time, meaning that a few pages may be misplaced or missing. I verified that no sheets from other parts entered this portion, since pages often cite which part they belong in their reading notes.52

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Note No.</th>
<th>Name of Teacher</th>
<th>Name of Reader</th>
<th>Script Writing the Certificate</th>
<th>Date of Reading</th>
<th>Approx. Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Describe Ibn Qudamah’s authority to use Sunan Ibn Majah</td>
<td><em>Usamah ibn Abd-Allah</em></td>
<td><em>Usamah ibn Abd-Allah</em></td>
<td>15 Shawwal, 604 A.H.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Maqdisi</em> (Ibn Qudamah)</td>
<td><em>Abdullah ibn Abd-Allah</em></td>
<td><em>Abdullah ibn Abd-Allah</em></td>
<td>Tuesday, 12 Ramadhan, 569</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Abdu-Haqq at-Rahwet</em></td>
<td><em>Muhammad bin Qasim bin al-Hassan</em></td>
<td><em>Muhammad bin Qasim bin al-Hassan</em></td>
<td>Tuesday, 12 Ramadhan, 569</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Abdu-Haqq at-Rahwet</em></td>
<td><em>Abdu-Haqq at-Rahwet</em></td>
<td><em>Abdu-Haqq at-Rahwet</em></td>
<td>15 ShawWal, 604 A.H.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td>Wednesday, 8 Dhul-Qadah, 606</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td>Tuesday, 12 Ramadhan, 569</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td><em>Ibn Qudamah</em></td>
<td>15 ShawWal, 604 A.H.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this table we can extract that a total of 115 students studied part six of this text directly from Ibn Qudamah; those learning it through his students in turn number roughly 450. Of the many manuscripts of Sunan Ibn Majah in circulation at the time, there were most likely others which listed Ibn Qudamah’s name in their reading certificates—manuscripts which have yet to be discovered or which have been lost to us forever. The reams of information bristling within this one certificate demonstrate that all transmission diagrams drawn till now, whether for Ibn Majah or any other text, are so meager that we cannot even call them rudimentary without embarrassing ourselves.
8. Impact of Ḥadīth Methodology on Other Branches

So powerful was this methodology, so well did it prove itself, that it quickly spilled beyond the confines of ḥadīth literature to include almost all literary and scholarly works:

- For examples in tafsir, see the Ta'wil of 'Abdur-Razzāq (d. 211 a.h.) and Sufyān ath-Thawrī (d. 161 a.h.).
- For history, see the Tārīkh of Khalīfa bin Khayyāt (d. 240 a.h.).
- For law, see the Musāwma of ʿImām Mālik (d. 179 a.h.).
- For literature and folklore, see al-Bayān wa at-Talbīn by al-Jāhiz (150-255 a.h.), and al-Aghāni by al-Aṣfahānī (d. 356 a.h.). This latter occupies twenty volumes and relates the stories of composers, poets, and singers (both men and women), along with a hearty sprinkling of their vulgar anecdotes. Interestingly one finds that even these indelicate tales have been cited through proper isnād channels, and that if the author appropriates material from a book for which he does not have an apt license he states clearly, “I copied this from the book of so and so”.

9. Isnād and the Transmission of the Qurān

All these studies raise an essential question. When this disciplined methodology served as an everyday workhorse for transmitting information, everything from the sunna to the love lives of singers, why was it not also applied to the Qurān?

Answering this entails that we recall the nature of this Holy Book. As it is the Word of Allāh and a vital element of all prayers, its usage is far more ubiquitous than the sunna. The need to use transmission chains and reading certificates for everyone setting out to learn the Qurān was therefore superseded. Individuals wishing to learn the art of professional recitation, of keeping in practice the sounds and makhārij (الْمَخْكَرُونَ: inclusions) used by famous reciters, did possess certificates and unbroken chains leading back to the Prophet. Abī ʿAbd Allāh al-Hambadhānī al-Aṣghār (488-569 a.h./1095-1173 c.e.), a well-known scholar, compiled a biography of reciters entitled al-Inṣāṣ fī Maʿrifat Quiyūl wa al-ʿAṣghār. This twenty-volume work has long perished unfortunately. But we can still reap a few grains of information from what others have written about it: for example, that the author’s full list of his teachers and their teachers, on a path converging back to the Prophet, covered pages 7-162.55 All these were professional reciters. Any attempt to extend this sketch and include non-professionals would be a hopeless task indeed. Even the speed with which the Qurān spread is difficult to fathom. To appease his curiosity about the number of pupils studying the book in his Damascus circle, Abū ad-Dardāʾ (d. circa 35 a.h./655 c.e.) requested Muslim bin Mādhkūm to count for him; the final tally exceeded 1600. Attending Abū ad-Dardāʾ’s circle in successive turns after fajr prayer they would listen to his recitation then emulate him, reciting amongst themselves for practice.54

Concealing the involvement of two different methodologies in the spread of the Qurān versus the sunna, there are nevertheless a few points common to the transmission of both:

1. Knowledge requires direct contact, and exclusive reliance on books is prohibited. Simply owning a Muṣāfa can never displace the necessity of learning how to recite from a knowledgeable instructor.

2. A stringent standard of morality is demanded of all teachers. If an individual’s peers know him to be of questionable habits, no one will seek his tutelage.

3. Sketching transmission diagrams using bibliographical data alone does not provide a full view of the subject’s immensity. To outline the Qurān’s diffusion, as we did with the sixth part of one manuscript of Sunan Ibn Mājah, would require a registry of every Muslim who has walked this earth from the dawn of Islam to our present day.

10. Conclusion

Recourse to a recognized instructor, inspection of biographies to uncover personal character, legitimacy as established through reading certificates, and other facets of this methodology united to form a powerful barrier against distortion in the books of sunna. But with the exception of professional reciters, the one field not subjected to vigorous isnād was the transmission of the Qurān, for in this sole area was sexual corruption impossible. That the exact same words echoed from every mosque, school, house and bazaar throughout all corners of the Muslim nation was a greater safeguard against corruption than anything any human system could have promised.

53 Al-Hamadhānī, Ghebas al-Iḥṣāṣ, l,7-162.
54 Adī-Dhahabi, Suyūr, ii:346.