

## A Critique of Salafī Contributions to the Science of Ḥadīth

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### Abstract

*This article attempts to highlight many of the weaknesses, inconsistencies, and contradictions found in the methods of key Salafī figures in the field of ḥadīth. First, despite his lofty status amongst many of his followers as being the standard of authenticity in the field of ḥadīth, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) based his ḥadīth grading methodology on a number of faulty approaches, such as relying on oversimplified biographical dictionaries for narrators and giving far little attention to the last two negative conditions (i.e., absence of anomalies and hidden defects) of authenticity. The relative disregard of these two conditions would actually cause al-Albānī to fall into some serious contradictions. Second, the approach of some Salafī figures in their use of Prophetic traditions for legal reasoning is just as problematic. The Saudi scholar Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ b. al-‘Uthaymīn (d. 2001) in theory rejected the citation or use of weak ḥadīths for deducing legal rulings. However, he occasionally violated his own principle, citing weak reports from the Sunan of al-Dāraqūṭnī to justify his legal positions or to refute opposing views. The upshot of the research article is that leading Salafī approaches in the science of ḥadīth are not logically consistent and are marred with a number of contradictions that are in need of further study.*

### Keywords

al-Albānī, al-‘Uthaymīn, Salafī approaches, ḥadīth criticism, weak ḥadīth.

### Introduction

The Salafī movement represents a radical intellectual current concerned with restoring the authenticity and purity of the original Islamic teachings found in the age of the Prophet (peace be on him) and his companions. For them, the question has been less about resisting or challenging Western modernity, but instead taking issue with traditional

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Islam's<sup>1</sup> claim to being the source of authentic Islamic teachings. According to Salafīs, the blind following of legal schools of thought (*madhhabs*), engagement with scholastic theology, enlistment in Sufi orders, and other characteristics of traditional Muslim societies are innovated practices introduced in later centuries, hence antithetical to the pure doctrines of the Prophet.<sup>2</sup> Yearning for a return to the untainted and pristine state of affairs found in the first three generations of the religion of Islam, Salafī scholars attempt to resuscitate Islam's original teachings by expunging them from any traditional excess that was potentially added afterwards. The ultimate objective then is to identify and apply the direct teachings of the Prophet without the intermediation or assistance of schools of thought.<sup>3</sup> This anti-traditionalist project would hold a number of consequences in almost all the Islamic fields and sciences. Two fields which Salafīs have influenced and greatly reconstructed are the sciences of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Unsatisfied with the past traditional corpus of religious rulings and opinions (*aḥkām*) accumulated over centuries in *fiqh* manuals, they instead insist on the need to revisit these tenets and evaluate whether or not they are backed by evidence and can withstand critical scrutiny. Even in the field of *ḥadīth*, deference was not given to the gradings of past critics, with the need for the reevaluation of Prophetic reports emphasized instead.<sup>4</sup>

Two figures that stand out in the Salafī project of reconstruction in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* are the revered scholars Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) and Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ b. al-'Uthaymīn (d. 2001). While choosing al-Albānī for the purposes of this paper is understandably clear, the inclusion of al-'Uthaymīn is also justified since

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<sup>1</sup> Despite of not being free of conceptual problems, traditional Islam is understood to refer to the orthodox current of Islamic thought, which stresses the need for following classical scholars of Islam, respecting and deferring to their areas of consensus, acquiring knowledge through their works, and vilifying modernist trends, which seek to undermine religious hierarchies. See Kasper Mathiesen, "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 13 (2013): 191–219.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of the antecedents and pillars of the Salafī movement, see Suleiman Mourad, *The Mosaic of Islam: A Conversation with Perry Anderson* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2016), 67–137; Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafī Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 33–56.

<sup>3</sup> Joas Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 31–32.

<sup>4</sup> For a lengthy discussion on how Salafī thought has affected the various Islamic sciences, especially *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, see Aḥmad Sālim and 'Amr Basyūnī, *Mā ba'd al-Salafiyyah* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Namā, 2015), 262–407.

in terms of teaching the Islamic sciences as a whole (especially *fiqh*), he was arguably the most productive and noteworthy figure in the Salafī movement.<sup>5</sup> In separate but intertwined projects, they set out to transform the status quo of the two fields. Although he dedicated a significant amount of his work in engaging with legal issues, al-Albānī primarily focused on reviving the field of *ḥadīth*. He undertook a vigorous and exhaustive programme of examining and grading the corpus of Prophetic sayings and actions. Furthermore, he separated authentic reports from weak ones, thus allowing readers to easily recognize the verified words of the Prophet. This type of division was central to the Albanian scholar, since in his view only authentic textual proofs could be a basis for formulating rulings.<sup>6</sup> Even some reports in the canonical collections, like the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875), were not spared of criticism.<sup>7</sup> On the front of Islamic law, al-‘Uthaymīn largely disagreed with the official views of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* and offered alternative opinions instead.<sup>8</sup> Instead of deferring to the popular views expressed in the *madhhab* that once dominated his native land of Saudi Arabia, al-‘Uthaymīn would often discard them, in many cases preferring instead the views of the reformer Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328).<sup>9</sup> Unless the *madhhab*’s opinion passed the test of his own critical scrutiny and contained compelling authentic evidences (often of the textual type), al-‘Uthaymīn would reject it.

It cannot be denied that the work of these two figures has contributed to the development of a largely anti-traditionalist and nonconformist current of thought, which is critical of past opinions. These new currents often collide with olden views regarding a given *ḥadīth*’s authenticity or the veracity of a *madhhab*’s official opinion. But there has to be a study on whether or not many of these new contributions are actually logically consistent. A careful evaluation of the writings of these two great pioneers of the Salafī movement in fact yields a number of disturbing findings and even contradictions that put the value of this work into serious question. With regard to contributions to the field of *ḥadīth*, I will attempt to demonstrate that al-

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<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, 338–39.

<sup>6</sup> For an explication of al-Albānī’s views with reference to the use of weak *ḥadīths* and how it contrasts with past opinions, see Jonathan Brown, “Even If It’s Not True It’s True: Using Unreliable Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam,” *Islamic Law and Society*, 18 (2011): 41–44.

<sup>7</sup> Kamaruddin Amin, “Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī on Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*: A Critical Study of His Method,” *Islamic Law and Society*, 11 (2004): 149–176.

<sup>8</sup> Sālim and Basyūnī, *Mā ba’d al-Salafīyyah*, 337–8.

<sup>9</sup> See Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 165–68.

Albānī exceedingly relied on simple biographical sources and unsubstantiated abstract principles in formulating his gradings. These errors or oversights in methodology led to many mistaken or farfetched rulings, not to mention opinions that opposed the letter and spirit of the science of *ḥadīth*. While it is true that criticisms against al-Albānī are nothing new, the first-generation critics of al-Albānī often came from an anti-Salafī and sectarian background.<sup>10</sup> The criticisms that will be evaluated in this essay largely come from figures and individuals who are neutral to or express sympathies to the Salafī movement. Owing to the sectarian impulses behind many of these first-wave critiques, I have intentionally ignored almost all of them and instead referred to newer arguments, which are more intricately tied to the science of *ḥadīth*. This means that a whole new host of arguments and points will be provided in this essay. Likewise, in this paper it will be revealed that despite taking a hard-line approach in theory against the use of weak *ḥadīths* as a source of legal rulings, al-‘Uthaymīn actually in practice occasionally relies on them to justify his views or challenge opposing opinions. This becomes quite apparent after his recurrent citation of weak reports from the *Sunan* of al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) is carefully scrutinized. The key upshot of this essay is that many of the views of these key pioneering figures of the Salafī movement might not actually rest on a firm and consistent methodology. Furthermore, it will be argued that the invocation of weak *ḥadīths* in these particular issues is not compelling. The issue then is not just concerning inconsistency, but incorrect application as well. For instance, al-‘Uthaymīn sometimes cites extremely weak reports to back his opinions, which according to his own standards should be inadmissible as evidence for establishing legal rulings.

### Conceptual and Practical Limitations in al-Albānī’s Grading Methodology

Widely celebrated by Salafīs as being the *ḥadīth* scholar of the previous century, al-Albānī has become the primary reference for ascertaining the authenticity of reports attributed to the Prophet. What reveals this widespread deference to the scholar is the honorary label “*ḥadīth* scholar

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<sup>10</sup> For example, see Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī, *Al-Albānī: Shudhūdhuhu wa Akḥṭā’uh* (Kuwait: Maktabat Dār al-‘Urūbah, 1984); ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, *Kalimāt fī Kashf Abāṭil wa Iftirā’āt* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyyah, 1990); Maḥmūd Sa‘īd al-Mamdūḥ, *Tanbīh al-Muslim ilā Ta‘addī ‘l-Albānī ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, 1408/1988).

of the epoch” (*muḥaddith al-‘aṣr*) that he was often entitled with.<sup>11</sup> It is no question that he was one of the main figures of the twentieth century who revived interest in ḥadīth authentication and verification.<sup>12</sup> As al-‘Uthaymīn argues, concern for the authentication of ḥadīths sharply diminished after the formation and crystallization of the main schools of thought. Instead of being concerned about verifying the evidences for the views found in their schools, scholars in the past few centuries took the authoritativeness of their school’s positions as established facts.<sup>13</sup> Many of these opinions might have been based on weak or fabricated reports, but the presumed validity of the canonical schools created an atmosphere of firm deference. For him, scholars had to emerge in order to free the *Ummah* from these vicious cycles by going back to the original sources to see if these opinions were actually backed by durable evidences. By doing so, there could be a revisitation of these opinions by bringing the question of authenticity back at the forefront. Al-Albānī is perceived to have been the scholar who addressed these grievances in a revolutionary manner by reviving the disregarded science of ḥadīth as an independent and impartial researcher. Having graded thousands of reports and Prophetic sayings, which he exhaustively verified and commented on by referring to past biographical entries, it is indeed a difficult task to find a report which al-Albānī has not graded. In fact, the presumed validity of al-Albānī’s method of verification of ḥadīths has led many Salafī scholars to simply rely on his gradings and create legal manuals based on the ḥadīths he authenticated.<sup>14</sup> Yasir Qadhi argues that al-Albānī raised the standards of the field by centralizing the importance of ḥadīth authentication. His legacy has been so decisive that even traditionalist scholars who disagree with al-Albānī and Salafīs generally have to pay greater heed to the quality of evidence they cite to back their positions.<sup>15</sup>

However, despite the sheer volume of Prophetic reports that he graded, there exist a number of significant problems with al-Albānī’s

<sup>11</sup> Samīr b. Amīn al-Zuhayrī, *Muḥaddith al-‘Aṣr: Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī, 1421/2000); Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-‘Alī, *Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī: Muḥaddith al-‘Aṣr wa Nāṣir al-Sunnah* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1422/2001).

<sup>12</sup> See Sālīm and Basyūnī, *Mā ba’d al-Salafīyyah*, 278.

<sup>13</sup> Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. al-‘Uthaymīn, *Fatḥh Dhī ‘l-Jalāl wa ‘l-Ikrām bi Sharḥ Bulūgh al-Marām*, 15 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1425/2004), 1:20.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include ‘Abd al-‘Azīm Badawī, *al-Wajīz fī Fiqh al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*, 3rd ed. (Damietta: Dār Ibn Rajab, 1421/2001); Muḥammad Ṣubḥī Ḥallāq, *al-Lubāb fī Fiqh al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Kitāb* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tābi‘īn, 1423/2007).

<sup>15</sup> Yasir Qadhi, “On Salafi Islam,” *MuslimMatters*, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/>.

grading methodology, which significantly undermine the value of his work. This puts a large corpus of his *ḥadīth* scholarship into question. First and foremost, for evaluating the status of narrators in a report's chain, he largely relied on the summarized remarks of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) concerning narrators from his work entitled *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* and often overlooked the evaluations of earlier critics.<sup>16</sup> This work gives short, simplified, and condensed verdicts for every narrator, often leaving out crucial details and provisos found in larger biographical works, such as Ibn Ḥajar's *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* or *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* by al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341).<sup>17</sup> Although *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* is a helpful reference to provide a researcher a quick assessment for a given narrator, it is not comprehensive enough for the scholar who seeks to provide a verdict on a *ḥadīth*'s authenticity.<sup>18</sup> This is because these short verdicts leave out important details concerning a narrator that may be pivotal in a given report. Because many of these remarks or comments are not exacting, some scholars have sought to issue corrections or amendments to the original work. One modest attempt can be found in the efforts of Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ and Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf in their thorough revision of the work, entitled *Tahrīr Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*. In this work, the two *ḥadīth* scholars warn researchers of sufficing with the one-line verdicts of Ibn Ḥajar. They convincingly argue that Ibn Ḥajar's work does not appear to be fully edited and revised; the author would often contradict himself by giving a reporter one assessment in *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, only to then say something else about them in another of his works.<sup>19</sup> This could then be read as implying that some of Ibn Ḥajar's verdicts were actually inconclusive and issued without firm certainty.

Unfortunately, al-Albānī's heavy reliance on the concise work would mean that he would overlook many of the nuances and stipulations concerning certain narrators, such as the controversial Egyptian judge Ibn Lahī'ah (d. 174/790).<sup>20</sup> Even more problematic is that by largely restricting himself to *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, al-Albānī simply relied on

<sup>16</sup> For a critique and troubling example of this common habit, see Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Idlibī, *Kashf al-Ma'lūl mim mā Summiya bi Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Amman: Dār al-Faṭḥ, 1432/2011), 150.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Muḥammad 'Awwāmah, *Athar al-Ḥadīth al-Sharīf fī Ikhtilāf al-A'imma al-Fuqahā'* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1997), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ and Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf, *Tahrīr Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1417/1997), 1:15. This work itself, however, is not free of criticism. See Māhir Yāsīn al-Faḥl, *Kashf al-Ṭhām limā taḍammanahu Tahrīr al-Taqrīb min al-Awhām* (Riyadh: al-Mīmān, 1427/2006).

<sup>20</sup> See al-Idlibī, *Kashf al-Ma'lūl*, 158–60.

Ibn Ḥajar's evaluation of narrators to grade *ḥadīths*. This rails heavily against his assertion that in his grading methodology he does not blindly follow anyone in formulating his conclusions.<sup>21</sup> To earn the label of impartiality and independence, he could have relied on larger references to weigh and compare the verdicts of multiple critics on a given narrator before formulating his own conclusion. Furthermore, even when basing himself on this shorter work, al-Albānī failed in being precise in his use of evaluative remarks with reference to narrators. In particular, al-Idlibī finds fault in al-Albānī's habit of simplifying his assessments on some chains. For example, if a *ḥadīth* chain mostly contained highly trustworthy narrators (who are labelled as *thiqah*) and a single or few acceptable narrators that sometimes missed the mark or were weak, al-Albānī would simply claim that all of the chain's narrators are highly trustworthy. This would be done without any differentiation or distinction made between the different qualities of narrators in the chain.<sup>22</sup>

The problems with al-Albānī's contribution to the science of *ḥadīth* become more pronounced once we realize that he sometimes misunderstands certain terms in the field.<sup>23</sup> For example, he seems to have difficulty in understanding why certain scholars weakened the controversial *ḥadīth* that prohibits fasting on Saturdays.<sup>24</sup> The famous early scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), for instance, criticized the report by calling it a *Ḥimṣī ḥadīth*,<sup>25</sup> the label *Ḥimṣī* being an adjectival suffix referring to the Syrian city in which the *ḥadīth*'s narrators were predominantly based. Al-Zuhrī's statement from its face value was understood to mean that he weakened the report and did not consider it worthy of narrating.<sup>26</sup> Al-Albānī found this verdict unacceptable and strongly objected by saying, "This is a strange form of criticism from an *imām* like Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī on an authentic *ḥadīth* coming from the

<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Tamām al-Minnah fī al-Ta'līq 'alā Fiqh al-Sunnah*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāyah, 1988), 254.

<sup>22</sup> See al-Idlibī, *Kashf al-Ma'lūl*, 7, 100.

<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, only two examples concerning the misuse of nomenclature could be discussed in the paper. Other notable examples can be found in Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr's note in Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1406/1986), 104; 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, *Itqān al-Ṣun'ah fī Taḥqīq Ma'nā 'l-Bid'ah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhirah, 1426/2005), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṣawm, Bāb al-nahy an yukhaṣṣa yawm al-Jumu'ah bi ṣawm.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Ma'ānī 'l-Āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhrī al-Najjār, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996), 2:81.

trustworthy!”<sup>27</sup> He further accused al-Zuhrī of introducing an innovated form of criticism (*naqd muḥdath*); disparagement is never directed to the land of the narrators since this does not impair their narrating capabilities in any way.<sup>28</sup> Yet, it appears that no one before al-Albānī read al-Zuhrī’s statement in this manner, let alone criticize it with such a reply. Instead, it was always conventionally cited by scholars as a key piece of evidence to show that early critics did not consider this report authentic, with its meaning being fairly evident. A *ḥadīth* scholar, Māhir al-Faḥl, has effectively responded to al-Albānī’s criticisms of al-Zuhrī and explained why there is essentially nothing wrong with al-Zuhrī’s expression. Al-Albānī oddly misunderstood al-Zuhrī as weakening the *ḥadīth* simply because of it being based in a certain geographical area. This is actually a serious misunderstanding. Rather, al-Zuhrī weakened the *ḥadīth* because of its isolation (*tafarrud*), such that only the narrators of the city of Ḥimṣ reported it. Although this isolation by itself is not sufficient to weaken the report, according to al-Faḥl it implicitly points to the report’s rejection owing to two central factors. First, Ḥimṣ was not a major city of knowledge, as opposed to the main central areas of learning. The fact that only a relatively small city was alone in narrating this report is a strong indication that it may be a mistake. Second, this report did not enjoy any circulation in any other cities, indicating that from early on it was deemed rejected.<sup>29</sup> In short, this is a *ḥadīth* proscribing an important act of worship on a certain day. Had it been an authentic report, it would have enjoyed widespread circulation owing to its significant legal repercussions. Quite to the contrary, it was widely ignored or deemed trivial by several leading jurists in addition to al-Zuhrī, such as al-Awzā’ī (d. 157/774), Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), and others.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, several terms and concepts in the *ḥadīth* sciences are polysemous, which means that they have two or more meanings at the same time. Subsequently, the researcher must be aware of all the potential meanings that a certain concept may have, and pick the most appropriate interpretation given the context. Unfortunately, al-Albānī in many occasions failed to identify the intended meaning within the

<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 8 vols. (Kuwait: Mu’assasat al-Ghirās, 1423/2002), 7:182.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:183.

<sup>29</sup> Māhir al-Faḥl, *al-Jāmi’ fī ’l-’Ilal wa ’l-fawā’id*, 5 vols. (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1431/2010), 2:277.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:261-74. Other criticisms have been levelled against al-Albānī concerning his authentication of this *ḥadīth* in Aḥmad al-Khalīl, *Mustadrak al-Ta’līl ‘alā Irwā’ al-Ghalīl* (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1429/2008), 401–06.



background it was used and subsequently fell into mistakes. For instance, with regard to narrators, the label *munkar al-ḥadīth* was used by several past critics to indicate that a person opposed other narrators who were more trustworthy than them. Whether this narrator was trustworthy or not, if they opposed a narrator of higher calibre or credibility, their narrations were labelled as *munkar*. This usage of *munkar* as referring to the narration which contradicts the narrations of those more trustworthy became popular among later scholars, who would use the term mostly to refer to a weak *ḥadīth* whose meaning runs counter to an authentic one.<sup>31</sup> But the term *munkar al-ḥadīth* was not exclusively used with this meaning of opposing or contradicting those who were more trustworthy. In fact, amongst early *ḥadīth* critics, the term actually had no settled and consistent meaning. As the contemporary scholar al-Ghumārī states, the concept of *al-nakārah* amongst the early *ḥadīth* scholars had no delineated definition and no determinable principle or standard, which could be relied on to identify cases of it.<sup>32</sup> Thus, when evaluating the words of early *ḥadīth* critics, one must keep the multiple meanings intended by this term. This is especially the case when one of the prevalent usages of the term had a neutral meaning attached to it with reference to a narrator's credibility, as was notably found among early scholars like al-Bardījī (d. 301/914).<sup>33</sup> Oftentimes, this term was invoked to simply mean that the narrator in question had a number of isolated narrations (*mujarrad al-tafarrud*), which were not supported by other reporters. This latter meaning was used even if the narrator in question was generally trustworthy and had no other existing problems.<sup>34</sup> Besides al-Bardījī, Ibn Rajab mentioned that other critics like Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/813) also used the term *munkar* in this rather benign sense.<sup>35</sup>

The importance of being aware of the varying meanings attached to the term *munkar* becomes clear once we consider al-Albānī's incorrect reading of it for a certain narrator. In his work discussing the number of

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Nuzhat al-Nazar fī Tawdīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Karachi: Maktabat al-Bushrā, 1432/2011), 67; Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, *Manhaj al-Naqd fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1399/1979), 114.

<sup>32</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, *Dar' al-Ḍa'f 'alā Ḥadīth Man 'Ashiqa fa 'Aff* (Cairo: Dār al-Imām al-Tirmidhī, 1416/1996), 35.

<sup>33</sup> See Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī, *Qaḍā' al-Waṭar fī Nuzhat al-Nazar*, ed. Shādī b. Muḥammad b. Sālim, 3 vols. (Amman: al-Dār al-Athariyyah, 1431/2010), 2:856–57.

<sup>34</sup> See Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Nukat 'alā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, ed. Rabī b. Hādī 'Umayr, 2 vols. (Medina: al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, 1404/1984), 2:674.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Mallāḥ, 1398/1978), 1:243.

units that should be performed for the Ramaḍān night prayers (*tarāwīh*), al-Albānī weakened the famous report that the people used to perform the *tarāwīh* prayer as twenty units during the time of the rule of ‘Umar.<sup>36</sup> One of the main pieces of evidence, which al-Albānī invoked for justifying his claim of weakness is that the chain of this report contains Yazīd b. Khuṣayfah, regarding whom the eminent critic Ibn Ḥanbal allegedly said, “*munkar al-ḥadīth*.”<sup>37</sup> In al-Albānī’s view, this statement presents a damaging verdict on Yazīd’s receptive capacities, since it implies that his narrations are unacceptable if he opposes others that are more trustworthy than him.<sup>38</sup> But in fact, al-Albānī’s inference from this statement is problematic, since Ibn Ḥanbal himself firmly stated in another narration from him that Yazīd was trustworthy (*thiqah*).<sup>39</sup> One way in resolving the apparent tension between these two statements from Ibn Ḥanbal regarding Yazīd is that the first statement actually holds no critical element to it. For as al-Anṣārī indicated in his critique of al-Albānī, Ibn Ḥanbal was known to use this term simply to indicate that this narrator had some isolated reports, which were not backed by their peers.<sup>40</sup> There is no negative value judgement to be inferred from this statement with reference to this narrator’s credibility or memory. Furthermore, mere isolation—unlike contradicting others—is not a fault or a problem as long as the narrator is trustworthy and has excellent receptive qualities, both of which are features found in Yazīd.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps one of the most serious issues in the *ḥadīth* authentication efforts of al-Albānī is his relative failure to take into account the last two conditions of an authentic report, both of which are negative stipulations. These are the requirements that in order for a report to be deemed sound, it must be free of any anomalies (*shudhūdh*) or hidden defects (*‘ilal*). The presence of any of the two suffices in discarding a report and labelling it as unsound. An anomalous report is that which an acceptable narrator reports in opposition to others who are more

<sup>36</sup> Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Ṣalāt al-Tarāwīh* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1405/1985), 49–50.

<sup>37</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf, 35 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1403/1983), 32:173. Ma’rūf himself doubts that Ibn Ḥanbal actually made this verdict concerning Yazīd and believes that it is likely to be a mistake.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Albānī, *Ṣalāt al-Tarāwīh*, 49–50.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 32:173.

<sup>40</sup> Ismā‘īl al-Anṣārī, *Taṣḥīḥ Ṣalāt al-Tarāwīh ‘Ishrīn Rak’ah wa ‘l-Radd ‘alā ‘l-Albānī fī Taḍ‘īfih* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, 1408/1988), 13–15.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Itr, *Manhaj al-Naqd*, 114.

reliable than them, either in terms of number or retention.<sup>42</sup> Here the redaction of the single narrator is rejected, since there is a strong likelihood that their report is an error. Unfortunately, al-Albānī many times accepted and applied principles, which inadvertently caused him to actually authenticate narrations that were anomalous. For instance, one may consider his opinion on the additional expressions included by a lone trustworthy narrator in their version of a report (*ziyādat al-thiqah*). This occurs when a group of narrators all report a common ḥadīth with the identical chain, but one of these reporters includes additional statements in their version, which are left out by everyone else.<sup>43</sup> Even if all the other narrators in their redactions of the report omitted this addition, al-Albānī would still accept the addition (*ziyādah*) of this single narrator as long as this extra wording did not contradict the original. He had no issue authenticating longer versions of these reports, arguing that since the narrator of this particular redaction was trustworthy, their addition should be accepted even if no one else supports them in that. The obvious problem with this reasoning is that if a single narrator adds something that most of their contemporaries left out or discounted, there are strong grounds in believing that a mistake has been committed. This is especially true if this lone reporter is opposed by several of their proficient peers by excluding this additional wording.<sup>44</sup> A good example of this may be found in the reports concerning what one does during the sitting session for the daily prayers (*tashahhud*). Although almost all ḥadīths on this topic say that one should point with their right index finger, one particular redaction from a trustworthy narrator (Zā'idah b. Qudāmah) in his version says that one should motion with this finger instead throughout the sitting.<sup>45</sup> The issue is that this particular addition of moving was left out by more than a dozen other narrators, all of whom in their redactions from the same teacher ('Āṣim b. Kulayb) only mentioned pointing.<sup>46</sup> Al-Albānī argues that this addition of motioning should be accepted, since Zā'idah is a trustworthy narrator. There is no contradiction between his report and that of his peers since moving the finger is *not mutually exclusive* to

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbali, *Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidhī*, 1:425.

<sup>44</sup> There are, however, some unique circumstances where this addition can be accepted, but they are the exception and not the norm. See Khālīd b. Ṣāliḥ b. Ibrāhīm al-Ghuṣn, *Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Muṣṭalaḥ Ahl al-Athar 'alā Ḍaw' Manāḥij al-Mutaqaddimīn wa Tahṛīrāt al-Muta'akkkhīrīn* (Beirut: Dār Qurṭubah, 1428/2007), 87–8.

<sup>45</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Abwāb tafrī' istiftāḥ al-ṣalāh*, Bāb raf' al-yadayn fī al-ṣalāh.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Faḥl, *al-Jāmi' fī 'l-'Ilal*, 3:245–46.

pointing; one can point and motion with one's index finger at the same time.<sup>47</sup>

Despite making an interesting argument, which tries to reconcile these two versions of the same report, al-Albānī's conclusion is deeply problematic. This is because the narrators that have opposed Zā'idah are not only far more numerous than him, but also superior in their retention.<sup>48</sup> Yet all of them made mention of motioning in their redactions with a single word only. To only use the word pointing is insufficient in clarifying the need for motioning as well. Had this specific wording of motioning been the correct version, a narrator besides Zā'idah would necessarily have agreed with him by making an indication of the need for constant movement. Second, the reconciliation informed by al-Albānī is not free of weakness. Although motioning is not mutually exclusive to pointing, it is also not exactly harmonious to it. Intuitively the first meaning that comes to mind upon encountering the word pointing is that it is done without continuous motion. All of these facts point to the simple conclusion that this lone version is a mistake on the part of Zā'idah. By making appeals to principles that are inapplicable in this particular case and falling into conceptual stretching, al-Albānī was attempting to authenticate this report. The danger of this type of reasoning cannot be overstated. For as the classical *ḥadīth* master Ibn Ḥajar once argued, accepting any addition from a trustworthy narrator simply because they do not oppose others actually will lead to an absurd conclusion. By accepting all of these additions, one will actually explain away cases of anomalies occurring by means of reconciliation of some kind.<sup>49</sup> But to do away with any case of anomaly simply because a narrator is trustworthy is an outrageous preposition since it implies that reliable individuals can never commit honest mistakes by inadvertently corrupting the wording of a Prophetic report. It also renders one of the negative conditions of authenticity to be largely meaningless, letting it amount to nothing more than an abstract term. Scholars committed to grading and authenticating reports from the Prophet can and should take a sounder methodological approach than this. Because Zā'idah has added something that is not entirely consistent with his other peers, his redaction becomes a primary candidate for being labelled as anomalous. Once one considers that Zā'idah has been opposed by those greater to him in both number and retention, it thus becomes apparent why his version has been largely rejected.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Albānī, *Tamām al-Minnah*, 219–22.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Faḥl, *al-Jāmi' fi'l-'Ilal*, 3:245; al-Khalīl, *Mustadrak al-Ta'līl*, 233–34.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, 64.

The final criticism raised regarding al-Albānī's method pertains to yet another negative condition of an authenticity. The problem here is his almost-complete disregard for the potential existence of hidden defects (*ʿilal*, pl. of *ʿillah*) in *ḥadīths*. The absence of any hidden defects is a condition in order for a *ḥadīth* to be deemed sound. This then implies that the mere inspection of the narrators of a report is necessary but insufficient to confirm its authenticity. A report can be labelled weak when an otherwise authentic chain is defective owing to a subtle mistake committed by one of its narrators, which corrupts the nature of the *ḥadīth*. Such a defect can only be detected by past *ḥadīth* critics (*nuqqād*, pl. of *nāqid*), who by virtue of their proficient memories and experience with the Prophet's *sunnah* could easily identify where an error had occurred.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, their extensive knowledge of the various routes of a given report, as well as their direct or almost firsthand knowledge of every reporter's pool of transmission were all factors that made their task less cumbersome.<sup>51</sup> Thus, if a damaging hidden fault is identified by an early critic in a given report, it suffices in labelling it weak, even if otherwise the chain of the report appears sound. Because this is largely a matter which is only within the grasp of the early critics, a later or contemporary researcher cannot reject such a finding and must simply comply if a *ḥadīth* is labelled faulty.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, al-Albānī would often reject a critic's finding fault with a given report's chain by arguing that since the report's narrators are all trustworthy, the assumption of error should not be paid attention to.<sup>53</sup> Yet this type of rebuttal has no merit since it fails to account for the definition of the hidden defect itself. Since damaging defects only come from trustworthy narrators, this explains why they are so hard to detect and identify in the first place. Obviously, when these critics labelled these reports as faulty, they were well aware that despite the narrators being generally trustworthy, a particular mistake was committed in the report in question.

A notable example where al-Albānī authenticates a clearly defective report can be found in a legally-worthy matter pertaining to fasting, that is, whether vomiting breaks the fast. A popular narration pertaining to this topic comes from Abū Hurayrah, who narrates from the Prophet that anyone who is overcome by vomiting, then nothing is upon them

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>51</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥafīz Quṭṭāsh, *al-Bayān fī 'l-Farq bayn al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa 'l-Taṣḥīḥ: Dirāsah fī Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1428/2007), 94.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Khalīl, *Mustadrak al-Ta'līl*, 17.

(i.e. they do not need to make up for that day and their fast is valid). But if they intentionally vomit, then they must make that day up.<sup>54</sup> This report was deemed as defective by a number of prominent past critics, including Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), and others.<sup>55</sup> With other redactions of the report indicating that these are simply the words of Abū Hurayrah, these critics concluded that the version presenting it as the Prophet's words was an error that could not be relied upon.

On the other hand, al-Albānī firmly rejects this assessment by arguing that the claim of these early critics concerning the mistaken nature of the report is a hasty conclusion. To support this claim, al-Albānī argues that the critics only weakened the report since they thought it was an isolated report from 'Īsā b. Yūnus and lacked any supporting route. In fact, he argues, one can find a corroborating narration from Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth, which demonstrates that the report is actually established from the Prophet.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the report can and should be graded as authentic, as opposed to the claim of past scholars. Unfortunately, al-Albānī's argument cannot be accepted since it in itself is a hasty and far-fetched claim. Obviously, these past critics considered this report to be suffering from a hidden defect while at the same also being aware of this other route as well. It is inconceivable to believe that throughout the golden age of *ḥadīth* criticism all of these past scholars lacked knowledge of this follow-up report, only for it to be found and invoked in the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, they did not label this report as weak because it was isolated, but because they determined that the fault lied in another narrator higher up in the chain: Hishām b. Ḥassān had erred when reporting it and attributed it to the Prophet.<sup>58</sup> These various points could have been easily determined had al-Albānī carefully analyzed the words of these critics. This confirms that these critics were well aware of the follow-up report and were not merely concerned with 'Īsā b. Yūnus, contrary to al-Albānī's claim. Furthermore, while it is true that Hishām was overall a trustworthy narrator, the fact that critics firmly stated that he had erred in this particular narration must be followed without question. Just like how a contemporary researcher accepts the statements of critics regarding the overall status

<sup>54</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, Bāb al-ṣā'im yastaqī 'amdan.

<sup>55</sup> See al-Khalīl, *Mustadrak al-Ta'līl*, 383.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Albānī, *Irwā' al-Ghalīl fī Takhrīj Aḥadīth Manār al-Sabīl*, 9 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1399/1979), 4:52.

<sup>57</sup> See al-Faḥl, *al-Jāmi' fī 'l-'Ilal*, 1:121.

<sup>58</sup> See Quṭṭāsh, *al-Bayān fī 'l-Farq bayn al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa 'l-Taṣḥīḥ*, 96–8.

of a narrator, one must also follow them when they identify where a narrator has erred as well. This is because critics were very exacting and precise in their assessments of these reporters, often taking into consideration their different circumstances, states, and places. It is then not surprising to find these critics authenticating the reports of some narrators in some contexts, while rejecting them in others.<sup>59</sup>

It is nothing short of a paradox to follow the critics in their general evaluations of narrators, but to ignore them in the circumstances and occasions when they say the same narrators have erred. Rejecting the hidden faults identified by critics leads to a number of alarming consequences. For instance, it is an arbitrary move to reject the words of the critics when they identify a mistake committed by a narrator while at the same accepting their general assessments concerning the same reporters. This results in a contradiction, since the words of the critics are entirely relied upon to know the general condition of a narrator in the *jarḥ-ta'dīl* scale. But when these same critics ascertain that this narrator in question has fallen into an error for a given report, such an evaluation is rejected.<sup>60</sup> Obviously, to achieve consistency, one must follow the critics in both cases. To do otherwise actually logically requires scholars like al-Albānī to discontinue the use of biographical dictionaries concerning the state of narrators. This is because the evaluative remarks that critics gave concerning a given narrator actually were based on their pools of transmission.<sup>61</sup> Critics would inspect every narrator's pool of transmission and based on the accuracy of their *ḥadīths* would give them a grade of evaluation. If they largely hit the mark, for example, they were deemed trustworthy and reliable. This then implies that in forming their evaluative remarks, the accuracy of their narrations was the basis and cause, while the grading the narrator received was the end result.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, scholars like al-Albānī accepted the upshot of the critics' examination method while ignoring the basis behind it. The absurdity in this posture is that it leads to accepting the effect, while at the same time rejecting the cause. Obviously, one then cannot use the evaluative remarks of past critics concerning narrators without also recognizing the places critics affirmed they committed errors.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 94–95.

<sup>60</sup> Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh al-Lāḥīm, *Muqāranat al-Marwiyyāt*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 1433/2012), 1:336.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Ghuṣn, *Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar*, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

### Acceptance of Weak *Ḥadīths* between Theory and Practice: When al-‘Uthaymīn Cites al-Dāraqūṭnī

Even within the realm of evidences deemed as acceptable for establishing legal rulings, we find Salafīs applying certain restrictions that generate tensions and lines of contention. For instance, while listing the *sunnah* as an acceptable form of evidence, al-‘Uthaymīn says that this is only so if the Prophetic report in question is verified to be authentic. Unlike the Qur’ān, which is already verified as authoritative since it imparts necessary knowledge, the Prophetic reports do not enjoy this distinction. Instead, they have to pass the extra hurdle of having their chains sifted through to see if the five conditions of authenticity are met. Reports which upon being verified turn out to be authentic can then be used to extract rulings pertaining to creed, worship, and transaction matters.<sup>63</sup> According to al-‘Uthaymīn, only *ḥadīths* which are highly authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or sufficiently good (*ḥasan*) can be used as proofs. In contrast, the usage of weak *ḥadīths* as an evidence in formulating rulings is outright rejected, whether in formulating rulings or for the matter of virtues.<sup>64</sup> In fact, even the mere citation or quotation of weak *ḥadīths* are not allowed, unless in order to clarify their weakness.<sup>65</sup> Some analysts like Qadhi see this concern for authenticity (with its outright rejection of weak *ḥadīths* as a source of Islamic law) as constituting one of the strengths of the Salafī methodology.<sup>66</sup> This might be so since the sole usage of authentic reports intuitively results in stronger *fiqh* opinions.

The issue, however, with this line of reasoning is that it is hardly practical or feasible for a wide domain of legal issues. Many chapters of *fiqh* are actually devoid of authentic *ḥadīths* in strict terms of the science of *ḥadīth*, since reports of such a high quality are in short supply and often unavailable for every topic.<sup>67</sup> To make matters worse, this opinion actually has no pedigree amongst classical *ḥadīth* scholars, the paragons of the science of *ḥadīth* itself and the unparalleled authorities in distinguishing authentic reports from weak ones. Instead of dismissing and lumping mere weak reports with outright fabricated ones, the foremost specialists in *ḥadīth* authenticity and pioneers of the field consistently cited and used weak reports in matters of law and worship.

<sup>63</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn, *Fatḥḥ Dhī ‘l-Jalāl wa ‘l-Ikrām*, 1:18–19.

<sup>64</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah al-Bayqūniyyah fī Muṣṭalah al-Ḥadīth* (Riyadh: Dār al-Thurayyā, 1423/2002), 46–47.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Qadhi, “On Salafi Islam.”

<sup>67</sup> See ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ Mazīd, *al-Ta‘aqqubāt al-Ḥadīthiyyah ‘alā ‘l-Shaykh al-Albanī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 1434/2013), 95–96.



They did not view a report's weakness as necessarily impinging its suitability as evidence as long as its weakness was not severe. In a recent groundbreaking study on the utility of weak *ḥadīths* with reference to law, 'Awwāmah has thoroughly established that the consistent practice of scholars until the last century has been the acceptance of weak *ḥadīths* as a basis in formulating rulings. Scholars as diverse as Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī (d. 198/814), Abū Zur'ah al-Rāzī (d. 264/878), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890), and others all indicated their approval of the use of weak *ḥadīths* either verbally or through the rulings they issued.<sup>68</sup> It is thus not surprising that this opinion would receive widespread acceptance in the latter stages of the formation of the science of *ḥadīth*.

Al-'Uthaymīn's opinion, on the other hand, implicitly appears to be based on the argument that quoting or using weak *ḥadīths* is dangerous since it may lead to attributing to the Prophet what he did not say. However, an argument based on precaution may actually in fact call for the opposite course of action. The well-respected authority Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) stated that with the sole exception of fabricated *ḥadīths*, weak reports of other gradations are not to be deemed false. As long as we are uncertain of the falsehood of the report (such as it containing fabricators and contradicting well-known tenets), they may be acted upon, since they may actually be true and have been uttered by the Prophet.<sup>69</sup> Based on this reasoning, 'Awwāmah thereby argues that as long as there is any possibility that the report is true, quoting and acting upon it is better than casting it aside. This is because if it turns out that the report is indeed correct, then one will have earned a reward by acting upon a virtue from the Prophetic *sunnah*.<sup>70</sup> By ignoring the *ḥadīth* and setting it aside, one is potentially foregoing an opportunity in obtaining extra good deeds. The rationale behind this permissibility is that if it turns out that the report is authentic (despite it appears weak to us based on all the information we have), we have given it its due by acting upon it. And if it turns out to be weak, then no harm has been done by us acting on its import.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Muḥammad 'Awwāmah, *Ḥukm al-'Amal bi 'l-Ḥadīth al-Ḍa'īf bayn al-Nazariyyah wa al-Taṭbīq wa 'l-da'wah* (Medina: Dār al-Yusr, 1438/2017), 34–67.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, 98–99.

<sup>70</sup> 'Awwāmah, *Ḥukm al-'Amal bi 'l-Ḥadīth al-Ḍa'īf*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī, *al-Mubīn al-Mu'īn fī Fahm al-Arba'īn*, ed. Ma'rūf Muḥammad Ismā'īl al-Bayātī and 'Aṭā Allāh Madab Ḥamādī al-Zawba'ī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1439/2018), 141.

Unlike al-‘Uthaymīn, al-Albānī’s argument for why weak reports are inadmissible as evidence is that there is insufficient epistemic warrant in believing they have come from the Prophet. From his point of view, owing to the presence of deficiencies in the chains or narrators of weak *ḥadīths*, we have strong reservations in believing these reports and do not gain enough confidence that they are true. Since they have not come in any authentic route, the preponderance of evidence points to the conclusion that weak reports are errors brought about by the unreliable narrators in the chain. The stronger conclusion then is that the narrators of these weak reports have missed the mark because the probability of soundness is less than half (*al-ẓann al-marjūh*). Al-Albānī also states that he is not aware of there being any difference of opinion amongst the scholars on the assertion that weak *ḥadīths* indicate a stronger likelihood of error.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, al-Albānī contends that even if theoretically one accepts the popular opinion permitting the usage of slightly weak *ḥadīths* for matters of worship and other areas of legislation, in practical terms it is difficult to apply. This is because it may not be easy for laypeople or even researchers to distinguish between slightly weak and extremely weak reports, since comprehending the boundaries may not be easily discernible. Instead of simply using weak reports only, they may actually inadvertently use forgeries and lies, thus committing an incredible wrong.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in order to avoid accidentally using extremely weak reports or fabrications as proofs, they should cease using weak reports altogether. ‘Awwāmah has replied to al-Albānī’s first contention, arguing that it is categorically untrue that all weak reports indicate incorrectness by preponderance of the evidence. Since there are different gradations of weakness, each with its own particular cause, to lump all weak reports together as imparting the same degree of epistemic force is an oversimplification. In fact, if the report is marred only by a slight weakness (such as a narrator having a weak memory) then here there is no preponderance at all; instead the likelihood of the report being either right or wrong is actually equal.<sup>74</sup> The likelihood that the Prophet uttered these words is relatively greater. Contrary to al-Albānī’s generalization, the epistemic warrant from such a narration is actually much stronger and worthier of being considered. ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ Mazīd, another contemporary *ḥadīth* scholar, has replied to al-Albānī’s second argument with a series of important points. First, he

<sup>72</sup> Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḡhīr wa Ziyādātuh*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Riyadh: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 1:50.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:53–56.

<sup>74</sup> See ‘Awwāmah, *Ḥukm al-‘Amal bi al-Ḥadīth al-Ḍa‘īf*, 25–27.

says that the decision to grade *ḥadīths* lies strictly upon specialists of the field, and not laypeople.<sup>75</sup> The fact that a layperson does not know the severity of a report's weakness poses as no problem or impediment to acting on the rulings indicated by a weak report, since they may simply ask a specialist for guidance. Thus, al-Albānī's claim that the majority of people are incapable of distinguishing weak reports from fabricated ones has no significance, since a minority of capable scholars will suffice to ensure that differentiation can be made. Second, Mazīd rejects al-Albānī's charge that scholars are incapable of distinguishing weak reports from fabricated ones. A cursory glance throughout history reveals that many important figures viewed the transmission of fabricated reports as being a danger. They thus paid exclusive attention to the problem of forgeries by cataloging them in detailed compendiums.<sup>76</sup> Another reason which Mazīd did not mention is that *ḥadīth* scholars were intricate in their discussions of the different gradations of weakness by listing their various causes and the severity of each. Although they broadly listed these different causes as being severe, intermediate, and slight, they further divided them into subunits.<sup>77</sup> In his classic *ḥadīth* manual, Ibn Ḥajar's discussion of the spectrum of the types of weak *ḥadīths* is so meticulous that he lists ten different causes of weakness dealing with defects in the narrators alone, and the subsequent levels of weakness that result from each cause.<sup>78</sup> These levels are so precise that al-Albānī himself failed to adequately discriminate them, sometimes even going as far as confusing one for the other.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this strong repulsion towards the use of weak *ḥadīths*, it then becomes a matter of much surprise for it be discovered that many leading Salafī scholars frequently relied on them in drawing their conclusions. One foremost scholar who can be identified as doing so is al-'Uthaymīn throughout his monumental *fiqhī* commentary of the well-known Ḥanbalī primer *Zād al-Mustaqni'*. In several issues discussed in this work, al-'Uthaymīn openly uses weak reports to justify many of his conclusions. Most interestingly, in the issues discussed in the first volume of al-'Uthaymīn's commentary, several of the cited weak *ḥadīths* come from the *Sunan* collection of 'Alī b. 'Umar al-Dāraqūṭnī. This is certainly a curious matter, since there is an additional issue with al-

<sup>75</sup> Mazīd, *al-Ta'aqqubāt al-Ḥadīthiyyah*, 100.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> See 'Awwāmah, *Ḥukm al-'Amal bi al-Ḥadīth al-Ḍa'if*, 18–20.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, 83–101.

<sup>79</sup> 'Abd Allāh al-Hararī, *Nuṣrat al-Ta'aqqub al-Ḥathīth 'alā Man Ṭa'ana fīmā Ṣaḥḥa min al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashārī, 1422/2001).

Dāraquṭnī's collection that may not appear as clearly at first sight. The work shares the same title as the authors of other famous and canonical *Sunan* works, such as Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), al-Tirmidhī, (d. 279/892), al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), and Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887). All four of them hold the distinction of collecting mostly reliable reports that constitute suitable proof texts for jurists in their respective *Sunan* works.<sup>80</sup> However, unlike these works, al-Dāraquṭnī's *Sunan* contains far more weak and criticized reports, such to the extent that works in the past were written to gather them exclusively.<sup>81</sup> Explaining such an anomaly requires a convincing answer, which accounts for why al-Dāraquṭnī's work should contain a higher frequency of weak reports despite its author being a *ḥadīth* master *par excellence*. The reason for why this work largely contains reports of a lesser quality is that al-Dāraquṭnī's objective was not to search for reliable and actionable reports and then organize them according to certain topics and chapters. Instead, unlike other authors, his goal was actually to collect popular weak and fabricated reports that were being cited and utilized by jurists in his time. By collecting these weak reports and showing the defects that they contained, he was attempting to illustrate why they are inadmissible as evidence and that they should be avoided.<sup>82</sup> This skeptical viewpoint concerning this *Sunan* collection interestingly has had actually a fairly long pedigree. For, as al-Ruḥaylī illustrates in his work, notable authorities in the field of *ḥadīth* such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), and al-Zayla'ī (d. 762/1361) rejected reports that were only found in al-Dāraquṭnī's *Sunan* and left out by the famous collectors of *ḥadīth*.<sup>83</sup> If this is true, then the work can largely be viewed as being a valuable source for finding weak reports that jurists relied on and cited during al-Dāraquṭnī's time. At the same time, however, one cannot view the work as a collection intended to help jurists find suitable evidences for legal issues. Instead, the opposite course of action

<sup>80</sup> See Mustafa Macit Karagözoğlu, "Contested Avenues in Post-Classical Sunni Ḥadīth Criticism: A Reading through the Lens of *al-Mughnī 'an al-Ḥifẓ wa-l-kitāb*," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 29 (2017): 156. It should be pointed out at the same time, however, that Ibn Mājah's *Sunan* is relatively weaker in its dependability in comparison to its other three counterparts. For why his *Sunan* earned its canonical status despite this shortcoming, see Jonathan AC Brown, "The Canonization of Ibn Mājah: Authenticity vs. Utility in the Formation of the Sunni Ḥadīth Canon," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 129 (2011): 169–81.

<sup>81</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Yahyā al-Ghassānī, *Takhrīj al-Aḥādīth al-Dī'āf min Sunan al-Dāraquṭnī*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf Ḥūt (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1411/1990).

<sup>82</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Ḍayf Allāh al-Ruḥaylī, *al-Imām Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī wa Āthāruhu 'l-'Ilmiyyah* (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus, 1420/2000), 256–58.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 258–60.

is called for; the reader has to be extremely cautious in searching for proof texts from al-Dāraquṭnī's collection. This is because not only could the report be weak, but one could actually go completely against the original intention of the author if they believe the work is a bastion of authenticity. One cannot then freely navigate the work and find any report that simply supports their conclusion, unless the report in question is investigated and verified to be authentic.

Considering the extreme caution required when approaching al-Dāraquṭnī's *Sunan*, it is surprising then to find that al-'Uthaymīn largely does the opposite. For example, when discussing the issue of whether or not one is required to wash their elbows during ritual ablution, al-'Uthaymīn argues that this is necessary.<sup>84</sup> To back this claim, he cites as one of his primary evidences a ḥadīth found in al-Dāraquṭnī's collection, which states that the Prophet would let water flow on his elbows while performing the ritual ablution.<sup>85</sup> The practice of the Prophet in doing this seems to impart the opinion that saturating the elbows with water is an obligation. The report appears to establish that ruling owing to its explicit wording and the constant action of the Prophet in doing so. While citing this report in his *fiqh* commentary, al-'Uthaymīn only does so through the passive voice by saying that it has been reported (*ruwiya*) that the Prophet used to run water on his elbows while making ablution.<sup>86</sup> This can be read as al-'Uthaymīn hinting to his doubt on the narration's authenticity or his prior knowledge of its weakness. However, this subtle measure fails to meet the standards that al-'Uthaymīn himself mandated when quoting inauthentic reports, since he proscribed using and quoting weak ḥadīths unless if its weakness is made clear and spelled out to the audience, lest one attribute to the Prophet something he did not say. This has not been done here.

This report is actually inadmissible as evidence since it contains a questionable narrator by the name of al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl, who al-Dāraquṭnī himself describes as not being strong in his narrations. However, Qāsim's condition is far worse than it may appear through this one verdict only. In fact, other critics like Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) and Abū Zur'a al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) described him with some of the harshest labels possible. Ibn Ḥanbal, for example, said that his

<sup>84</sup> Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. al-'Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī' 'alā Zād al-Mustaḥqī'*, ed. 'Umar b. Sulaymān al-Ḥafayān, 15 vols. (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1422/2002), 1:213.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṭahārah, Bāb wuḍū' Rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa sallam.

<sup>86</sup> Al-'Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī'*, 1:213.

reports are considered nothing.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the consistent negative appraisals render the reports of this narrator to be abandoned (*matrūk*).<sup>88</sup> The label of *matrūk* is one of the worst levels of evaluation that a narrator can score in the *jarḥ* scale.<sup>89</sup> This then is not a simple case of minimal weakness, which only slightly impairs the quality of a narrator's reports. Quite to the contrary, the reports of such a narrator are considered to be very weak and unsuitable as being evidence. Even though in this example al-Qāsim's report actually supports a ruling, which is already agreed upon by the scholars, this did not prevent these scholars from rejecting this *ḥadīth*.<sup>90</sup> Yet, in this issue, not only did al-'Uthaymīn fail to explicitly mention its weakness, he used the *ḥadīth* as a proof for his position.

The matter becomes more severe once we consider another report that al-'Uthaymīn used in a legal issue concerning vessels made with gold or silver. Although there are numerous authentic *ḥadīths*, which prohibit the use of vessels made of gold or silver only, there are far less reports that address using vessels, which are made of other metals yet contain lines or pieces of silver and gold on the side for decoration, for instance. Regarding this second matter, al-'Uthaymīn says that the same ruling of prohibition applies to it. To back this claim, he quotes a report from al-Dāraquṭnī: "Whoever drinks from a vessel made of gold, silver, or that which contains something from them is only filling their belly with the fire of hell."<sup>91</sup> This report makes it clear that the prohibition does not apply only to the one who consumes from vessels made purely of gold or silver, since the punishment is mentioned even for those who drink from vessels decorated or trimmed by them.<sup>92</sup> Al-'Uthaymīn quotes this *ḥadīth* without pointing to its weakness, whether explicitly or implicitly. However, the chain of this report is unacceptable since it contains Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Jārī, who was criticized by a number of critics, including al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870).<sup>93</sup> What further generates

<sup>87</sup> Abū 'l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *al-Taḥqīq fī Aḥādīth al-Khilāf*, ed. Mas'ad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Sa'danī and Muḥammad Fāris, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1415/1994), 1:147.

<sup>88</sup> Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr, *I'lām al-Anām Shārḥ Bulūgh al-Marām min Aḥādīth al-Aḥkām*, 4 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Farfūr, 1419/1998), 1:160.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, 87.

<sup>90</sup> 'Itr, *I'lām al-Anām*, 1:160.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṭahārah, Bāb awānī 'l-dhahab wa 'l-fiḍḍah.

<sup>92</sup> See al-'Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī*, 1:74.

<sup>93</sup> 'Alī b. 'Umar al-Dāraquṭnī and Shams al-Dīn al-'Azīmābādī, *Sunan al-Dāraquṭnī wa bi Dhaylihi al-Ta'liq al-Mughnī 'alā 'l-Dāraquṭnī*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ et al., 6 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1424/2004), 1:56.

doubts in the accuracy of this report is that Yaḥyā alone narrated this report with this particular wording, which adds to the list of prohibited vessels that which contains pieces of gold or silver. The fact that a weak narrator reported the ḥadīth with an isolated addition raises the possibility that an error in transmission had occurred. Subsequently, notable critics like Ibn ‘Adī (d. 365/976) firmly rejected this report.<sup>94</sup> Centuries later, the ḥadīth master al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) would deliver the same assessment.<sup>95</sup>

Oddly enough, for the next case where al-‘Uthaymīn uses a ḥadīth from al-Dāraquṭnī as evidence, he does so while clearly indicating its weakness. In his discussion of whether or not bleeding or vomiting nullifies one’s ablution, al-‘Uthaymīn held the view that this was not the case. The opposing view, championed in the Ḥanbalī school, is that ablution must be renewed from the two since the Prophet once vomited and thereafter made a fresh ablution.<sup>96</sup> Because the Prophet is the best of examples and Muslims are required to emulate him, this action of the Prophet can then be read to impart an obligation.<sup>97</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn provides two responses to the use of this ḥadīth by the Ḥanbalīs and why it does not support their conclusion. First, this ḥadīth was criticized and deemed as weak by a number of scholars. Second, the mere action of the Prophet does not bring about an obligation.<sup>98</sup> To back up his second argument, al-‘Uthaymīn cites a ḥadīth found in al-Dāraquṭnī, which states that the Prophet was once cupped and he prayed thereafter without performing any ablution.<sup>99</sup> This report is weak because it contains a narrator by the name of Ṣāliḥ b. Muqātil, who was deemed weak by al-Dāraquṭnī and others.<sup>100</sup>

Although acknowledging that this ḥadīth is weak, al-‘Uthaymīn nevertheless claims that it indicates that redoing one’s purification after vomiting or bleeding is merely recommended. The lack of any ablution done in this instance weakens the force of the other narration; it indicates that the ablution made after vomiting was not done by the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-‘itidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1382/1963), 4:406.

<sup>96</sup> Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṭahārah, Bāb mā jā’a fī ‘l-wuḍū’ min al-qay’ wa ‘l-ru’āf.

<sup>97</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī*, 1:273.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1:274.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṭahārah, Bāb fī ‘l-wuḍū’ min al-khārij min al-badan ka ‘l-ru’āf wa al-qay’ wa ‘l-hijāmah wa naḥwih.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Itr, *I‘lām al-Anām*, 1:205.

Prophet to indicate any obligation.<sup>101</sup> At the very most, it can only lead to the conclusion that redoing ablution after vomiting or bleeding is merely recommended. Once again, al-‘Uthaymīn uses a weak *ḥadīth* from al-Dāraquṭnī to address a contentious legal matter by contesting an opposing view.

Despite acknowledging the weakness of *ḥadīth*, al-‘Uthaymīn still relies on it to lower the legal weight of the report utilized by the Ḥanbalīs. Obviously, to be consistent with his own approach with reference to weak *ḥadīths*, al-‘Uthaymīn could have simply dismissed the evidence of the Ḥanbalīs by establishing the weakness of its chain and then concluded that the Ḥanbalīs lacked any credible evidence to back their legal standpoint. There was no need to bring forth another *ḥadīth* to challenge it. Second, instead of citing the weak *ḥadīth* from al-Dāraquṭnī he could have produced a broader argument. He could have argued that while it is known that the Prophet had himself cupped several times throughout his life, it is not reported by anyone that he remade his ablution afterwards. Such a general line of reasoning would have been sufficient to challenge the opposing view, without there being any need to produce a weak report. However, because this latter argument is implicit and only inducible, its explanatory force is perhaps weaker than using a weak *ḥadīth*, which explicitly mentions the absence of any ablution done on the Prophet’s part.

A final example which will be explored here pertains to the legal ruling of performing the funeral prayer upon every dead Muslim, whether pious or otherwise. To justify the stance that the prayer is incumbent as a collective legal obligation, al-‘Uthaymīn cites a report from al-Dāraquṭnī’s collection, which states, “Pray [the funeral] upon the person who says, ‘There is no god except Allah.’ And pray behind the one who says, ‘There is no god except Allah.’”<sup>102</sup> The relevance of this *ḥadīth* to the topic is that it contains an imperative directed to the Muslim community; the first part of the report requires that the funeral prayer be performed for anyone who claims to be a Muslim. Al-‘Uthaymīn quotes the *ḥadīth* in the active voice as a primary piece of evidence, firmly attributing it to the Prophet without mentioning anything concerning its authenticity.<sup>103</sup> It is surprising then to know that the chain of this report contains a narrator by the name of ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Waqqāṣī al-Zuhrī, who was accused of being a fabricator.

<sup>101</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī*, 1:274.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṣalāh, Bāb ṣifat man tajūz al-ṣalāh ma’ahu wa man tajūz al-ṣalāh ‘alayhi.

<sup>103</sup> Al-‘Uthaymīn, *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtī*, 5:314.



Severely punitive remarks regarding this reporter have been issued by major critics like Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn.<sup>104</sup> The report has two other supporting narrations, but they also contain fabricators or narrators accused of lying.<sup>105</sup> Owing to their severe weakness, they then cannot elevate the status of the report in any way. Consequently, the report must be dismissed as being extremely weak or fabricated.<sup>106</sup> Considering these stunning faults, using the report as a piece of legal evidence to establish a ruling is unacceptable according to al-ʿUthaymīn’s own standards. Such a weak report can only be mentioned to warn *against* its citation and usage, lest one attribute something to the Prophet that he did not say.

### Conclusion

Although Salafī scholars have attempted to revisit and reconstruct the field of ḥadīth from a variety of angles, most of these efforts seem to have backfired. Despite his amazing efficiency in grading narrations, which led to a level of productivity unforeseen in modern history, al-Albānī’s methodology faces a number of serious problems. The heavy reliance on simple biographical dictionaries and relative disregard of the last two negative conditions described in the definition of an authentic Prophetic tradition sap the quality of his work. This methodology, despite its efficiency and somewhat acceptable degree of accuracy, is at the same time over simplistic and bound to yield many errors in judgement. The greatest danger here is that the relative lack of concern for the presence of anomalies or hidden defects and an overemphasis on the biographies of narrators reduces the grading of ḥadīths to a maths problem.<sup>107</sup> As long as all the narrators have been as a rule labelled trustworthy by critics, a ḥadīth scholar like al-Albānī would grade it as authentic. The fallacy with this reasoning is that every ḥadīth (and its narrators) has its own specific circumstances and cases, which defies such simple cumulative exercises or the use of absolute abstract principles (e.g., the issue of *ziyādat al-thiqah*). There may be indicators and signs that point that for a given report a trustworthy narrator has erred or that a weak narrator has hit the mark. Hence, as opposed to using rules and principles, the correct

<sup>104</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī and al-ʿAzīmābādī, *Sunan al-Dāraquṭnī wa bi Dhaylihi al-Taʿlīq al-Mughnī*, 3:401.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:402.

<sup>106</sup> ʿItr, *Iʿlām al-Anām*, 2:56.

<sup>107</sup> Quṭṭāsh, *al-Bayān fī ʿl-Farq bayn al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa ʿl-Taṣḥīḥ*, 95.

course of action then is grading every *ḥadīth* in accordance with its own indicators and circumstances.<sup>108</sup>

Al-‘Uthaymīn’s approach with reference to the use of weak *ḥadīths* is just as problematic. Although proscribing the use of such reports in all matters, al-‘Uthaymīn appears to have taken a number of liberties in citing weak and extremely weak reports from the collection of al-Dāraquṭnī. What makes the issue more troubling is that in two of the examples cited in this essay, al-‘Uthaymīn makes no explicit indication of their weakness. Without a doubt, a higher degree of caution was expected from a scholar taking a hardline approach against the use of weak *ḥadīths*, especially so when referencing a work like al-Dāraquṭnī’s. The practice of al-‘Uthaymīn, if anything, in fact points to the opposite. The upshot then is that if Salafīs want to really revive or refine these sciences, they may need to revisit their methodology in these fields and ensure that it is internally coherent and consistently applied throughout all issues.

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<sup>108</sup> See al-Faḥl, *al-jāmi‘ fi ‘l-‘lāl*, 1:122–24.