

Essential Hadithological Requisites of Mahdist Teachings

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Abstract

The concept of the Hadithological Requirements of Mahdism refers to the essential obligations pertaining to Hadith sciences that must be taken into account in the transmitted teachings of Mahdism. Although the common requisites in narratology and transmitter-criticism (rijāl) can be extended to various subjects, in the context of Mahdism, some are more prominent or warrant greater emphasis. Understanding the process of examining Mahdist traditions—from tracing the genealogy of sources and chains of transmission (isnāds) to addressing the external textual damages often inflicted upon the traditions—constitutes one of these relevant requisites. The findings of this article can be summarized as follows: by recognizing the subject matter of Mahdist traditions and the commonalities and distinctions between Shi'a and Sunni schools in this regard, one can better distinguish between authentic (ṣaḥīḥ) and unsound (ṣaqīm) traditions based on the principles of Islamic denominations. Hadithological flaws such as textual distortion (taṣḥīf), fabrication (ja'l), truncation (taqṭī'), Israelite traditions (Isrā'īliyyāt), excessive hermeneutical interpretation (ta'wīl-garā'ī), and tradition by meaning (naql bi al-ma'nā) are highly prevalent in Mahdist traditions. Sects claiming Mahdism have exploited these vulnerable channels to fabricate or spiritually distort Mahdist ḥadīths in their own favor, such as the Wāqifiyya and the deviant movement of Aḥmad al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Furthermore, tradition by meaning—given the cryptic nature of some statements and their alteration by the transmitter due to ignorance, or textual distortion by an uninformed scribe, as well as the truncation of traditions by later transmitters and authors during the transition from early Ḥadīth writings to comprehensive collections and the like—are among the other factors that impair the correct understanding of Mahdist traditions.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Belief in Mahdism is an accepted principle among most Islamic sects, despite some differences, to the extent that denying the existence of the Mahdi at the end of time is considered disbelief by Sunni scholars. The established tradition (Sunnah) of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams (AS), alongside the Qur'an, constitutes the most important means of accessing religious rulings and teachings, including Mahdism, based on verses such as 16:44 and hadiths like the Thaqalayn. Some Mahdavi hadiths even serve as interpretations, allegorical interpretations (Ta'wil), or applications (Tatbiq) of Qur'anic verses. It is essential to emphasize that genealogy, subject identification, and pathology of Mahdavi hadiths are crucial, in addition to the standard discussions of hadith jurisprudence (Fiqh al-Hadith), biographical evaluation (Rijal), and principles of hadith (Diraya). Understanding Mahdavi hadiths requires attention to requirements of hadith studies, considering both external and sometimes internal aspects of the traditions, as well as the personality traits of the transmitters and the researcher. It cannot be claimed that the words in all hadiths are exactly those of the Infallibles (AS); undoubtedly, like other hadiths, they have undergone changes from their issuance to the present, increasing the possibility of deviation through segmentation (Taqtī'), transmission by meaning (Naql bi al-Ma'na), or chain-related issues such as discontinuity (Irsal), ambiguity (Idmar), concealment (Tadlis), and textual issues like miswriting (Taṣḥīf), distortion (Tahrif), forgery (Wad'), addition, omission, and inversion. Hence, some researchers have partially and independently addressed this important issue. Although some books or articles have been written on examining Mahdavi hadiths, none have specifically undertaken a hadith-studies approach with a methodological framework and emphasis on critical junctures in a comprehensive manner.

Materials and Methods

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method. The data collection was conducted through library research, referring to primary and secondary sources including: major Shi'a and Sunni hadith collections (such as al-Kafi, Kamal al-Din, Ghaybat al-Tusi, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari, Sunan Abi Dawud); classical and contemporary exegetical works (e.g., Tafsir al-Qummi, Majma' al-Bayan); rijali sources (like Rijal al-Najashi, Rijal al-Tusi, Rijal al-Kashshi); and contemporary studies on Mahdism and hadith pathology.

The research process is systematically organized into distinct analytical phases: First, a "genealogical analysis" of Mahdavi hadiths is conducted, encompassing two sub-dimensions: (a) Chain (Sanad) analysis, examining the nature of the

chains (e.g., Mutawatir vs. Ahad) and the application of authenticity criteria (Ṣaḥīḥ, Hasan, Muwaththaq, Da'if), while considering the differing approaches of early (Qudama') and later (Muta'akhhirin) scholars regarding textual and contextual indications (Qara'in); and (b) Source criticism, exploring the number, distribution, and primary textual sources of Mahdavi hadiths in both Shi'a and Sunni traditions, identifying key compilations and the historical development of their recording.

Second, a "thematic analysis" is conducted, categorizing Mahdavi hadiths into four main groups: exegetical/allegorical, predictive (concerning the future), explanatory (elucidating causes and duties), and historical. This section also examines points of commonality and distinction between Shi'a and Sunni teachings, particularly concerning the birth, nature, and role of the Mahdi, as well as concepts like Raj'ah.

Third, a "pathological analysis" is performed, focusing on six major damages affecting Mahdavi hadiths: transmission by meaning (Naql bi al-Ma'na); esoteric interpretation and misapplication (Ta'wil-garai); infiltration of Isra'iliyyat; segmentation (Taqtī'); textual miswriting (Taṣḥīf); and forgery (Jadl). For each damage, concrete examples from Mahdavi hadith literature are provided and analyzed. This multifaceted pathological examination is vital because these damages, often originating from external sources, have been systematically exploited by various heretical sects to forge or distort Mahdavi traditions for their own benefit.

Results and Findings

The research findings indicate that a proper hadith-studies approach to Mahdism requires distinguishing between several key layers. It was found that the majority of Mahdavi hadiths are singular reports (Ahad) and often suffer from chain weaknesses. Therefore, it is crucial not to fall into the trap of laxity, where every report is accepted, nor to be so overly skeptical as to disregard a wealth of valuable material. The validation of Mahdavi hadiths based on the early scholars' methodology, which relies on a variety of corroborating indications beyond just the chain, can serve as an effective method for preserving the hadith heritage of Mahdism.

The genealogical analysis revealed that the number of Mahdavi hadiths in Shi'a sources far exceeds those in Sunni sources. Research estimates indicate about 200 hadiths in Sunni sources and over 2,000 in Shi'a sources, with a total of 1,941 non-repetitive hadiths recorded in the comprehensive Mu'jam Ahadith al-Imam al-Mahdi. The hadiths originate from the Prophet (560 hadiths), Imam Ali (130), Imams al-Hasan to al-Askari (541), and 130 as Tawqi'at from the Imam of the

Time (AJ). The thematic analysis identified approximately one hundred distinct subjects within Mahdavi hadiths. This thematic diversity was systematically categorized into four primary groups: interpretive and allegorical traditions, predictive reports concerning future events, explanatory hadiths elucidating causes and duties, and historical traditions detailing the birth and lineage of the Imam. The study also pinpointed key commonalities between Shi'a and Sunni traditions, such as the belief in the Mahdi, his descent from Fatimah (SA), the establishment of universal justice, and the descent of Jesus (AS). Conversely, significant distinctions were found, including differences on the birth, the doctrine of Raj'ah, and the very conceptualization of the Mahdi's role (as a sign of the Hour in Sunni thought vs. the culmination of prophetic programs in Shi'a thought).

The pathological analysis confirmed the high prevalence of specific hadith-related damages in Mahdavi traditions. "Transmission by meaning" (Naql bi al-Ma'na) is particularly significant due to the coded and symbolic language of many eschatological reports, increasing the risk of semantic drift. "Esoteric interpretation" (Ta'wil-garai) has been a primary tool for deviant sects like the Waqifiyya and the contemporary Ahmad al-Hasan al-Basri movement to misappropriate hadiths for their claims. "Forgery" (Jadl) is evident in fabricated traditions inserted for political or factional purposes, such as those attributing Mahdi's lineage to Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib or the distortions by the Baha'i faith. The infiltration of "Isra'iliyyat" (Judaean-Christian legends), "segmentation" (Taqtī'), and "miswriting" (Tashhīf) were also identified as significant problems that can lead to profound misunderstandings of Mahdavi teachings if not carefully identified and corrected through rigorous scholarly analysis.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a systematic hadith-studies approach, encompassing genealogy, subject identification, and pathology, is indispensable for a sound understanding of Mahdavi teachings. The research confirms that Mahdavi hadiths, like all hadiths, have undergone a complex historical evolution, and a failure to account for the six major damages (Naql bi al-Ma'na, Ta'wil-garai, Isra'iliyyat, Taqtī', Tashhīf, and Jadl) can severely compromise their correct interpretation. A key finding is the necessity of differentiating between the historical, traditional, and allegorical-eschatological layers within these texts to avoid anachronistic or ideologically motivated readings. Ultimately, the study establishes that a comprehensive "hadith-studies requirements" framework, which moves beyond mere chain analysis to include a critical evaluation of the text, its transmission history, and its intertextual context, is the foundational condition for achieving a credible and rigorous understanding of Mahdism. The application of this

framework is crucial for distinguishing authentic traditions from forgeries and for countering the misappropriations of deviant groups.

Keywords: Pathology of Mahdavi Hadiths, Hadith Damages, Hadith Studies Requirements, Mahdavi Hadiths, Understanding Mahdavi Hadiths.