

Motzki On Muslim Ḥadīth Literature: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The trend of Western scholarship has changed over a passage of time from direct criticism of Muslim hadith literature to counter-criticism by Western scholars of previous Western scholarship. This change seems to go hand in hand with the changing political agendas of the West. Harald Motzki introduced a new and badly needed approach to the study of early Islamic intellectual history. Motzki challenged the reigning conclusions of Joseph Schacht by demonstrating convincingly that his study of early hadith used only a small and selective body of sources, and that it was based on skeptical assumptions and that his argument “e silentio” was a flawed argument. Firstly a brief overview of criticism of Hadith by Western scholars of 20th and 21st century is given followed by views of two skeptics of hadith, Goldziher and Schacht are discussed briefly. Harald Motzki’s most recent and extensive scholarship on Muslim hadith literature with respect to characteristics of modern western scholarship on hadith is discussed in detail. Finally, an analysis of the entire discussion concludes this research.

Key words: Western Scholarship, Hadith Literature, Harald Motzki, Goldziher, Schacht

Introduction

When we look at Western criticism on the early history and Origins of Islamic law, i.e during first three centuries after Hijra, the debate revolves around codification of Ḥadīth literature, emergence of classical schools of fiqh and political developments from the era of Prophet till the Abbasids.

Western scholars could not study Islam as we Muslims do because of lack of belief and reverence. To study Islam they had to adopt methodology which was either historical or sociological. To study the evolution of Islamic law they have conducted inquiry in the first three centuries of Islam on historical and sociological grounds.³

Muslim Ḥadīth literature is codified in the six canonical compilations, these are:

1. Saḥīḥ Bukḥārī (by Imām Bukḥārī, d.256)
2. Saḥīḥ Muslim (by Muslim Ibn-e-Hajjaj, d.261)
3. Sunan Abū Dāwood (By Abū Dawood, d.275)
4. Sunnah Nisai (by al Nisai, d.303)
5. Sunan Majah (by Ibn-e- Majah, d.273)
6. Jamia Tirmizi (by al Tirmazi, d.279)

Study of ‘Origins’ or the first three centuries of Islam entails an in depth understanding of revealed texts and derivation of legal material from them. These further demands knowledge of gradual development of extra scriptural material in the form of prophetic traditions and their compilation in canonical form.

Study of historical and political scenario in the first three centuries and impact of Muslim invasions of non-Muslim empires puts forward following two important assumptions regarding Islamic law, posed by western critics.

1. Flawed and fabricated compilation and codification of Prophetic traditions (second primary source of Islamic law).
2. Influence of foreign laws, pre-Islamic customs and Umayyad practices on the development of Islamic law. Meaning thereby that Islamic law is neither divine nor original.

Both these assumptions are intertwined because it is assumed by the western critics that foreign elements paved way into Islamic law through Ḥadīth literature.

Ḥadīth in 20th Century Western Scholarship

Criticism by Western scholars on Ḥadīth literature is summarized below with special emphasis on views of Goldziher and Schacht. Thus the study is narrowed down from general discussion about Islamic law in the writings of Western orientalist to their focus on the second primary source of Islamic law, the “Ḥadīth

Literature”.

Before Goldziher a number of Western scholars commented and published their view points on Ḥadīth. Views of nineteenth and twentieth century Western scholars on Ḥadīth are summarized below This summary largely draws upon the article on Ḥadīth literature written by Fatima Kizil.⁴ Disagreement on the issue of authenticity of Hadith literature by orientalist is observed even in nineteenth century. Gustav Weil (1808-1889) argued that all the aḥādīth in al-Bukḥārī must be rejected. Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893) responded to Gustav’s assumption and contended that the Ḥadīth literature contains more authentic material than fabricated events.⁵ In “The Life of Muḥammad” William Muir (1819-1905) has put forward a number of criteria to establish the authenticity of aḥādīth and has argued that inspite of the fact that distortions exist in Ḥadīth literature but it is a large store house of historical facts of the beginnings of Islam. According to Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883) hadith compilation carried fictitious literature because hadith codification began in the second century that is almost a century⁶ after the demise of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).⁷

Goldziher on Hadith

In Goldziher’s view majority of hadith were products of religious, historical and social conditions prevalent in the first two centuries of Islam. He supported the idea that people produced fictitious hadith for political and other purposes. They not only produced fictitious hadith but modified the existing hadith in order to support their respective positions or to justify

⁴ Fatima Kizil, ‘Views of Orientalists on Hadith Literature (1848- 1950)’ Available at <http://www.nusrah.com/en/articles/analysis-opinions/5382.the-views-of-orientalists-on-the-hadith-literature.htm>. Retrieved on January 14, 2023.

⁵ Fatima Kizil

⁶ Hatiboglu, "Osmanli Aydinlarınca Dozy'nin Tarih-i Islamiyyet' ine Yoneltelen Tenkitler

[Criticism Directed to Dozy's History of Islam by the Ottoman Intellectuals], p. 202.

their views. Goldziher also accuses Muslim scholars for relying solely on isnads, and showing negligence towards hadith content.

Elaborating further he writes in his famous book, *Muhammedanische Studien*, (1890):

“We should not rule out the possibility that Ḥadīth which we know from the transmission of later generations now and then contain the nucleus of ancient material, material that may not stem directly from the mouth of Prophet, but that does stem from the earliest generation of Muslim authorities. On the other hand it is easily seen that as spatial and temporal distance from the source grew, the danger also grew that people would devise ostensibly correct aḥādīth with chains of transmission reaching back to the highest authority of the Prophet and his Companions, and employ them to authenticate both theoretical doctrines with a practical goal in view. It soon became evident that each point of view, each party, each proponent of a doctrine gave a form of hadīth to his thesis, and that consequently the most contradictory tenets had come to wear the garb of such documentation. There is no school in the area of ritual, theology, or jurisprudence; there is not even any party to political contention that would lack a hadīth or a whole family of aḥādīth in its favor, exhibiting all the external signs of correct transmission.⁸

Commenting on the growth of hadīth he further adds that,

“Questions of authenticity and age pale in significance when we realize that hadīth is the direct reflection of the aspirations of Islamic community

For not only law and custom but theology and political doctrine also took the form of hadīth. Whatever Islam produced on its own or borrowed

from outside was dressed up as hadīth. In such form alien borrowed matter was assimilated until its origin was unrecognizable. Passages from Old and New Testaments, rabbinic sayings, quotes from apocryphal gospels and even doctrines of Greek philosophers and maxims of Persian and Indian wisdom gained entrance into Islam disguised as utterances of the Prophet...It is among the most fascinating problems of research for those who devote their attention to this province of religious literature to track down the widely different sources from which this motley material springs and to understand the trends and aspirations that it documents.”⁹

This was stated by Goldziher in 1907 in one of his lectures on Islamic Law, which he was to deliver in American universities. Owing to poor translation these lectures could not be published in the form of a book and instead his views were published in “Vorlesungen über den Islam” in 1910.

Snouck Hurgronji (1857-1936) agreed with Goldziher’s assertions about Hadith. To Hurgronji the idea that these ahadith can be traced all the way back to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was false, he advocated the view that ahadith were created by various groups in Muslim community to achieve their objectives.

Henry Lammens (1862-1937) a Belgian Orientalist agreed with Goldziher that Muslim scholars could not notice ‘obvious anachronisms’ in hadith texts and confined their attention to narrative chains (isnads) only. Thus they failed to notice obvious logical and historical impossibilities. He also agreed with Goldziher in that Islamic law was influenced by Roman law and these elements of Roman law and other foreign laws were falsely attributed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his Companions through hadith fabrication, thereby portraying that Islamic law was an original and authentic

⁸ Ignac Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Andras & R. Hamori, Trans.).(New Jersey:

Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 39
⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40-41

legaltradition.

David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940) believed that the concepts of infallibility of Prophetic traditions and the idea of non-recited revelation (wahy ghayr matlu) as falsely constructed theories to strengthen the position of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as a legitimate source of law. Josef Horovitz, a contemporary of Margoliouth deviated from the conventional Orientalist assumption that hadith was a product of second century hijra. Horovitz presumed that ahadith emerged in the last quarter of the first century and G.H.A. Juynboll also agreed with Horovitz in dating the Prophetic traditions. Although Horovitz differs from his predecessors on the issue of the chronology of the Isnād, he occupies common ground with them in terms of the assertion that Islam contains many elements from other religions and cultures. He describes Islam as “an area where syncretism dominates.”

A Dutch Orientalist Arent Jan Wensink (1882-1939) claims that Hadith literature contained elements of Roman and Jewish law and traces of Christian ethics. He agreed with Goldziher that numerous ahadith were created by competing groups to strengthen their point of views. Wensinck assumed that the Qur’ān was authored by the Prophet Mohammad and the aḥādīth were produced by Islamic society after him.

Above summary of views of orientalist of nineteenth century on hadith literature shows that they all shared a common skeptical attitude towards the hadīth literature. JohnFueck (1894-1974) a German Orientalist carried a different view point from his predecessors. He believed in the originality of hadith literature and supported his view with a logical argument that most of the ahadith were reported from young sahaba and not from Prophet’s Companions. If hadith were fabricated then they should be fabricated in the name of Companions who died earlier.

Schacht on Hadith

Half a century later Goldziher’s research and views were carried forward by JosephSchacht (1902-1969) in his leading treatises “Origins” (1950) and “Introduction to Islamic Law” (1964). Even before the publication of Origins, Schacht’s views were articulated in his article, ‘A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions’. Schacht says that the impact of Goldziher’s research and findings has gradually whittled down and their implications neglected since he published his work. Following in Goldziher’s footsteps, he proposed to reevaluate the entire corpus of hadīth literature with a new criticalapproach. Schacht also borrows from A.N.Poliak that the collection of Islamic traditions is a mass of contradictory views formulated at uncertain times by unknown persons.¹⁰ Out of his analysis of the technical legal problems he concludes that the concept of Medina as a true source of sunnah turns out to be a fiction of early third century of Islam. Furthermore traditions from the Prophet did not possess an overriding authority in Iraqi, Madani and Syrian schools of thought who relied heavily on the traditions from companions and their successors.

Schacht tries to give a workable alternative supporting Goldziher’s formula. Describing the methodology he adopted to test the critical approach to Islamic traditions he chooses to follow Legal Historical Method of research. He gives two reasons for selecting this methodology, firstly that the literary sources of law carry us back further in history and they are much more abundant and secondly our judgments on formal and abstract problems of law and legal science is less likely to be distorted if we had a recourse to political or religious history. He adds that Muslim studies are based on historical intuition which needs to be replaced by historical

¹⁰ A.N.Poliak, in AJCL 57, 1940:50

criticism.

Regarding Prophetic traditions Schacht, in his article, "Revaluation of Islamic Traditions" (1949) says

"This assumption should be abandoned that there originally existed an authentic core of information going back to the time of Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) due to the fact that tendentious and spurious additions were made to the original mass of hadīth literature in every succeeding generation."¹¹

On authenticity of Ḥadīth, Schacht goes beyond Goldziher, in his "Origins" he says

"Every legal tradition from the Prophet until contrary is proved must not be taken as authentic.... but as fictitious expression of a legal doctrine formulated at a later date."¹²

Schacht saw his studies as an extension of Goldziher's work. According to Schacht it was Shafi (150-204 A.H.) who gave hadith the status of a legitimate source of law gaining an ultimately authoritative position. Schacht assumes that the marfu ḥadīth emerged in the middle of the second century (AH), and hadith belonging to the Companions (mawkuḥ) traditions emerged in the early second century. Furthermore, although he admits that the aḥadīth about theological issues could be dated to an earlier time than the legal traditions, Schacht nevertheless asserts that not all of these aḥadīth can be dated to the first century. In short Schacht became a major figure in orientalist literature, greatly influencing the later scholars - so much so that the subsequent generations of orientalists have been divided into either those who accept his claims or those who do not, making him a central figure in the literature on 'Origins' of

Islamic law.

Another very important assertion by Joseph Schacht that ahadith were orally transmitted in the first century and recording of hadith began only in the second century is refuted by

- Motzki's study and analysis of the hadith corpora of Ma'mar bin Rashid and Ibn eJurajj (students of al-Zuhri) as contained in Musannaf of Abd al Razzaq which shows that it leaves little room for allegation that they fabricated the material attributed to al Zuhri.
- Mustafa Azmi's reference to the personal compilation of Qasim ibn e Abu Bakr (d. 112 A.H.)
- Discovery of Sahifa of Hammam bin Munabbih (d.110) believed to have been written around mid- first century

All imply hadith forgery though the mannerism in which these statements are made vary considerably. Schacht borrowed the idea from the literature of classical Muslim hadith critics but did not acknowledge and proposed the theory of back projection in his name. He acknowledged Goldziher's contribution and claimed that he followed in his footsteps but in whose footsteps did Goldziher follow? It is a well-known fact that Goldziher studied the Zahiri school of thought with immense interest even though Zahiri school did not gain much popularity amongst Muslims and became extinct very soon. The legal methodology or the legal theory of Zahiri school rejected analogy and gave prime importance to the textual sources. While considering textual sources they limited themselves to the apparent meaning of the texts. This approach often led them to contradictions which they did not consider important to resolve

¹¹ Joseph Schacht, 'Revaluation of Islamic Traditions' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain &*

Ireland (New Series), (1949), p.150.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

to give relief to the parties. With this approach this school was bent upon accepting all sort of material in hadith texts or even attributing ahadith to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) which he had not said as the texts of Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet were the only sources acceptable to them to draw conclusions. The question arises why did Goldziher study Zahiri school of fiqh and not other mainstream popular sunni school such as Hanafi or Shafi schools of fiqh.

Schacht picked up Shafi school of thought and called him the master architect of Islamic jurisprudence. He first elevated Shafi's status and established that he was a thorough traditionalist. Proponents of his legal theory adhered to Quran and traditions and had very strict criteria for admittance of analogy. Then relying upon the findings of Muslim hadith critics criticized Prophetic traditions overwhelmingly. On the one hand he gained favor of Muslims by referring to Shafi'i and on the other hand tried to prove that the hadith literature to which Shafi adhered so strongly was a mass of forged and fabricated reports.

The objectives of both these Orientalists seem to coincide when we see on which classical Islamic literature they have built their edifice. For both these scholars writing on Islamic law their primary source would be the classical Islamic texts on which they built upon their thesis. However the approach of both Goldziher and Schacht was similar in that they criticized Prophetic traditions directly. Their mannerism was scholarly but they avoided to acknowledge the contribution or relevance of the sources on which they relied to build their theories.

Hadith in 21st Century Western Scholarship

¹³ These three western scholars have written on Muslim hadith literature; Motzki (d. 2019), Brown (alive and serving as director ACMCU, Georgetown University, USA)

¹⁴ Ibn e Salha (d.1245) was born in Kurdish, a Shafai'

Twentieth century hadith scholarship by Western scholars has been discussed in detail bringing out the contentions of leading hadith critics. A detailed account of Goldziher and Schacht brings out most important issues raised in twentieth century scholarship. We shall now precede to the discussion of twenty first century Western hadith scholars. For this purpose work of three hadith scholars of contemporary era are prominent namely, Harald Motzki, Jonathan Brown and Eerik Dickinson.¹³

Professor Motzki is a German trained scholar of Islam and he has conducted extensive research on transmission of hadith. He received his Ph D in Islamic studies in 1978 from University of Bonn. He served as Professor of Islamic Studies in Nijmegen University in Netherlands and passed away in 2019.

Professor Brown is Associate Professor at Georgetown University in the department of Islamic Studies and Muslim Christian Understanding. He also holds the office of Associate Director of Prince al Waleed Bin Talal Center for Christian- Muslim Understanding. He has also been selected a term member for the Council on Foreign relations.

Eerik Dickinson completed his PhD in 1992 from Yale University in Arabic language and taught at Yale and Hunter College in New York City. He writes on Muslim hadith and has translated Ibn al-Salha's 'Muqaddima'.¹⁴

Harald Motzki on Hadith

Harald Motzki's research demonstrates that Schacht's premise that a nearly scholar's failure to

hadith specialist who wrote a seminal work on hadith titled '*Muqadimah ibn e Salah*' translated as 'Introduction to Science of Hadith' by Eerick Dickinson.

employ a Prophetic hadīth in a debate in which it would have been pertinent somehow proves that this Prophetic hadīth did not exist at that time was a flawed argument *e silentio*. Motzki after consulting sources far more expansive than those examined by Schacht and Juynboll, demonstrates that certain traditions actually appeared earlier than these scholars believed that the hadīth existed or did not consider it useful for the argument. Rather than being active forgers of hadīth early legal scholars and hadīth transmitters such as Zuhri (d. 124) and Ibn-e- Jurayj (d. 150) and Sufyan Ibn- e-Uyayna (d.196) were reliably passing reports from the previous generation.

Motzki regards Schacht's thesis "that portions of *Isnāds* that extended into the first half of the second century and into the first century are without exception arbitrary and artificially fabricated" as untenable at least in this degree of generalization. He further states in "The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence" (2002) that an investigation of the Meccan strands of sources leads to the conclusion that roots of legal scholarship in Meccan can be traced back to the middle of 1st century and their further development to the middle of 2nd century A.H. can be ascertained with a stunning wealth of detail that exceeds our dreams. He introduces *Musannaf* of Abdul Razzak as San'ani (d.211) as an important source of history of law. He was a contemporary of Shāfi'i. This source in contrast to classical hadīth collections of 3rd century represents an early stage of development and more voluminous than *Mawṭṭā*. However the significance of this source lies in the fact that it contains sources from the first half of the second century which are lost as independent works or have not surfaced until today. *Musannaf* works are not originally compilations limited to hadīth in narrow sense i.e traditions from the Prophet,

rather they contain reports of the statements and modes of behavior of all past generations, including the immediate teachers of the compilers. These *Musannafs* are potential sources for early history of Islamic law and Islamic Jurisprudence. *Musannafs* of Abdul Razzak and Ibn-e- Abi Shyba are broadly structured and not confined to single scholarly tradition. Imām Bukhāri was a student of Ahmad Ibn-e- Hanbal and Yahya Ibn-e- Ma'in, who in turn were the students of Abdul Razzak¹⁵.

Motzki notes Schacht's mistrust of chains of transmission which preceded the individual texts and states that Schacht's mistrust blocked him from undertaking a consistent source analysis aimed at reconstructing the history of transmission. According to Schacht books surviving from ancient schools of law such as *Mawṭṭā* of Imām Mālik include far more authoritative reports from Companions than from Prophet himself. Collections compiled after Shāfi'i such as the canonical six books and Sunan of Daraqutni (d. 385) were undeniably focused on Prophetic reports. A report in *Mawṭṭā* may be attributed to a Companion, while a generation later al-Shāfi'i attribute the same report to the Prophet through a defective *mursal Isnād* (gap between Prophet and the person quoting him). Two generations later we find the same *Ḥadīth* with complete *Isnād* in *Shīḥ Bukhāri*. This led Schacht to believe that after *Mawṭṭā* Prophetic versions of reports have been forged. Schacht's conclusions have been further developed by G.H. A. Juynboll. Harald Motzki however demonstrates that Schacht's and Juynboll's conclusions about origins and dating of hadīth are problematic¹⁶.

Motzki challenged the reigning conclusions of Joseph Schacht and the late G.H. A. Juynboll by demonstrating convincingly that their study of

¹⁵ Yemani hadith scholar of Persian descent who compiled hadith collection known as *Musannaf Abdur Razzak*

¹⁶ Motzki, *Analyzing Muslim traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghazihadīth*, Published by Brill in 2010

early hadīth and law used only a small and selective body of sources, and that it was based on skeptical assumptions which, taken together, often asked the reader to believe a set of coincidences far more unlikely than the possibility that a hadīth might actually date from the genesis of the Islamic community. Motzki's work and that of those who have followed in his footsteps have contributed greatly to advancing the study of early Islamic history and law.

Following analysis of Harald Motzki's research and approach is based on the articles edited in "Analyzing Muslim traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghazi hadīth published by Brill in 2010. This is the English translation from German, of some very important articles on hadīth literature. Contents of the following paragraphs draw heavily on the review of this book by Ahmad al Shamsy.¹⁷

Harald Motzki introduced a new and badly needed approach to the study of early Islamic intellectual history. To describe his method of analyzing and dating Aḥādīth Motzki coined the term "isnād-cum-matn" analysis. It is based on three main assumptions:

- Firstly, the variants of a Ḥadīth are, at least partially, the results of the process of transmission. Secondly, the isnāds of these variants of a hadīth reflect, at least partially, the actual course of their transmission.
- Secondly, the isnāds of these variants of a hadīth reflect, at least partially, the actual course of their transmission.
- Thirdly, if the texts of these variants emanating from a supposed common source are both similar enough and seemingly independent, then that source would seem to be an "authentic moment" of transmission.

Behind Motzki's method lies an even more important assumption, namely, that it is

inaccurate to assume that intentional forgery and deception are the most likely explanation for all phenomena of hadīth transmission. Touted by earlier scholars such as Juynboll as the commonsense explanation behind the Byzantine web of hadīth transmissions, Motzki sees 'forgery' as less likely in many instances than a number of other realistic and totally predictable factors.

This does not imply that Motzki believes Hadith to be generally authentic. Motzki is mainly concerned with dating the traditions and assumes that traditions found in surviving compilations carry a history that can be retracted to a certain point in time. Whether hadith corpus is authentic or forged is not the focus of his research.

Motzki offers a corrective to Schacht's conclusions in his famous article, "The Jurisprudence of Ibn-e- Shihab al-Zuhri: A Source-Critical Study." (1991) (This article was revised and translated from the original "Der Fiqh des -Zuhri: Die Quellenproblematik" (Der Islam 68). He uses the Musannaf of "Abd al-Razzaq al-San'ani (d. 211/826) to prove that Schacht's conclusions were tainted by (1) the lack of early published sources (Schacht relied principally on Malik's Mawṭṭā) and (2) hypothesis-driven analysis that judged the provenance of early legal material based on overly skeptical assumptions.

Motzki uses the hadīth corpora of two of al-Zuhri's students, Ma'mar b. Rashid (d. 153/770) and Ibn-e- Jurayj (d. 150/767), as contained in the Musannaf, to shed light on al-Zuhri's narrations. By comparing them with Malik's book, he uses his analytical method to strengthen the claim that material attributed to al-Zuhri actually came from him. He argues that in their transmissions Ma'mar and Ibn-e- Jurayj drew on such diverse sources and were so willing to admit both ignorance of who some transmitters

¹⁷ Professor of Islamic Thought at University of

were and difference of opinion within transmissions, as well as between their own opinions and those they transmit, that there is very little indication that they fabricated the material they attribute to al-Zuhri. By solidifying the transmission from al-Zuhri and then showing that al-Zuhri's material was itself compiled from several sources; Motzki proves that the material dates back to the time of the Companions in the second half of the first hijri century.

This finding of Motzki coupled with that of Azami's reference to the personal compilation of Qasim Ibn-e- Abū Bakr (d.112 AH) refutes Schacht's claim that aḥādīth were transmitted orally in the first century A.H. and recording of ḥadīth began only in the second century A.H.

Motzki wrote his most influential article "Whither Ḥadīth Studies" (1996) as a rebuttal to Juynboll's claims that Ḥadīth supposedly transmitted by the successor Nafi Ibn-e- e Umar (d. 118/ 736-7) are mostly forgeries by Malik (93-179) and there was no historical relationship between Nafi' and Malik and other narrations transmitted via Isnād Ibn-e- e Umar- Nafi were not authentic. Juynboll uses argument e silentio to prove the fabrication of Ḥadīth which Motzki rejects completely. He says that there can be plenty of reasons why a tradition was transmitted from one person to another and not from many to many as in the early Islamic period narrators often did not feel the need to give more than one narration of a Ḥadīth - many narrations simply went unstated. Finally, many of the books that have survived from the early Islamic period and that are not under suspicion of forgery were transmitted by only one Isnād, such as al-Shāfi'i (d. 204/820)'s al-Umm. Motzki also points out Juynboll's flawed inferences that Nafi did not really exist as a transmitter. According to Motzki early biographical sources like the *Tabaqat of Ibn-e- Sa'd* (d. 230/845) do not furnish a great deal of biographical information about Nafi. Motzki also demonstrates that Juynboll's

conclusions are based on his sparse use of ḥadīth sources. Using only the main canonical ḥadīth sources, along with his assumptions about transmission, Juynboll concluded that a ḥadīth attributed to Nafi dealing with zakat al-fitr was made up after Nafi's time. By studying a much larger number of sources, including vital pre-canonical ḥadīth sources such as the *Musannaf of Abd al- Razzaq*, Motzki proves that there were eleven well-established transmitters of this ḥadīth from Nafi. Employing his Isnād-cum-matn analysis, Motzki argues that this multiplicity of sources means that they all drew on one common source-Nafi'. Thorough analysis of Nafi's case by Motzki is an important contribution to refute Juynboll's and Schacht's claims regarding Ḥadīth forgery, common links and back growth of Isnāds.

Both the above-mentioned articles by Motzki confront two towering skeptics of ḥadīth studies, Joseph Schacht and Juynboll. Motzki argues Schacht and Juynboll that a substantial amount of the material narrated by these two prolific transmitters can be traced back to the beginning of the second hijri century, and that some of the material can in fact be credibly attributed to the first Muslim generation. Motzki's argument proceeds in three steps. First, he gathers all available chains of transmission for a particular ḥadīth report and draws up a transmission tree that synthesizes the chains into a single diagram. Second, he examines and compares the various versions of the actual content of the ḥadīth. And third, he combines the results of these two analyses by correlating patterns of variance in the content with the structure of the transmission tree. Motzki initially follows Juynboll's overall methodology and terminology by identifying 'common links' that is, transmitters whose role is corroborated by the large number of individuals to whom they are recorded as having transmitted a particular ḥadīth. But then he parts ways with Juynboll. He criticizes both Juynboll and Schacht for not including older and more extensive works

on ḥadīth and consequently in many cases identifying the common link a generation or so later than it actually was. He also faults them for categorically considering the common link the earliest historically tenable point at which the ḥadīth's existence can be assumed. Common links generally appear in the early second hijri prior to this, most ḥadīth reports carry only single chains of transmission. Motzki demonstrates that this phenomenon can be explained by considerations outside the world of isnāds by drawing on the sociology of knowledge. He argues that the common links prominent among them al-Zuhrī and Nāfi' represent the first systematic collectors of ḥadīth, who, in turn, became sought-after teachers of ḥadīth, thus giving rise to the multiplicity of transmitters in the next generation. As the subsequent chapters show, this argument was understood by others to mean that Motzki assumes a priori that ḥadīth reports predate their common links, a misunderstanding that he emphatically disavows. Rather, Motzki is merely open to the possibility that a ḥadīth could be dated earlier than its common link. For example al-Zuhrī is the common link for a ḥadīth from Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha regarding the legal effects of giving breast milk to adults. Motzki reasons that since this ḥadīth contradicts the legal position held by al-Zuhrī himself, he would have had little motivation to invent it, which makes it likely that the ḥadīth in fact goes back to al-Zuhrī's alleged informant 'Urwa in the first Hijri century. Same reasoning holds for 'Urwa, whose position corresponds to al-Zuhrī's. This suggests that the ḥadīth in question indeed originates with 'Ā'isha.

Thus by using the example of 'Zuhri' and 'Nafi' as common links Motzki argues with Schacht and Juynboll that common links are not the earliest historically tenable point at which existence of a particular ḥadīth can be assumed, instead ḥadīth reports predate common links. To prove his point he not only uses older and most extensive ḥadīth sources than those employed by

Schacht and Juynboll but also confronts them logically by referring to ḥadīth from Aisha on legal effects of giving breast milk to adults. (Al-Zuhri being the accepted common link for this ḥadīth). This ḥadīth predates its common link, that is it goes back to Aisha and it cannot be forged because this ḥadīth contradicts legal position taken by al-Zuhri, which leaves little room for motivation of forgery.

Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort in "The Raid of Hudhayl: Ibn-e- Shihab al Zuhri's version of the Event" and Sean W. Anthony's "Crime and Punishment in Early Madina: The Origins of Maghazi Traditions" both the authors have used Motzki's Isnād-cum-Matan analysis to find the correct dating of these traditions. Nicolet concludes that this tradition can possibly be dated to as early as the last quarter of the first century A.H and Sean Anthony after applying Motzki's Isnād cum matan analysis proposes that cluster of reports attributed to Anas Ibn-e-Malik can, in fact, be traced to Basra in the last quarter of the first century A.H. Anthony argues that the suggested additions and changes made to the traditions are due to early scholars trying to draw legal rulings or lessons from it as well as the akhbar and maghazi narrators drawing on other bodies of lore, such as tribal stories. Anthony's findings are contrary to scholars like Juynboll and Wansbrough, he suggests that there is a possibility that many historical reports may have originated more with Umayyad-era muhaddithan than with "Abbasid-era sira and maghazi scholars.

Isnād-cum-matan analysis is most extensively developed by Harald Motzki which has brought Western scholarship on criticism of hadith closer to the Muslim scholarship on Ḥadīth criticism.

Most importantly, Motzki insists that his method is not a mathematical formula into which one can feed data to achieve results in a mechanistic way. He emphasizes that the isnād-cum-matn analysis requires judgment and the

weighing of evidence. He does not claim to have discovered any universal truths about ḥadīth (thus rejecting Berg's assertion that Motzki has declared most ḥadīths to be authentic). Nor does Motzki claim that a report that in one instance is attributed to Muḥammad and in another to a second-generation personality must necessarily be assumed to originate with either the latter or the former. Rather, he stresses the need to develop methodological tools specifically to fit the particular context of the reports in question.¹⁸

Al Shamsy¹⁹ notes that Isnād-cum-matn analysis can be employed as a research agenda for investigating early Islam. Growing popularity of this approach among young scholars in both Europe and the United States is not surprising: it provides a critical methodology for utilizing the vast amount of available material and for dating each ḥadīth on a case-by-case basis, in contrast to the sweeping judgments of earlier modern scholarship on ḥadīth. It raises the standard of theorization of ḥadīth and promises to invigorate the debate on how to study early Islam. Motzki's account of the isnād-cum-matn analysis is, however, a work in progress that has at least one significant blind spot. The method of examining both the isnād and the matn of each ḥadīth under study represents the closest approximation of Western scholarship to the classical Muslim science of ḥadīth criticism—in terms of methodology, that is, rather than conclusions regarding the status of individual ḥadīth. This raises the question of why Motzki declines to address this relationship. While he does draw on the auxiliary literature of classical ḥadīth studies, such as biographical dictionaries, ḥadīth collections appear in his work primarily as depositories to be mined for chains of

transmission; the process of sifting that went into the composition of these works remains untheorized. It would seem that a sustained intellectual engagement with the classical ḥadīth sciences in their early literary manifestations from the third to the fifth Hijri centuries would add a new dimension to the capabilities of the isnād-cum-matn analysis. Recent studies by al-Sharīf Ḥātim b. ʿArif al-ʿAwnī, Scott Lucas, and Jonathan Brown have begun to show what such engagement might look like, and it remains to be seen whether and how its insights will be integrated methodologically into the isnād-cum-matn approach.²⁰

Characteristics of Modern Western Scholarship on Hadith

A significant trend is observed in modern Western scholarship of Prophetic traditions. During the twentieth century direct criticism of these traditions was adopted by almost all scholars of Europe and Great Britain. However this trend has considerably changed rather reversed in the twenty-first century in the name of academic honesty. Professor John Esposito of Georgetown University is one of the reigning authorities on Islam in the West whose text books are taught at universities for courses on Islam. He has made the following counter-criticism of Schacht's traditional position:

‘Accepting Schacht's conclusion regarding the many traditions he did examine does not warrant its automatic extension to all the traditions. To consider all Prophetic traditions apocryphal until proven otherwise is to reverse the burden of proof. Moreover, even where differences of opinion exist regarding the authenticity of the chain of narrators, they need not detract from the

¹⁸ Ahmad al Shamsy, ‘Book Reviews of Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal Exegetical and Maghazi Hadith’ *Islamic Law and Society*. 18. (2011), 440-449.

¹⁹ Ahmad al Shamsy is currently working as Professor at University of Chicago.

²⁰ Ahmad al Shamsy, ‘Book Reviews of Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal Exegetical and Maghazi Hadith’ *Islamic Law and Society*. 18. (2011), 440-449.

authenticity of a tradition's content and common acceptance of the importance of tradition literature as a record of the early history and development of Islamic belief and practice.²¹

The position of Esposito perhaps reflects the growing trend of Western scholarship to counter criticize the Orientalist's writings on Islam in the twentieth century.

Western scholarship on Islam is closely linked with Western political agenda. This is evident from an interesting report published by RAND Corporation²² entitled

'Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies'. This report had two fold agenda firstly to present an image of Islam which suits post 9/11 agenda and secondly to create divisions within Muslim societies. This report contains following material on hadith,

'Even if that were not the case, objectively speaking, there is little doubt that hadith is at best a dubious, flawed instrument. Consider that Al-Bukhari is the compiler of what is generally considered to be the most authoritative and reliable collections of hadith. He collected 600,000 hadith, examined them for their authenticity, eliminated all but 7,600 of them, deleted some for redundancy, and was left with a collection of about 4,000.'²³

Such statements have been made by numerous orientalist about canonical hadith collections. We must however see the Muslim perspective or at least see what Imam Bukhari had to say about his collection,

"I have not included in my book al-Jami` but what is authentic, and I left out among the authentic for fear of [excessive] length"²⁴

Professor Mustafa Azmi further supports this statement of al-Bukhari in following words,

Al-Bukhari did not claim that what he left out were the spurious, nor that there were no authentic traditions outside his collection. On the contrary he said, "I only included in my book al-Jami` those that were authentic, and I left out many more authentic traditions than this to avoid unnecessary length." He had no intention of collecting all the authentic traditions. He only wanted to compile a manual of hadith, according to the wishes of his Shaikh Ishaq b. Rahwaih, and his function is quite clear from the title of his book al- Jami` al-Musnad al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar min umur Rasul Allah wa Sunanhi wa ayyamih. The word al-Mukhtasar, 'epitome', itself explains that al-Bukhari did not make any attempt at a comprehensive collection.²⁵

Thus Professor Azmi first clarifies what Imam Bukhari had said and then explains logically how the meaning of the title of his canonical compilation corresponds to the material selected for it.

The reversal of position in recent time (i.e post 9/11) with the advent of academic honesty on the part of Western scholars the trend is of counter criticism of the orientalist scholars of twentieth century.

Motzki on Common Link Theory

²¹ J. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 81.

²² The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

²³ C. Benard, "[Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies](#)", 2003, Rand Corporation, p. 67.

²⁴ Abi Bakr Ahmad Ibn `Ali al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad Aw Madinah as-Salam*, 1931 (1349 AH), Volume II, Maktabat al-Khanji, Cairo & Al-Maktabah al-`Arabiyyah, Baghdad and Matba'at as-S'adah near the State Department, Cairo, pp. 8-9.

²⁵ M. M. al-Azami, *Studies In Early Hadith Literature*, 1992, American Trust Publications: Indianapolis(USA), pp. 305-306.

Common link is that person whose name appears in almost all versions of a particular hadith. By common link theory the orientalist mean that the hadith was forged during the time of this common link. This theory thus gives a clue to the time when a particular hadith was invented. He faults Schacht for considering the common link the earliest historically tenable point at which the hadith's existence can be assumed or this in any way reflects on hadith forgery. Motzki proves with the help of examples that hadith reports pre date common links. The difference in the conclusions of both these Western scholars is due to the fact that Schacht relied only on the chains of narration and concluded. He did not take into consideration the text of hadith. Another reason for reaching at different conclusions is identified by Motzki himself when he states that Schacht has used small and selective body of sources and that his study was based on skeptical assumptions. The method that Motzki uses in order to analyze traditions is based on critical scrutiny of both text as well as chains of a narration. He also faults Schacht for not using older and more extensive works on hadith and consequently identifying the common link a generation or so later than it actually was. Motzki also asserts that the possibility exists that a hadith could be dated earlier than its common link thereby refuting Schacht's claim that common link indicates the dating of a hadith. He reaches this conclusion by drawing on sociology of knowledge and by carrying out matan analysis of hadith. In hadith from Aisha regarding giving breast milk to adults, the common link is al-Zuhri but this hadith contradicts the legal position taken by al-Zuhri on this issue thus he would not be inclined to invent a tradition that contradicts his legal stance. Zuhri was informed by Urwa of this hadith whose legal position corresponds to al-Zuhri thus same reasoning holds for Urwa which suggests that hadith indeed originated with Aisha. This particular example explains

- All hadith are not fabricated and the

contents of hadith were carried forward honestly and with extreme deliberation.

- The narrators were reliable and did not attempt to change the contents according to their own whims and wishes.
- That ahadith pre date their common links
- That ahadith originated in the first century A.H.
- It also disapproves the concept of back projection of a hadith into the mouth of a Companion
- It is inaccurate to assume forgery and deception in the process of hadith transmission.

The *isnad cum matan* method employed by Motzki has brought Western scholarship on criticism of hadith closer to Muslim scholarship on hadith criticism in terms of results or conclusions arrived at. Also, this method of analysis requires judgment and weighing of evidence which is not arbitrary or based on one's personal opinion but rests on sound logical reasoning and strong historical evidence. Another positive aspect of Motzki's research is that he does not generalize his conclusions for entire hadith corpus but insists on adopting proper methodological tools to analyze traditions individually. This methodology has been successful in claiming support of American and European scholars alike. Motzki also differs from earlier Western scholars of hadith because he does not make sweeping judgments but weighs each hadith case by case.

Conclusion

Motzki regards Schacht's thesis "that portions of *Isnāds* that extended into the first half of the second century and into the first century are without exception arbitrary and artificially fabricated" as untenable at least in this degree of generalization. Motzki confronts Juynboll in his

most influential article “Whither Ḥadīth Studies” (1996) which he wrote as a rebuttal to Juynboll’s use of argument e silentio to prove the fabrication of hadīth which Motzki rejects completely. Motzki also demonstrates that Juynboll’s conclusions are based on his sparse use of hadīth sources. By studying a much larger number of sources, including vital pre-canonical hadīth sources such as the Musannaf of Abd al-Razzaq, Motzki proves his point. He criticizes both Juynboll and Schacht for not including older and more extensive works on ḥadīth and consequently in many cases identifying the common link a generation or so later than it actually was. Motzki employs *sanād cum matan* analysis to analyze and date a hadīth. Behind Motzki’s method lies a very important assumption, that it is inaccurate to assume that intentional forgery and deception are the most likely explanation for all phenomena of hadīth transmission. Motzki uses the Musannaf of “Abd al-Razzaq al-San’ani (d. 211/826) to prove that Schacht’s conclusions were tainted by (1) the lack of early published sources (Schacht relied principally on Malik’s *Mawṭiʿā*) and (2) hypothesis-driven analysis that judged the provenance of early legal material based on overly skeptical assumptions.

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