

## Examining the Isnad and significance of the circumambulation (ṭawāf) of Noah's ark

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### Introduction

One of the ways to distinguish authentic ḥadīths from inauthentic ones is by examining the chain of transmission (isnād), a method that has been prevalent since early times. Many individuals have made significant contributions to purifying the sayings of the Infallibles by identifying weak transmitters in the chains of transmission. The story of Noah's mission and the event of the flood has received attention in the Bible, Islamic texts, and historical sources, with more than six hundred different legends and traditions about its nature and details. The Qur'an refers to the story of Noah's mission and the flood, mentioning some of its details. Consequently, numerous ḥadīths have been transmitted on this subject.

One notable issue in these ḥadīths is the claim that Noah's Ark circumambulated the Kaaba, a narrative found in early Shi'a sources and later transmitted by subsequent sources. This article will examine the ḥadīths related to the circumambulation of Noah's Ark around the Kaaba, both in terms of their content and their chain of transmission.

### Materials and Methods

One of the well-established and widely used methods that ḥadīth scholars have employed to assess the authenticity of ḥadīths is the simultaneous examination of both the chain of transmission (isnād) and the content (matn) of the traditions. Chain analysis aims to determine the reliability of the transmitters, while content analysis involves scrutinizing and evaluating the texts of the ḥadīths to identify any weaknesses in their substance. In other words, the credibility of the transmitters in the chain is evaluated based on the views of biographical scholars ('ilm al-rijāl), and subsequently, the content of the tradition is analyzed.

As mentioned in the introduction, the present article investigates the tradition regarding Noah's Ark circumambulating the Kaaba during the time of the flood, as reported in significant Shi'a sources.

Circumambulation (ṭawāf) is one of the rituals of Hajj and is specific to human beings. That such an act could have occurred during the dangerous and catastrophic circumstances of Noah's flood highlights the need for a thorough textual and chain-based examination of the related ḥadīths.

To this end, relevant traditions from both early and later Shi'a sources were reviewed, and the related ḥadīths were identified. The majority of these traditions are found in *al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī, although other ḥadīth compilers have also reported similar accounts.

Following this quantitative review, the credibility of the transmitters was assessed based on the evaluations of both classical and later biographical scholars. While some of the transmitters in the chains are trustworthy and reliable, the presence of some unknown or weak transmitters seriously challenges the authenticity of these ḥadīths.

Subsequently, we examined the content of the traditions concerning the circumambulation of Noah's Ark around the Kaaba. This section revealed that the traditions in question exhibit significant textual discrepancies.

## Results and Findings

A systematic examination of the subject of Noah's Ark circumambulating the Kaaba reveals that initially, Shaykh al-Kulayni collected the traditions related to the circumambulation of the Ark, and after him, these traditions were discussed by other ḥadīth scholars of the Four Books and other ḥadīth collections. Al-Kulayni narrated five ḥadīths from his teachers. The first and second traditions are from a weak transmitter named Ḥasan ibn Ṣāliḥ from Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and the third tradition is from an unknown individual named Ḥisham al-Khurasani, also from Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The weakness of the fourth tradition is attributed to 'Ali ibn Ḥamzah al-Baṭā'ini, one of the leaders of the Waqifah sect. The sixth tradition is narrated by Shaykh al-Ṣaduq using the word "rawa," which makes it considered as mursal (unattributed). The seventh and eighth traditions are transmitted through Muḥammad ibn Sinān and Muḍaffal ibn 'Umar, and biographical scholars have differing opinions about these two individuals, with the evidence leaning toward their being criticized. The ninth tradition is the same as Shaykh al-Kulayni's tradition, transmitted through Ḥasan ibn Ṣāliḥ, whose weakness was noted earlier. Therefore, despite the presence of trustworthy and reliable individuals, weak and unknown transmitters in the chain of transmission have weakened the authenticity of these traditions.

In terms of content, these traditions exhibit internal and external contradictions. There is a conflict regarding the size of the Ark, with some traditions stating the width of the Ark as 800 cubits, while others mention it as 100 cubits. Similarly, some say the height of the Ark was 200 cubits, while others state it was 80 cubits. On the other hand, in traditions one, two, four, six,

seven, eight, and nine, the landing place of the Ark is mentioned as Mount Judi without any supporting evidence, but in tradition three, the landing place of the Ark is identified as the Euphrates in Kufa. In Shaykh al-Ṭusi's tradition, Noah disembarks from the Ark, wading into the water up to his knees, then retrieves a coffin containing the bones of Adam and carries it back into the Ark. This implies that the depth of the water Noah entered was up to his knees! How could such a large Ark have moved in such a shallow depth?

As for the circumambulation of the Ark, it must be noted that this action is exclusive to human beings as part of the rituals of Hajj. The idea that this act occurred under the dangerous and catastrophic circumstances by the Ark is worth reconsidering. Finally, given rational indicators and natural signs, the regional nature of Noah's flood (in the Tigris and Euphrates region) and its distance from Mecca gain strength.

### **Conclusion**

The story of Noah's flood, as one of the common topics between ancient and modern sources, is an undeniable truth. However, there are contradictory reports regarding the nature and details of this event. The Qur'an refers to Noah's mission, the rejection of his invitation by the majority of his people, and the occurrence of the flood. In Islamic traditions, Noah's flood is discussed in greater detail. One of the notable issues in these traditions is the circumambulation of Noah's Ark around the Kaaba. In the present work, the traditions related to the circumambulation of Noah's Ark around the Kaaba were gathered, examined, and analyzed. Despite the presence of trustworthy and reliable individuals, there are weak and unknown figures in the chain of transmission, which weakens the authenticity of these ḥadīths. Additionally, the chains of some of these traditions, despite having somewhat reliable chains, are *mursal* (unattributed) and *mafru* (elevated). In terms of content, these traditions also exhibit internal and external contradictions.

**Keywords:** Sanad and Dalalah Examining, Traditions, Circumambulation of Noah's Ark, Kabah.