

The Role of Examining the Isnad and Content of Traditions of a Narrator in Rijāl Evaluations: A Case Study of Thābit ibn Hurmuz

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Abstract

The evaluations provided by early rijāl scholars constitute a primary tool for examining the status of hadith narrators. However, relying solely on these early assessments—even when supplemented by the views of later scholars—does not appear sufficient to gain a comprehensive understanding of a narrator's profile. The central question of this study is whether examining the sanad and the content (matn) of a narrator's traditions influences their rijāl evaluation. An analysis focusing on the rijāl assessment of Thābit ibn Hurmuz demonstrates that examining a narrator's transmitted traditions—alongside the evaluations of early and later scholars—can yield deeper insight into that narrator's status. While we cannot dispense with the reports of early and later rijāl scholars when assessing a narrator, nor can we necessarily determine their wathāqah or lack thereof based solely on their narrations, examining these traditions plays a decisive role in understanding the narrator and evaluating existing rijāl assessments; indeed, it may sometimes prompt a reconsideration of a narrator's jarḥ or ta'dīl. This approach is particularly significant in contexts involving taqiyyah and allegations such as ghuluww or affiliation with specific sects and schools of thought. Consequently, this practice can have a profound impact on standard methodologies for determining narrator trustworthiness and evaluating rijāl assessments.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The evaluations provided by early scholars of rijāl constitute a primary tool for examining the backgrounds of narrators—so much so that they are often cited as the most significant available evidence for understanding a narrator's status. However, relying solely on these early evaluations—even when supplemented by the views of later scholars—does not appear sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of a narrator's profile, nor can it serve as the definitive criterion for establishing their trustworthiness or lack thereof. Given that assessing a

narrator's reliability is a central issue in the science of rijāl—to the extent that the discipline is sometimes equated with the science of jarḥ wa ta'dīl (impugnement and validation)—it is essential to explore other methods and resources that can aid in gaining a better understanding of narrators. When investigating a narrator's background, the statements and sensory observations of rijāl scholars are typically accorded the highest importance; consequently, reports from early scholars are often treated as direct sensory accounts of the narrator's status and prioritized over the reports or research of later scholars, with some regarding the consultation of rijāl texts as the sole means of understanding a narrator. Nevertheless, it appears that an examination of the Isnad (asnāds) and the content of the traditions narrated by an individual can also play a significant role in their biographical assessment.

Materials and Methods

In this context, the central question of the present study is whether examining the Isnad (sanad) and the content of a narrator's traditions influences their evaluation within the field of rijāl. To address this, the study focuses on a specific case—Thābit ibn Hurmuz—seeking to answer the posed question. This case study aims to determine whether analyzing a narrator's Narrated Traditions can play a role in establishing their trustworthiness or in evaluating the statements made about them by early rijāl scholars. Thus, the article's primary objective is to demonstrate the impact of examining the Isnad and content of a narrator's traditions on their rijāl evaluation, specifically through the case study of Thābit ibn Hurmuz. The selection of Thābit ibn Hurmuz is significant because, in his case, the analysis of his traditions' Isnad and content clearly influences the assessment of earlier rijāl judgments, ultimately leading to the refutation of the criticisms (charges of unreliability) previously leveled against him.

Results and Findings

The findings of the present study, which focuses on the rijālī evaluation of Thābit ibn Hurmuz, demonstrate that examining a narrator's transmitted traditions—alongside the assessments of early and later rijāl scholars—can provide deeper insight into that narrator's character and background. A comprehensive review of all traditions narrated by Thābit ibn Hurmuz reveals that he never transmitted any report implying doctrinal corruption; furthermore, none of the traditions attributed to him in either Shi'a or Sunni sources suggest an affiliation with the Butrīeh sect. On the contrary, sources from the Sunni tradition record reports from him that articulate the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). Moreover, an analysis of his narrations indicates that the accusation of Butrīeh affiliation is untenable; he transmitted material incompatible with Butrīeh doctrine, serving as strong evidence against the validity of this charge. This conclusion aligns with the views of certain rijāl scholars who have noted that figures such as Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī

appear to have harbored doubts regarding the legitimacy of this accusation. Based on the research conducted in this article regarding Thābit ibn Hurmuz, it can be stated that assessing a narrator's status in the science of rijāl requires consulting the reports of both early and later scholars; one cannot afford to forgo this source of information, which relies on direct observation or accounts close to it. Furthermore, while an examination of a narrator's transmitted traditions alone is not sufficient to definitively establish their trustworthiness or lack thereof, the findings of this study demonstrate that such an analysis plays a pivotal role in understanding the narrator and evaluating existing scholarly judgments about them. Indeed, it can even lead to a reconsideration of previous verdicts regarding a narrator's impugnement (*jarḥ*) or vindication (*ta'dīl*); this is particularly significant in contexts involving (*taqiyya*) and allegations such as (*ghuluww*) or affiliation with specific sects and schools of thought. Consequently, this approach can have a profound impact on standard methodologies for assessing narrator reliability and evaluating biographical judgments.

Conclusion

In addressing the study's central question—whether a narrator's *rijāl* status (regarding their reliability or lack thereof) can be determined solely by examining the traditions they narrated—it became evident that one cannot dispense with the reports of early and later *rijāl* scholars. While an examination of a narrator's traditions does not necessarily yield a definitive verdict on their trustworthiness, it plays a pivotal role in understanding the individual and evaluating the *rijāl* assessments made about them. Analyzing the content of a narrator's traditions is particularly significant—especially concerning allegations of doctrinal or sectarian deviation, *ghuluww*, and similar issues—as it aids in evaluating the labels attributed to them. This holds especially true for figures who practiced *taqiyya*; for instance, Thābit ibn Hurmuz and ‘Amr ibn Thābit appear to have been prominent figures and scholars within the Sunni tradition, yet some Sunni sources labeled them as Shi‘a or Rāfiḍī and deemed them unreliable—an indication that they were practicing *taqiyya*. Consequently, consulting a narrator's traditions, alongside the views of early and later *rijāl* scholars, constitutes a reliable method for ascertaining a narrator's characteristics and evaluating existing *rijāl* assessments.

Keywords: Thābit ibn Hurmuz (Abū al-Miqdām), Butrīeh, evaluation of *rijāl* assessments, ‘Amr ibn Abī al-Miqdām, *rijāl*.