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LOC transliteration, with ` for `ayn, ' for ḥamzah.

## MUḤAMMAD NĀṢIR AL-DĪN AL-ALBĀNĪ AND TRADITIONAL HADITH CRITICISM

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### Abstract

Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) was an influential Syrian hadith critic. A major advocate of Salafism, he proposed to infer rules directly from hadith, bypassing the historic Sunni schools of law. He taught in Saudi Arabia 1961-3 but had to leave because of aberrant legal opinions; for example, that it was unnecessary to fast in Ramadan if one could not see daylight, as in a house with the windows blocked, that it was unnecessary to remove one's footwear to pray, and that the full-face veil was unnecessary. His method of hadith criticism seems to rely heavily on evaluations of men by the most prominent medieval critics, a simplistic interpretation of the medieval literature. He is to be admired for accepting the consequences of his programme, though, daring to identify weak hadith in the most respected medieval collections, sternly dismissing rules based only on custom or doubtful hadith reports. Willy nilly, he seems to have provoked a re-examination of medieval methods of hadith criticism among Muslim scholars uninfluenced by recent scholarship in the same direction by Eerik Dickinson and others.

Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī was a prolific and influential Salafi writer. He was born in Albania in 1914. His family emigrated to Damascus, where he grew up to be a tradesman and an informally-trained `ālim, expert in hadith and Ḥanafī law. He taught in Saudi Arabia 1961-3, having to leave because of aberrant legal opinions; for example, that it was unnecessary to fast in Ramadan if one could not see daylight, as in a house with the windows blocked, that it was unnecessary to remove one's footwear to pray, and that the full-face veil was unnecessary. He was invited back to Mecca for a brief period in the '70s but spent most of the rest of his life in Jordan. He died in Amman in 1999.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A good short survey of his life and especially the controversy he aroused by his hadith criticism is Jonathan Brown, *The canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, Islam [sic] History and Civilization, Studies and Texts 69 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 321-34. A survey of his hadith criticism is Abū al-Ḥasan `Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-`Aẓẓarī, *Juhūd al-shaykh al-Albānī fī al-ḥadīth* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1427/2006), which v. esp. for his biography and lists of works written or edited by him, 33-90. V. also Kamaruddin Amin, 'Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: a critical study of his method', *Islamic law and society* 11 (2004): 149-76, on which more below. The context and

To me as a student of hadith, he is interesting first of all for his fearless criticism of the traditional canon. What first caught my eye were things like *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah* (1986), followed two years later by *Da`īf Sunan Ibn Mājah* (1988), the sound and the weak of Ibn Mājah, one of the Six Books, the most prestigious Sunni collections of hadith (although admittedly Ibn Mājah's was the last to be added to the list and never enjoyed the same prestige as the rest). These were shortly followed by similar volumes identifying the strong and weak of the collections of Tirmidhī and Nasā'ī, two others of the Six Books (and both less obvious targets). The earliest book of his that I have come across is *Hijāb al-mar'ah al-muslimah*, dated on the cover 1374/1954-5, completed according to a note at the end in Damascus, 7/5/1371; that is, 3 February 1952.<sup>2</sup> Its bibliography seems to indicate an earlier publication (probably no more than a pamphlet), *Takhrīj aḥādīth kitābihī Ṣifat ṣalāt al-nabī*, I take it an extract from the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd with commentary. Already at this point, he seems to have projected an abridgement of one of the Six Books comprising only its sound hadith.<sup>3</sup> I am a student of medieval hadith criticism. I have written about Abū Nu`aym al-Iṣbahānī, al-Nasā'ī, al-Bukhārī, and other early-medieval collectors and critics. Naturally, my first question with regard to Albānī is whether he uses the same methods as medieval hadith critics or only thinks he does.

### Salafism

Albānī identified his own position as Salafism. For example, he says he had the idea for an abridgement with commentary of a thirteenth-century book on pious works 25 years earlier (in the early '50s) when he was teaching this book to a group of Salafī brothers in Syria.<sup>4</sup>

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effects of his teaching in Saudi Arabia are developed in Stéphane Lacroix, 'Between revolution and apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his impact on the shaping of contemporary Salafism', pp. 31-54, 66-71 in Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, *The Meccan rebellion: the story of Juhayman al-Utaybi revisited* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2011), and Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: the politics of religious dissent in contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Hijāb al-mar'ah al-muslimah fī al-Kitāb wa-al-sunnah* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Shabāb al-Muslim, 1374), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Albānī, *Hijāb*, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa-al-tarhīb*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1402/1982). The title page says 'volume 1', but I am not aware that a second volume was ever published. There has also appeared a three-volume edition (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma`ārif lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī',

It was notably opposed to organized Sufism and the schools of law. ‘Salafism’ refers to a movement begun in the late 19th century by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and Muḥammad `Abduh (d. 1905), who briefly published together a newspaper, *al-`Urwah al-wuthqá* (‘the firmest handle’, with allusion to Q. 2:256 and 31:22). Albānī himself pointed to a polemic against Ghazālī’s defence of Sufism and use of weak hadith reports in the journal *al-Manār*, founded by `Abduh, as a formative influence (although also a detailed list of weak hadith in Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’ `ulūm al-dīn* by Zayn al-Dīn al-`Irāqī [d. 806/1414]).<sup>5</sup> It is named for the *salaf*, those who went before, as opposed to the *khalaf*, those who came after them. *Salaf* usually refers more specifically to the Companions of the Prophet and the first generation or two after them. There is prophetic hadith declaring that the best of his community was the generation amongst whom he was sent, then the next one or two generations, uncertainty as to what he said expressed by the Companion himself.<sup>6</sup> *Salaf* itself is a rare word in both Qur’an and hadith. The noun occurs just once in the former, and not with an encouraging meaning: speaking of Pharaoh and his people, ‘We took vengeance on them and drowned them all. We made them *a thing of the past* and an example for those of later times’ (Q. 43:55-6, Jones trans., emphasis added). In Bukhārī’s collection of hadith, it occurs once, in a topic heading, ‘How far the *salaf* would store up food and other things in their houses’. The following hadith report stresses how long the Prophet would keep food, his family had so little to eat. Bukhārī evidently uses *salaf*, then, to

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2000), along with a two-volume edition of *Da`if al-Targhib wa-al-tarhib*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma`ārif lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī`, 2000), neither seen by me.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *Canonization*, 321-2. The book by al-`Irāqī is *al-Mughnī `an ḥaml al-asfār fī al-`asfār fī takhrīj mā fī al-Ihyā’ min al-akhbār*, published with Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ `ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols (Cairo: Muṣṭafá al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awladuh, 1346). The connection between Afghānī and `Abduh on the one hand and Salafism on the other has been questioned by Henri Lauzière, ‘The construction of *salafīyya*: reconsidering Salafism from the perspective of Conceptual History’, *International journal of Middle East studies* 42 (2010): 369–89. The crux of the issue seems to be how strictly one defines ‘Salafism’.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Bukhārī, *k. al-shahādāt* 9, *bāb lā tashhadu `alá shahādah jawr*, no 2651; *k. faḍā`il aṣḥāb al-nabī* 1, *bāb faḍā`il aṣḥāb al-nabī*, no 3650; *k. al-riqāq* 7, *bāb mā yuḥdharu min zahrāt al-dunyā*, no 6428; *k. al-aymān wa-al-nudhūr* 27, *bāb ithm man lā yaḥī bi-al-nadhr*, no 6695; *k. faḍā`il al-ṣaḥābah* 52, *bāb faḍl al-ṣaḥābah, thumma alladīna yalūnahum*, no 2535 (multiple versions). Cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of canonical ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 542, ascribing it in its present form to a Basran of the mid-2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> cent. but supposing that the idea of ranking the generations so went back to the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> cent.

indicate the generation of the Companions.<sup>7</sup> Early uses of *salafī* that I have come across are unspecific as to how early the *salaf* are taken to be, and refer to theological orthodoxy rather than law; for example, of Abū Ḥanīfah's grandson Ismā'īl ibn Ḥammād (d. 212/827-8), 'They said he was a sound *salafī*.'<sup>8</sup>

Albānī himself used a somewhat flexible definition of the *salaf*. He comments thus on the hadith report, 'God (blessèd and exalted be he), when it is the Day of the Resurrection, will descend to his servants'<sup>9</sup>:

I say this is a real descent (*nuzūl ḥaqīqī*), as befits his exaltedness and perfection. It is a character of action belonging to God (alternatively: it describes an action of God's). Beware of interpreting it figuratively (*an tata'awwalahū*), as do some of the recent ones (*khalaf*) and so go astray.

Here is an example of traditionalist theology, accepting whatever revelation says without applying rationalist interpretation. (At that, the distinction between characters of action and characters of essence apparently betrays some rationalist theological reflection.) He says of an opinion from Ibn Ḥajar (against invoking the Prophet as *sayyidanā*), 'This is an important *fatwá* in which the Ḥāfiẓ pursued the way of the *salaf* in following (*ittibā'*) and leaving innovations.'<sup>10</sup> It would be hard to say that the *salaf* and *khalaf* here are anything more than (respectively) modest early authorities who let hadith be their opinions and immodest later authorities who wanted to elaborate on the early tradition, with relevance to both law and theology.

As for law in particular, the Salafī idea has been to get behind the schools, named for jurists of the later eighth to earlier ninth centuries, back to the material of revelation, Qur'an and hadith. The tradition often opposes *ijtihād* to *taqlīd*. The former term refers literally to effort, technically (in jurisprudence) the effort of examining the evidence and coming up with

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<sup>7</sup> Bukhārī, *at'imah* 27, *bāb mā kāna al-salaf yaddakhirūna fī buyūtihim wa-asfārihim min al-ta'ām wa-al-laḥm wa-ghayrih*, followed by no 5423.

<sup>8</sup> Wakī' (d. 306/918), *Akhbār al-quḍāh*, ed. `Abd al-`Azīz Muṣṭafá al-Marāghī, 3 vols (Cairo: Maṭba`at al-Istiḳāmah, 1366-9/1947-50), 2:167.

<sup>9</sup> Mundhirī, *Ṣaḥīh*, 14 and fn.

<sup>10</sup> Ismā'īl ibn Ishāq, *Faḍl al-ṣalāh `alá al-nabī*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1383/1963), 36nf.

one's own answer to a legal question. The latter term refers literally to putting a collar on someone, technically to bestowing authority on someone to answer a legal question without troubling to examine the evidence for oneself. Medieval jurists came up with hierarchies of *ijtihād*, some persons being allowed more scope for their scholarly effort than others. In the late 1950s, Albānī edited a book by the Ḥanbali Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdān (d. Cairo, 695/1295) that posits a hierarchy and unsurprisingly (since it comes from an authority of one of the recognized guild schools) calls for a layman to stay within the schools, not presuming to choose any of the *salaf* to follow in preference to Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad, and their like. Albānī protests in a note,<sup>11</sup>

Do not be misled by this here, for to take as one's school the doctrine of any of the Companions, especially the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (assuming it is soundly transmitted), is the worthiest way for a Muslim after the Book of God and the *sunnah* of his Messenger . . . .

Apparently, Albānī does not reject *taqlīd* altogether in favour of going directly to Qur'an and hadith for rules. Rather, he expressly allows one to invest authority in Companions as well, especially the first four caliphs. This is reminiscent of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's reported definition of *sunnah*, meaning authoritative precedent:

I more than once heard Aḥmad when he had been asked whether the practice of Abū Bakr, `Umar, `Uthmān, and `Alī was *sunnah*. He said, 'Yes.' Once he said, 'On account of the hadith report of the Messenger of God: "Incumbent on you is my *sunnah* and the *sunnah* of the Rightly Guided Caliphs." He thus named it *sunnah*.

When someone asked whether the dicta of such persons as Abū Mu`ādh and Ibn Mas`ūd (other Companions) equally constituted *sunnah*, he said, 'I will not deny it, for I dislike to disagree with any of them.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥamdān, *Ṣifāt al-fatwā wa-al-muftī wa-al-mustaftī*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1380), 73fn.

<sup>12</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Masā'il al-imām Aḥmad*, ed. Muḥammad Bahjah al-Bayṭār (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1353/1934, repr. Beirut: Muḥammad Amīn Damj, n.d.), 277. V. further Christopher Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Makers of the Muslim world* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 70-9.

His professed disdain for relying on the *khalaf* notwithstanding, Albānī in practice does cite jurists from throughout the long tradition. Here for example are the legal authorities he cites in his early work on the veil (*Hijāb al-mar'ah*; not just relating hadith) in descending order of frequency.

eight times

Ibn Taymīyah (d. Damascus, 728/1328), Ḥanbali.

three times

Ibn Ḥazm (d. Majorca, 456/1064), Zāhiri.  
al-Qurṭubī (d. Munyat Banī Khaṣīb, Upper Egypt, 671/1273?), Māliki.  
Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. Cairo, 807/1405), Shāfi'i.

twice

al-Nawawī (d. Nawā, 676/1271), Shāfi'i.  
Ibn Kathīr (d. Damascus, 774/1373), Shāfi'i.

once

al-Shāfi'ī (d. Old Cairo, 204/820), independent.  
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. Baghdad, 241/855), independent.  
al-Bayhaqī (d. Nishapur, 458/1066), Shāfi'i.  
Ibn `Abd al-Barr (d. Jativa, 463/1071), Māliki.  
Ibn Rushd (d. Marrakech, 595/1198), Māliki (but the book cited, *al-Bidāyah*, purports to cover all schools).  
al-Rāfi'ī (d. Qazvin, 623/1226), Shāfi'i.  
Abū Muḥammad ibn Abī Jamrah (d. Cairo, bef. 700/1300-1), Māliki.  
Ibn Daqīq al-`Īd (d. Cairo, 702/1302), Māliki and Shāfi'i.  
Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. Cairo, 745/1344), Zāhiri and Shāfi'i.  
al-Dhahabī (d. Damascus, 748/1348?), Shāfi'i.  
Ibn Ḥajar al-`Asqalānī (d. Cairo, 852/1449), Shāfi'i.  
al-Shawkānī (d. Sanaa, 1250/1834), independent.  
Anwar al-Kashmīrī (d. Deoband, 1352/1933), independent.

These are mostly the sort of authorities one would expect a writer to cite who has a high regard for hadith but a low one for scholastic law. It is not surprising that Ibn Taymīyah is cited more often than anyone else, since he famously stood for his own prerogative of going back to original sources as a *mujtahid muṭlaq*, while Ibn Kathīr and al-Dhahabī were both close to him. Al-Shawkānī and Anwar al-Kashmīrī were notable later advocates of going back to original

sources. The rest are predominantly Shāfi`i, probably reflecting some of that school's strong preference for hadith-based jurisprudence (or at least the appearance of it). It is a minor puzzle why Ibn Taymīyah should be the only Ḥanbali on the list, since the Ḥanbali school was even more strongly characterized by a preference for hadith-based jurisprudence, often to the point of taking aberrant positions. (For example, when I looked into the question of women's attendance in the mosque, I found that the Ḥanbali school was more permissive than any other of women's going to the mosque without their husbands' permission, in line with hadith, also of women's leading prayers.<sup>13</sup> When I looked into the question of using public baths, I found ~~the~~ [that] the Ḥanbali school was the only one to maintain a strong, restrictive position, again in line with hadith.<sup>14</sup>) Part of the reason is probably the history of legal publication up to the early 1950s: there were simply few Ḥanbali books in print for Albānī to become familiar with. It is also a minor puzzle why there are no Companions on the list. At that, Albānī professed himself to be highly respectful of past juristic activity. Establishing the legal categories (*ahkām*) to which different things are assigned, even things merely recommended or discouraged (not absolutely required or forbidden), requires sound hadith as evidence, he says in a book of the late 1970s—just what we expect him to say. Surprising is his justification: less than this 'detracts from what the ulema have established.'<sup>15</sup> The prevailing idea is apparently not that Islamic jurisprudence at one time took a wrong turn and became an irrelevance, rather that properly hadith-based law has always had its followers, within and without the schools, in whose tradition Albānī places himself at this end.

#### Albānī's hadith criticism

It may seem conceptually easy to shove aside the schools of law. There are some precedents for it; for example, the Almohads seem to have shoved aside Māliki law in the 12th century, and Ibn

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Melchert, 'Whether to keep women out of the mosque', *Authority, privacy and public order in Islam*, ed. B. Michalak-Pikulska and A. Pikulski, *Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta* 148 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 59-69.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Melchert, 'Public baths in Islamic law', *25 siècles de bain collectif en Orient*, ed. Marie-Françoise Bousseac, &al., *Études urbaines* 9 and PIFD 282 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2014), 1001-10.

<sup>15</sup> Albānī, introd'n to Mundhirī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 33.

Rushd's survey of the different schools may have been planned as a prelude to writing a single code for them to impose.<sup>16</sup> But the project of getting behind the learning of the eighth and ninth centuries in order to work directly from revelation runs into a greater difficulty when it comes to hadith, for our major collections of hadith date from the time of the schools of law, not before. Can a Salafi dismiss Shaybānī and Shāfi`ī as fallible individuals, creatures of their time, but treat Bukhārī and Muslim as impeccable scholars who transcended the limitations of their time? Albānī is notable for questioning their impeccability, which has made him highly controversial among Sunni Muslims. How do his methods compare with those of the major collectors?

Hadith is basically the body of quotations of the Prophet and descriptions of his actions that constitutes the principal basis of Islamic law. A major question in modern hadith studies is how our medieval collectors and critics went about sorting the sound from the weak; that is, the more reliably attributed from the less. Most twentieth-century scholarship has concentrated on the terms used by early critics, following the example above all of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245), whose textbook on hadith science comprises a series of chapters each explaining one evaluation: sound hadith, fair hadith, and so on.<sup>17</sup> This stress on understanding what early critics meant by various expressions was dictated partly by the crystallization of a hadith canon, so that scholars got their hadith mainly from recognized collections of the (mostly) ninth and tenth centuries. It was presumably reinforced by the feeling that they were all epigones who should not presume to come up with better evaluations than the great collectors and critics of the ninth and tenth centuries, just as they should not presume to come up with better rules than the pioneers of their schools of law.

To the contrary, Eerik Dickinson read early hadith criticism directly and stressed rather *isnād* comparison. If a hadith report was supported by multiple, mutually corroborative *isnāds*, it

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<sup>16</sup> Maribel Fierro, 'The legal policies of the Almohad caliphs and Ibn Rushd's *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*', *Journal of Islamic studies* 10 (1999): 226-48.

<sup>17</sup> Now conveniently available in translation: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *An introduction to the science of the ḥadīth*, trans. Eerik Dickinson with Muneer Fareed (Reading: Garnet, 2005).

must be sound. If a particular link was without parallels, one investigated whether the transmitter's hadith were usually corroborated or not. If they were, he got the benefit of the doubt in this case; if not, then this uncorroborated report must be considered weak and the transmitter became suspect.<sup>18</sup> Similar reliance on *isnād* comparison is attributed to Bukhārī (correctly, I believe) in a 2007 biography and has moved into the textbooks with Jonathan Brown's *Hadith*.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1970s, Albānī himself said that he thought to identify the weak hadith in the book at hand 'depending in that on hadith terminology, *al-jarḥ wa-al-ta`dīl* (the aspersion and pronouncing just of individual traditionists), and looking up what the careful ulema had said about each hadith in it.'<sup>20</sup> That is to say, he will rely on the opinions of past experts without presuming to redo their work.

Examples of early hadith criticism I take from a book by al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), *al-`Ilal al-kabīr*, supplementary to his great hadith collection, in which he quotes the most revered Sunni hadith collector of all, Muḥammad ibn Ismā`īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870). Asked about the hadith report < Muḥammad ibn al-Muthanná < Muḥammad ibn Bakr al-Bursānī < Yūnus ibn Yazīd < al-Zuhrī < Anas ibn Mālik that the Messenger of God walked before funeral processions, likewise Abū Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthmān, Bukhārī said, 'Muḥammad ibn Bakr was mistaken about this. It is related only < Yūnus < al-Zuhrī < Sālim < Ibn `Umar.'<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad ibn Bakr (Basran, d. 203/818-19?) had evidently substituted Anas ibn Mālik for Sālim and Ibn `Umar, he being the only one who related it this way. He was also asked about the hadith report related by Abū Kurayb < Ishāq ibn Sulaymān al-Rāzī < Mughīrah ibn Muslim < Yūnus < al-Ḥasan < Abū Hurayrah < Messenger of God: 'God likes forbearance in selling, forbearance in

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<sup>18</sup> Eerik Dickinson, *The development of early Sunnite ḥadīth criticism*, Islamic history and civilization, studies and texts, 38 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), chap. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ghassan Abdul-Jabbar, *Bukhari*, Makers of Islamic civilization (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith*, Foundations of Islam (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). V. also Christopher Melchert, 'Bukhārī and early hadith criticism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 7-19.

<sup>20</sup> Albānī, introd'n to Mundhirī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Tirmidhī, *Ilal al-Tirmidhī al-kabīr*, ed. Abū Ṭālib al-Qāḍī, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Sāmarrā'ī, Abū al-Ma`āṭī al-Nūrī, & Maḥmūd Muḥammad Khalīl al-Ṣa`īdī (Beirut: `Ālam al-Kutub, 1409/1989), 144, no 248.

buying, and forbearance in judgement’, to which Bukhārī said, ‘This hadith report is a mistake. Ismā’īl ibn `Ulayyah related this hadith report < Yūnus < Sa`īd al-Maqburī < Abū Hurayrah.’ Someone had substituted al-Ḥasan’s name for Sa`īd al-Maqburī’s.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the rejected version is in Tirmidhī’s major hadith collection (no 1319) with the comment *gharīb* (meaning uncorroborated). Both of these examples are of hadith criticism by *isnād* comparison, with the discrepant version discarded. In both cases, Tirmidhī relies on his teacher Bukhārī’s expertise, but he gives us Bukhārī’s reasoning, not just Bukhārī’s one-word characterization.

For comparison, here are a few examples of Albānī’s hadith criticism. I start with one from his earliest work, a collection of what he considers the sound hadith pertaining to women’s veiling<sup>23</sup>:

Abū Dāwūd related it with full *isnād* (2:182-183) and al-Bayhaqī (2:226 and 7:87) by way of Sa`īd ibn Bashīr < Qatādah < Khālīd ibn Durayk < `Ā’ishah. Abū Dāwūd said immediately afterwards, ‘This is *mursal* [lacking one link]. Khālīd ibn Durayk never met `Ā’ishah.’ I say that Sa`īd ibn Bashīr is weak, as in *al-Taqrīb* by the *ḥāfiẓ* Ibn Ḥajar. However, the hadith report has come by other ways by which it is strengthened.

The first two references are to hadith collections of the ninth and eleventh centuries, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), *al-Taqrīb*, is a succinct biographical dictionary of all the men in the Six Books.<sup>25</sup> Next, Albānī offers another hadith report from Abū Dāwūd (related by Qatādah directly from the Prophet) and another from Bayhaqī, of which, as he says, Bayhaqī himself commented, ‘Its *isnād* is weak.’ Then Albānī defends it<sup>26</sup>:

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<sup>22</sup> Tirmidhī, *Ilal*, 196, no 349.

<sup>23</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al- Albānī, *Hijāb al-mar’ah al-muslimah fī al-Kitāb wa-al-sunnah* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Shabāb al-Muslim, 1374), 8.

<sup>24</sup> For the hadith report in question, v. Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), *Sunan*, k. *al-libās* 31, *bāb fīmā tubdī al-mar’ah min zīnatihā*, no 4104. Albānī cites the edition Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan* (al-Maṭba`ah al-Tāziyah, 1348), of which I have otherwise seen no record, let alone the work itself. Albānī also cites Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 10 vols (Ḥayderabad: Maṭba`at Majlis Dā`irat al-Ma`ārif al-Nizāmīyah, 1316, repr. 1352). Ibn Ḥajar quotes two authorities as saying that Khālīd ibn Durayk never met `Ā’ishah: Ibn Ḥajar, *K. Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 12 vols (Hyderabad: Majlis Dā`irat al-Ma`ārif al-Nizāmīyah, 1325-7, repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 3:86-7.

<sup>25</sup> V. Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. `Abd al-Wahhāb `Abd al-Laṭīf, 2 vols (Medina: Muḥammad Sulṭān al-N\*m\*n\*kānī, 1961), but at this point Albānī was probably using an earlier Indian edition such as the Lucknow printing of 1937.

<sup>26</sup> Albānī, *Hijāb*, 9.

I say that its weakness is this Ibn Lahī`ah. His name is `Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī, Abū `Abd al-Raḥmān the Egyptian qadi. He is trustworthy and virtuous. However, he used to relate hadith from his notebooks, then they were burnt so he related hadith by memory and became confused. Some late critics have pronounced his hadith good, others sound . . . . What I do not doubt is that his hadith, when corroborated by additional witnesses, do not go below the level of ‘good’, this being an example.

Al-Bayhaqī strengthened the hadith report from another direction, for after he had related the report of `Ā`ishah, also from Ibn `Abbās and others in explaining *illā mā zahara minhā* (Q. 24:31), he said, ‘Along with this *mursal* is the pronouncement of those who have passed of the Companions (may God be pleased with them) in clarifying what God has permitted by way of external adornment.’ With this, the position becomes strong.

A *mursal* hadith report is one whose *isnād* has a gap, as between Qatādah (d. 117/735-6?) and the Prophet. The position in question is whether a woman’s whole face need be covered. Albānī thinks not, in line with the position of the traditional schools of law. Albānī’s method here is mainly to see what earlier critics said, then to look for corroboration in parallel reports. He seems remarkably complacent about defective chains of transmission, also deferential to earlier hadith critics and even jurists, as by not testing Bayhaqī’s investigation of Companion opinion.

Here is another example from the same early work<sup>27</sup>:

Al-Ḥākim brought it out . . . , saying, ‘a sound hadith report by the criterion of the two shaykhs.’ Al-Dhahabī agreed with him. However, it is so by the criterion of Muslim alone, for Zakarīyā [*sic*] ibn `Adī is in its *isnād*, and al-Bukhārī related from him only elsewhere than in *al-Jāmi` al-ṣaḥīḥ*, as (is said) in *al-Tahdhīb*.

Albānī refers to al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014), *al-Mustadrak `alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, Bukhārī and Muslim (‘the two shaykhs’), Dhahabī (d. 748/1348?), and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, the work of which *al-Taqrīb* is an abridgement. Here is another example of Albānī’s reliance on critics of the High Middle Ages. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī invented the idea of ‘the criterion of Bukhārī’ and ‘the criterion of Muslim’ (*sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, *sharḥ Muslim*). Muslim hadith critics across the centuries have written extensively to define these criteria. The most popular definition in modern times is a distinction proposed by Ibn Ḥajar: that Muslim wanted uninterrupted chains

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<sup>27</sup> Albānī, *Hijāb*, 29.

of transmitters of known probity who might have met each other, whereas Bukhārī would accept only uninterrupted chains of transmitters of known probity who demonstrably did meet each other. Muslim's introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* does defend the *isnād* in which direct audition is not asserted at every link, but it seems to be unsupportable speculation that Bukhārī excluded such hadith.<sup>28</sup> It is to Albānī's credit that he here accepts the evidence of Bukhārī's including a hadith report in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* as sufficient to establish that it met his criterion, since further evidence cannot be found. Again, however, he relies implicitly on the judgement of medieval critics, especially (here) Muslim.

Here is an example from the early 1960s<sup>29</sup>:

An excellent hadith report. Al-`Aṭṭār is not celebrated for his *isnād* (chain of authorities), but Qabīṣah corroborated his transmission from Sufyān. Al-Tirmidhī brought it out and said, 'a good sound hadith report.'

Al-Tirmidhī has a longer version of this hadith report < Hannād < Qabīṣah < Sufyān, of which he comments *ḥasan* ('good') or, according to one manuscript, *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* ('good and sound').<sup>30</sup>

Here then from the later '60s<sup>31</sup>:

Sound, short of his saying 'above seven heavens.' Thus it is in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and the *Musnad*. As for this addition, Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Tammār alone related it, as in *al-`Ulūw*, 162, saying 'He being *ṣadūq*.' In the *Taqrīb*, he says, '*Ṣadūq*, making mistakes.' I say that from the like of him is not accepted single narration (*tafarrud*), even if the author pronounces it sound. So likewise (says) al-Dhahabī. In affirmation of his (God's) being above are sound hadith reports that make us not need this one.

*Al-`Ulūw* probably refers to a collection of hadith by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348?).<sup>32</sup> For Albānī, again, a medieval critic's evaluation of a traditionist is decisive.

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<sup>28</sup> For attempts to define the criteria of Bukhārī and Muslim, v. Brown, *Canonization*, 162-70. For a test of Ibn Ḥajar's version of Bukhārī's criterion, v. Christopher Melchert, 'Bukhārī and his *Ṣaḥīḥ*', *Le Muséon* 123 (2010): 425-54, at 437-40.

<sup>29</sup> Ismā'īl ibn Ishāq, *Faḍl al-ṣalāh `alā al-nabī*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1383/1963), 8n.

<sup>30</sup> Tirmidhī, *Jāmi`*, *abwāb al-ru'yā* 88, no 2457.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., *Mukhtaṣar sharḥ al-`aqīdah al-ṣaḥāwīyah*, nn. by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Manshūrāt Kulliyat al-dirāsāt al-islāmīyah (Baghdad: Dār al-Nadhīr, 1388/1969), 151n. The commentary here abridged is evidently that of `Alī ibn Abī al-`Izz (d. 792/1390).

<sup>32</sup> Dhahabī, *al-`Ulūw lil-`Alī al-Ghaḥfār fī ṣaḥīḥ al-akḥbār wa-saqīmihā*, ed. `Abd al-Razzāq `Afifī & Zakarīyā' `Alī Yūsuf ('Ābidīn [Cairo]: Maṭba`at Jamā`at Anṣār al-Sunnah, 1938), not seen by me.

Here is Albānī's comment on the well-attested hadith report, 'Do not write from me. Whoever writes anything from him besides the Qur'an, let him erase it': 'This is abrogated by the many hadith reports in which is the command to write Prophet hadith.'<sup>33</sup> There is no attempt here to show that the hadith report in question was inaccurately transmitted; rather, Albānī resorts to the legal concept of abrogation. Elsewhere, he does resort to hadith criticism to discredit another on the topic. Yaḥyá ibn Ja`dah (Hijazi Follower): 'Umar wished the *sunnah* to be written, then he wrote to the people, "Whoever has any of that written, let him erase it." Of this, Albānī says, 'Its *isnād* is interrupted, for Yaḥyá ibn Ja`dah did not meet `Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. They mentioned that he did not meet Ibn Mas`ūd, who died after `Umar by about twenty years.'<sup>34</sup> Two early critics are quoted as saying that Yaḥyá ibn Ja`dah did not meet Ibn Mas`ūd, although 'twenty years' is an odd estimate: `Umar is universally said to have died in 23/644, while Ibn Mas`ūd is said to have died in 32 or 33/ca. 653.<sup>35</sup> Albānī goes on to acknowledge that there was a controversy among the *salaf* over the permissibility of writing hadith (the term expressly indicates an oral report), with permissibility, even obligation, becoming established over time. This seems to be true.<sup>36</sup> I just observe that hadith on the topic going back to Companions and the Prophet seem to an outsider patent back-projections of current opinion, whereas Albānī strongly resists finding back-projection.

Another example: the collection he is evaluating includes the hadith report,

Fasting and the Qur'an will intercede for the servant on the Day of the Resurrection. Fasting will say, 'O Lord, I forbade him food and desires, so make

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<sup>33</sup> Mundhirī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 492 and n. The same hadith report in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-zuhd wa-al-raqā`iq* 16, *bāb al-tathabbut fī al-ḥadīth wa-ḥukm kitābat al-`ilm*, no 3004.

<sup>34</sup> Abu Khaythamah, *K. al-`ilm*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1403/1983), 11 and n.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Ḥajar mentions from two authorities that he did not meet Ibn Mas`ūd, although one of them, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, is not so quoted by his son, the usual source for his criticism: Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* 11:193; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *K. al-Jarḥ wa-al-ta`dīl*, 9 vols (Hyderabad: Jam`iyat Dā`irat al-Ma`ārif al-Uthmānīyah, 1360-71, repr. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-`Arabī, n.d.), 9:133. Mizzī mentions Ibn Mas`ūd among those from whom he related hadīth but no one who questioned this link: *Tahdhīb* al-Kamāl, ed. Bashshār `Awwād Ma`rūf, 35 vols (Beirut: Mu`assasat al-Risālah, 1413/1992), 31:253-4. No such source that I have checked does list `Umar among those from whom Yāḥyá ibn Ja`dah related hadith. For `Umar and Ibn Mas`ūd's dates of death, v. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* 6:28, 7:441.

<sup>36</sup> V. Michael Cook, 'The opponents of the writing of tradition in early Islam', *Arabica* 44 (1997): 437-530.

me an intercessor for him.' The Qur'an will say, 'I forbade him to sleep by night, so make me an intercessor for him.' Then they will be made intercessors.

Al-Mundhirī comments, 'Aḥmad related it, also al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr*. Its men are argued by in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā related it in *Kitāb al-Jū`* and elsewhere with a good *isnād*.

Al-Ḥākim said, "Sound by the criterion of Muslim." In the margin, Albānī comments *ṣaḥīḥ* ('sound').<sup>37</sup> In his note, Albānī first quotes the Egyptian al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621?): 'This saying may be interpreted literally, such that the reward for the two of them is incarnated and God created for them a voice, "God being capable of anything" [Q. 2:284, 3:29, &c.]. It may also be interpreted as a kind of figurative case and allegory.' Albānī then comments,

The first is correct, the one that must be firmly endorsed here and in similar cases of hadith in which works are incarnated; for example, the incarnation of one's treasure as a spotted serpent.<sup>38</sup> There are many others like it. The allegorical interpretation (*ta`wīl*) of such texts as these is not the way of the *salaf* (God be pleased with them); rather, it is the way of the Mu`tazilah and those who followed the way of the *khalaf*. This is one of the things that contradict the first condition of faith, 'those who believe in the unseen' (Q. 2:3). Beware of taking after them, lest you go astray and be hapless. Our refuge is with God (be He exalted).

The assumption here that the *salaf* who disbelieved in allegorical interpretation came earlier than the *khalaf* who accepted it seems likely to be correct, but it would be difficult to prove, since assertions that such hadith reports are to be taken literally could only appear in response to proposals to interpret them figuratively. *Salaf* and *khalaf* practically stand for 'the orthodox' and 'unorthodox', anyway. This seems to be exactly the way the Ḥanbali writer Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393), among others, uses the terms in *Faḍl `ilm al-salaf `alá `ilm al-khalaf*, 'The superiority of the knowledge of the *salaf* to that of the *khalaf*', which warns against theological

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<sup>37</sup> Mundhirī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 411. Aḥmad, *Musnad imām al-muḥaddithīn*. 6 vols (Cairo: al-Maṭba`ah al-Maymanīyah, 1313/1895), 2:174 = *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad*, ed. Shu`ayb al-Arna`ūt, &al., 50 vols (Beirut: Mu`assasat al-Risālah, 1413-21/1993-2001), 11:199-200. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak `alá al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, 4 vols (Hyderabad: Maṭba`at Majlis Dā`irat al-Ma`ārif al-`Uthmānīyah, 1334-42), 1:554. I been unable to locate this hadith report in Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu`jam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī `Abd al-Majīd Salafī, Iḥyā` al-turāth al-Islāmī 31, 25 vols (2nd edn, n.p.: al-Jumhūrīyah al-`Irāqīyah, Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-al-Shu`ūn al-Dīnīyah, 1984-90), likewise in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Jū`*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍānb Yūsuf (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1417/1997).

<sup>38</sup> Someone who withholds payment of the alms tax will have his treasure made into a spotted serpent on the Day of the Resurrection to encircle and bite him. V. among other places Bukhārī, *k. al-zakāh* 3, *bāb ithm māni` al-zakāh*, no 1403, *k. al-tafsīr ad Q. 3:180 and 9:12*, nos 4565 and 4659, and *k. al-ḥiyal* 3, *bāb fī al-zakāh*, no 6957.

discussion and indeed most of the sciences as distracting from what is necessary, mainly knowledge of what is required and forbidden, without attempting to demonstrate that the *salaf* discussed only this.<sup>39</sup>

What I conclude from this survey is that Albānī does not offer new methods of hadith criticism. On the face of it, Albānī seems to have combined reliance on medieval critics to have identified strong and weak traditionists with reliance on multiple lines of transmission to confirm authenticity in difficult cases. This is to stress corroboration, as our medieval critics did. He does not particularly favour early collectors or critics over later. He does not point to the phenomenon of ‘partial common links’ like Juynboll or labour to identify variant wordings with particular transmitters like Motzki and his students.<sup>40</sup> My conclusion is similar to that of Kamaruddin Amin, which he based on a more extensive analysis of a smaller number of hadith reports: that Albānī’s method was thoroughly traditional, with stress on the evaluations of particular traditionists by medieval critics but apparently applied more systematically than by medieval collectors such as Muslim.<sup>41</sup> (The chief weakness of Amin’s analysis, I would say, is his reluctance to acknowledge either that later theories of hadith criticism, as from Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, might not agree perfectly with early practice, or that a collector like Muslim might have been inconsistent.)

#### An example of Albānī’s legal reasoning

Hadith is important to Albānī mainly because it tells us our obligations; that is, because of its implications for Islamic law. He started with a book on women’s veiling that is mostly a collection of what he considers the relevant sound hadith reports, but it is organized to make a systematic argument and every now and then interrupts the series of hadith reports for an

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Faḍl `ilm al-salaf`alá `ilm al-khalaf*, ed. Yahyá Mukhtār Ghazzāwī (n.p.: Dār al-Bashā`ir lil-Malāyīn, 1403/1983).

<sup>40</sup> V. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of canonical ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), ‘General introduction’, esp. xx-ii; Harald Motzki, ‘Dating Muslim traditions: a survey’, *Arabica* 52 (2005): 204-53; Harald Motzki with Nicolet Boeckhoff-van der Voort and Sean Anthony, *Analysing Muslim traditions*, Islamic history and civilization, Studies and texts, 78 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Amin, ‘Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī’, esp. 171-2.

extended legal discussion. I provide here one example of Albānī's legal reasoning. The subject is saluting non-Muslims. Some well-attested hadith discourages saluting them first; for example, from Muslim,<sup>42</sup>

< Qutaybah ibn Sa`īd < `Abd al-Raḥmān (i.e. al-Darāwardī) < Suhayl < his father < Abū Hurayrah < the Messenger of God: 'Do not take the initiative in saluting the Jews and Nazarenes. When you meet one of them on the road, force him onto its narrowest part.' Variants come < Muḥammad ibn al-Muthanná < Muḥammad ibn Ja`far < Shu`bah; < Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shaybah and Abū Kurayb < Wakī < Sufyān; < Zuhayr ibn Ḥarb < Jarīr, all of them < Suhayl with this *isnād*. In Wakī's version, 'When you meet the Jews.' In Ibn Ja`far's version < Shu`bah concerning the People of the Book. In Jarīr's version, 'When you meet them' without naming the polytheists.

Very typically, Muslim presents several alternative *isnāds* one after another, so that we can see the evidence for ourselves. Albānī says,<sup>43</sup>

It is established by these reports that saluting a *kitābī* first is not permitted at all, whether on the way, in a house, or elsewhere. If it is asked, 'Is it permissible to say first something other than saluting, such as saying "How are you this morning?" or "This evening?" or "How are you?" and the like of that, then I say: what appears to me (and God knows better) is permissibility, for the prohibition mentioned in the hadith report is only the salutation. . . .

What is intended is only the Islamic salutation that includes the name of God (mighty and glorious is he), as in his saying . . . 'Peace is one of the names of God that he put on the earth, so spread peace amongst you . . . ' Ibn Mas`ūd permitted saluting them first with a gesture, for it is not the salutation peculiar to the Muslims. Likewise they may be saluted by such words as we have mentioned.

As for what has been brought up in some of the books of the Ḥanābilah such as *al-Dalīl*, that it is also forbidden to say first to them the like of 'How are you this morning?' or 'this evening?' or 'how are you?' or 'what is your condition?' I know of no evidence from the *sunnah*. Rather, he declares in his commentary *Manār al-sabīl* that it is by analogy with the salutation. I say it cannot be concealed that it is an analogy despite a difference; that 'peace' is a distinction that does not come up in the mentioned expressions. God knows best.

Albānī does permit *wa-`alaykum al-salām* in reply, pointing to the hadith report commanding a like or better reply.

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<sup>42</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-salām* 4, *bāb al-nahy `an ibtidā' ahl al-kitāb bi-al-salām*, no 2167.

<sup>43</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah wa-shay' min fiqhīhā wa-fawā'idihā*, 6 vols in 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma`ārif, 1415-17/1995-6), 2:320-1.

The first thing that strikes me about this discussion is how traditional it seems. The argument is about the operation of analogy, a normal recourse in the jurisprudence of the schools. Classically, analogy is a means to extend the rulings of Qur'an and hadith. To see whether two cases are analogous, one looks for a common *'illah*. A standard example is date wine. The Qur'an forbids *khamr*, meaning grape wine. For a time, a party of Muslim jurists held out for *nabīdh*, date wine, on the ground that it was not *khamr* and therefore not forbidden. Hadith could be found on both sides. The argument that won the day was that *khamr* was forbidden because of its property of intoxicating, hence *nabīdh* also was forbidden, since it shared this property (their common *'illah*). Albānī argues that saying *al-salāmu 'alaykum* to non-Muslims is forbidden because *al-salām*, one of the names of God, is reserved for Muslims. Saying 'How are you this morning?' does not have the property of including this word; therefore, it must be permissible. It seems as though it should have been easy to argue the other way around: that putting non-Muslims in their proper, subordinate place is the common property [of] neither saluting them nor offering them other pleasantries. But this apparent opportunism is a prominent feature of traditional Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>44</sup>

Also notable is Albānī's arguing against a 20th-century Ḥanbali commentary on a 17th-century Ḥanbali epitome (*Manār al-sabīl* and *al-Dalīl*, respectively<sup>45</sup>). This also seems remarkably traditional. He has learnt Islamic law as it was expounded by the generation before him. He has not leapt back to the High Middle Ages, as to Ibn Qudāmah, nor even the Early Middle Ages, as to al-Shāfi'ī. Rather, again, he apparently puts himself at the near end of a long tradition.

### Conclusion.

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<sup>44</sup> V. now Behnam Sadeghi, *The logic of law making in Islam*, Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḍūyān (d. 1353/1934-5), *Manār al-sabīl fī sharḥ al-Dalīl*, 2 vols. (n.p.: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1378), a commentary on Mar'ī al-Karmī (d. Cairo, 1033/1623-4?), *Dalīl al-ṭālib li-nayl al-maṭālib* (many editions).

Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī turns out to be more a traditionalist than an innovator. He is willing to cast out hadith from revered collections, but with notable reluctance when it comes to Bukhārī and Muslim, the most revered of all. He often goes to lengths to defend hadith in the revered collections with obvious defects in their *isnāds*. His inconsistency is itself fairly traditional. Likewise his legal reasoning: it turns out that hadith do not provide an obvious answer to every question, so he resorts to analogy, just as medieval jurists did (and not, as pre-classical jurists did, to Companion and Follower opinions, even though his professed theory of Salafism seems to allow it). Like those medieval jurists, he purports to control the operation of analogy so as to stay loyal to revelation, not presuming to arrive at norms by reason; yet, like them, he often gives the appearance of actually starting with desirable rules, then finding ways to justify them from revelation.

Willy-nilly, Albānī does seem to have provoked progress in hadith studies by Muslims. In Europe and North America, the authenticity question has tended to dominate hadith studies.<sup>46</sup> Among the very few writers about the Islamic tradition of hadith criticism, James Robson was typical in stressing the definitions of terms such as *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan* and categories of men such as *thiqah* and *ṣadūq*.<sup>47</sup> The same emphasis on terminology and upright transmitters pervades accounts by Muslims.<sup>48</sup> It was thought that sound hadith reports were such as had only upright men in their *isnāds*. Albānī similarly looks first to terms such as *ṣaḥīḥ* and categories of men but approximates the actual earliest method when he says that a formally defective hadith report is strengthened by parallels, although he does not stress particular links in need of corroboration.

When I started to read modern hadith scholarship in Arabic, it seemed as though it was all stuck in the same rut as Robson and others, relying heavily on later synthetic treatments by

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<sup>46</sup>Two good surveys of the controversy are Harald Motzki, *The origins of Islamic jurisprudence*, trans. Marion H. Katz, Islamic history and civilization, studies and texts 41 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), chap. 1, and Herbert Berg, *The development of exegesis in early Islam*, Curzon studies in the Qur'ān (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), chap. 2.

<sup>47</sup>E.g. *The encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn, s.v. 'ḥadīth', by J. Robson.

<sup>48</sup>E.g. Muhammad Zubair Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth literature: its origin, development and special features*, ed. & rev. Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

writers like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, scarcely paying attention to what the important early collectors wrote. For example, I recall a book by two professors at the University of Kuwait, `Abd al-Razzāq ibn Khalīfah al-Shāyājī and al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sayyid Nūḥ about hadith transmission by paraphrase (*al-riwāyah bi-al-ma`nā*).<sup>49</sup> The authors review in chronological order arguments allowing traditionists to paraphrase, then in chronological order arguments forbidding paraphrase in favor of verbatim transmission alone, drawing mainly on a handbook by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī.<sup>50</sup> The authors add their own hypothetical rebuttals to the major arguments in favour of paraphrase. Their final conclusion is that the Companions were too careful about exact transmission, too skilled at memorization, for similar but distinct wordings credited to different Companions to reflect anything but hearing from the Prophet on different occasions, so that the differences in wording go back all the way to the Prophet himself. As for the transmission of hadith after the Companions, widespread and early written transmission of hadith must have meant that in practice, only rarely, as for long stories, would traditionists resort to paraphrase, even those traditionists such as Sufyān al-Thawrī who argued strongly that paraphrase was permissible. Their interpretation is clearly driven heavily by dogmatic certainty that Sunnis know what the Prophet said, uninformed by examination of actual collections of hadith.

Perhaps a fairer test is something by a more industrious researcher, Zuhayr `Uthmān `Alī Nūr, a study of a tenth-century biographical dictionary of weak traditionists.<sup>51</sup> He directly compares a number of works on weak traditionists and supplies many interesting figures. However, he tends to assume that later writers always understood exactly what earlier writers had meant. For example, his discussion of the term *munkar* ('disreputable') includes many

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<sup>49</sup> `Abd al-Razzāq ibn Khalīfah al-Shāyājī and al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sayyid Nūḥ, *Manāhij al-muḥaddithīn fī riwāyat al-ḥadīth bi-al-ma`nā* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1419/1998).

<sup>50</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *K. al-Kifāyah fī `ilm al-riwāyah* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma`ārif al-`Uthmānīyah, 1357).

<sup>51</sup> Zuhayr `Uthmān `Alī Nūr, *Ibn `Adī wa-manhajuhu fī kitāb al-Kāmil fī ḍu`afā' al-rijāl*, 2 vols (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd & Sharikat al-Riyāḍ, 1418/1997), originally a 1990 doctoral dissertation at the University of Umm al-Qurā, Mecca.

interesting quotations, but he explains Bukhārī's use of it by quoting someone else from over a century later, not (failing an explanation by Bukhārī himself) by deduction from where Bukhārī applies it. Contrast Eerik Dickinson's concern to identify changing usage over time.<sup>52</sup>

Recently, however, more imaginative treatments have begun to appear; for example, surveys of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's *rijāl* criticism from Bashīr `Alī `Umar and Abū Bakr ibn Laṭīf Kāfī, both of whom try to make out how he assessed hadith directly from the earliest Ḥanbali literature, not later synthetic treatments, and both of whom stress the comparison of *isnāds*.<sup>53</sup> Neither `Umar nor Kāfī is so fully free from the influence of later developments in hadith study as I should like. For example, `Umar is justified in investigating Aḥmad's attention to who had actually met whom, but he frames it in terms of whether Aḥmad shared Bukhārī's criterion or Muslim's, as identified (dubiously, I would say) long after their deaths. (It appears that Aḥmad was inconsistent about accepting or rejecting hadith by the criterion of whether some link in the *isnād* could or could not be shown to come of a face-to-face encounter.) Kāfī spends a great deal of time trying to figure out the precise definitions of various terms that Aḥmad used to characterize hadith reports and their transmitters (e.g. *munkar* and *lā yathbut*), obviously starting from the list of technical terms that is so prominent in later exposés of hadith criticism rather than from categories strongly suggested by quotations of Aḥmad. (Both `Umar and Kāfī conclude, sensibly, that Aḥmad's terminology was loose with much overlapping.) Still, both are extraordinarily good, since they overwhelmingly reconstruct Aḥmad's method from ninth-century sources. In the context of the present study, most important is Kāfī's stress on *isnād* comparison as the fundamental technique of the early hadith critics<sup>54</sup>:

Yes, the *`illah* is a hidden matter but the way to realizing it is not to investigate the conditions of the narrators only, for the conditions of the narrators are in

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<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Introduction*, 59fn.

<sup>53</sup> Bashīr `Alī `Umar, *Manhaj al-imām Aḥmad fī `lāl al-ḥadīth*, Silsilat al-iṣḍārāt al-`ilmīyah 2, 2 vols (Riyadh: Waqf al-Salām al-Khayrī, 1425/2005); Abū Bakr ibn Laṭīf Kāfī, *Manhaj al-imām Aḥmad fī al-ta`līl wa-atharuhu fī al-jarḥ wa-al-ta`dīl*, sup'd Muḥammad `Abd al-Nabī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1426/2005), originally a doctoral dissertation at Jāmi`at al-Amīr `Abd al-Qādir, Constantine, Algeria.

<sup>54</sup> Kāfī, *Manhaj*, 155.

actuality (known) as a result of the investigation of what they relate. A narrator's being *a liar* or *suspect* or *left* is verified only as a result of probing his narrations and comparing them with those of others.

Partly stimulated by polemics against Albānī and his followers, who simplistically look up evaluations of men in references like Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Taḥdhīb*, these new studies point out how characterizations of men in late compilations such as Ibn Ḥajar's are the end product of much *isnād* comparison, not the original basis for evaluating hadith. Albānī's reliance on *isnād* comparison seldom goes beyond piling up alternatives, the more that can be found, the better for the reliability of whatever quotation of the Prophet is in question. Ninth-century scholars actually had somewhat more subtle methods than his, and Muslim scholars have recently been rediscovering them, in part because of Albānī's prodding.