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MODERN CRITICISM OF THE SAHABAH: AN APPRAISAL¹

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Abstract

The relationship between the sahabah and Qur'an and sunnah is crucial in terms of the reliability of the texts because its narrations are closely linked to the reliability of the narrators and the sahabah in general. Muslims can reach the sacred texts only through the sahabah; there is no other material means. The issue of the sahabah is not merely a story of some people who lived during a certain period of time. They are not objects of history or the science of narration. The issue of the sahabah is very sensitive because their position plays an important role not as individual biographies, but because of the role they played in transmitting of the ahadith of the Prophet (ﷺ). This study analyzes the sensitivity of this issue and the disputes on the sahabah in terms of theory and practice from their historical and modern critical perspectives.

Keywords: *sahabah, sunnah, criticism, modern, theory and practice.*

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Introduction

The Quran and *sunnah* are the two main sacred sources of Islam, with the latter consisting of Prophet (ﷺ) Muhammad's saying, deeds and tacit approvals. These sources guide the historical experience of Islam extending from economics and religious practices to fine arts. The first generation to receive this heritage from the Prophet (ﷺ) and to transmit it to the next generations was the generation of the *sahabah* (the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)). When the issue of *sahabah* is discussed, these two sources inevitably should also be consulted.

Thus, renowned ahl al-sunnah hadith scholar, Abū Zur'ah al-Rāzī, criticizes the critics of hadith: "If you see someone who taints the reputation of the *sahabah* of the Prophet (ﷺ), beware for he is a heretic. According to our faith, the Rasul is right, the Quran is right. The Quran and ahadith were transmitted to us by the *sahabah*. The critics want to repudiate and blame our witnesses for the Quran and *sunnah*, so that these sources will not be trusted anymore and their authority will be challenged. Indeed, they should be blamed themselves, not our invaluable witnesses."²

This firm stance is because the concept of "*sahabah*" plays a crucial role on the perception of religion. The determinative role of the *sahabah* on this perception is not an issue exclusive to modern times. The issue of the *sahabah* is one of the most ancient matters of conflict between different sects and schools of Islam. It is one of the fundamental elements which distinguish a sect from another. It poses a modern problem as well as a historical one. Thus, the perception towards the *sahabah* retains its significance as a "divisive" or "unifying" force in religious, intellectual, political and social spheres of life."

All sects of Islam agree on the necessity of a sound perception

² See, al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad bin 'Alī bin Thābit, *al-kifāya fī 'ilmi al-riwāya*. Edited by 'Abdu Allāh al-Sūruqī and Ibrāhīm Ḥamdī al-Madanī. (al-Madīna al-Munawara: al-Maktabat al-'Ilmiyya), 49, al-Mazī, Yūsuf bin al-Zakī 'Abdu al-Raḥmān Abū al-Ḥijāj, *tahdhīb al-kamāl*. Edited by Bashār 'Iwād Ma'rūf. (Bayrūt: Muassasat al-Risālah, 1st edition, 1980), v.19, 96, al-Sakhāwī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Abdu al-Raḥmān. *fathu al-mughhith*. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiy, 1st edition) v. 3, 109.

of the *sahabah* for a true understanding of Islam. Here, however, we do not refer to the biographies of the *sahabah* as historical personalities. We discuss, firstly, their mission as transmitters of the teachings of the Prophet (ﷺ) to the next generations and, secondly, their role in the transformation of these teachings from something abstract to that which is concrete.

They were both the actors and the witnesses of the era of revelation. They were the only generation that witnessed the rituals, ethical teachings, battles, administration, trade and family practices of the Prophet (ﷺ). It would have been impossible to reach this heritage without their accounts and narrations; subsequently, we would not be able to speak of established faith, ethics, law or ritual systems in Islam. This suffices to demonstrate how the issue at hand is closely related to a true understanding of Islam.

This study analyzes the sensitivity of this issue and the disputes on the *sahabah* in terms of theory and practice from historical and modern critical perspectives of the *sahabah*. The paper will demonstrate that the conflicts in theory do not correspond to the reality of matters and that such theoretical assumptions will remain unsubstantial and barren.

The Difference between Modern and Old Criticism of the *Sahabah*

In this section we will deal with cases that are both old and modern. These cases are closely related and nurture each other because the approaches of the followers of the previous Islamic sects influenced not only their own era, but also modern times. Thus, when the issue of the *sahabah* is studied today, the roots of the differences should be analyzed. Without referring to the events that occurred in the early years of Islam, a true reading today cannot be realized. If the issue of the *sahabah* still causes tensions between Sunni and Shia schools, this indicates the heavy impact of the heritage of religious conception and written heritage of tradition derived from history.

The criticism of the Sahaba also has a modern dimension. Although archaic and modern criticisms share common points, their sources and processes may differ. Hence, historical and modern criticism should not be regarded in the same category. To clarify the

point further, we shall summarize the archaic version first.

The history of Islam is a successful story with all its historical, social, and intellectual achievements. Nevertheless, it also consists of conflicts between sects that are difficult to comprehend even today. The cliques and divisions in the early dynamic periods affected their methodology, the perception of religion that is then carried forth to the next generations. For example, the religious perceptions of the Shia, Kharijite and Mutazilah followers were inspired by these differences and these historical events marked the beginnings of the formulation of their *madhabs* and their regard for the *sahabah* and the ahadith narrated by them.

Schools other than the *ahl al-sunnah* reject most of the *ahadith* narrated by the *sahabah*. These schools do not deny the role of the Prophet (ﷺ) as an authority; they criticize the positions of the *sahabah* after the demise of the Prophet (ﷺ), accuse them of unjust practices and are perceived as sinners. Some even go to the extent of denouncing them as infidels,³ as *Kharijites* did of the *sahabah* who joined the Battle of Siffin.

Internal political disputes started after the Prophet's demise (ﷺ) and eventually led to the assassination of the third Caliph, Othman. This period is named *aşru al-fitnah* (the period of sedition) for the effect of disputes and their consequences were grave. The political segregation that resulted from the disputes carried the seeds of transformation for different Islamic sects and various schools of the future. The nucleus of criticism of hadith was also embedded in this segregation.

It is clear that Shiite Imamiyyah sects, which deem the legal and religious authority of Ali as sacred, do not consider the *sahabah* who pledged alliance to Abū Bakr the caliph of Muslims as “upright”, on the grounds that they disobeyed Allah with their

³ For example, Shia sources claim that after the demise of the Prophet (ﷺ) all the *sahabah* became apostates except three: Salmān al-Fārisī, al-Miqdād bin al-Aswad, and Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī. See al-Kulaynī, Muḥamad bin Ya'qūb bin Ishāq al-Rāzī, *al-kāfī*, (Tehrān: Dār Kutub al-Islāmiyyat, n.d), v. 8, 245; al-Majlisī, Muḥamad Bāqir, *biḥār al-anwār*, (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-wafā'a, 1404h), v. 22, 333; al-Kashshī, Muḥamad bin 'Umar, *ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl*, (Mashhad: Dānishkāh, n.d), 6.

alliance.⁴ Thus, the narrations of all the *sahabah*, except for a few, are rejected. For this reason, the *ahadith* narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ) constitute only a small number- less than ten percent- in Shia hadith sources.⁵ Even today, criticizing the *sahabah* under the facade of defending the sect and besmirching them with accusations are amongst the common methods used by Shia scholars.⁶

Since these sects act as a minority against the majority *ahl al-sunnah*, they strive to prove the fundamentals of the sect for each case. This often leads them to criticizing the *sahabah*, as it can be clearly observed in Shia classical sources and modern Shia publications. This tendency preserves the expansive historical tension between the Shia and the *ahl al-sunnah* even till today.

The events of the era of *al-fitnah* had a profound impact on the Mutazilah approach to the *sahabah* and hadith. The Mutazilah consigned to suspicion the integrity of the *sahabah* involved in political disputes and the wars in the aftermath.

The founder of the Mutazilah School, Wāṣil bin ‘Āṭā, argued that members of one of the sides involved in the wars had become unbelievers; however, it was not possible to determine which. Thus, he rejected the narrations of both parties. Leaders of the three sects in Mutazilah, ‘Āmrū bin ‘Ubayd, Abū Hudhayl al-‘Allāf, and especially al-Nazzām, had even a firmer stance against the *sahabah*. Their arguments rendered transmission of hadith from these sources utterly impracticable.⁷

Islam cannot be conceived properly and profoundly without a

⁴ For further information, see “The Role of Ḥadīth Perception on Disputes between Ahl al-Sunnah and *al-shī‘ah al-imāmiyyah al-ithnā ‘ashariyyah*”, Dr. Serdar Demirel, *Intellectual Discourse Journal*, IIUM, vol. 19, issue 2, 2011, 245-262.

⁵ See. Nu‘mānī, Muḥamad Manzūr, *al-thawrat al-irāniyyat fī mizān al-islām*, (‘Amān: Dāru ‘Umār, 1st edition, n.d), 110.

⁶ Two books can exemplify this: al-Mūsawī, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-dīn, *Abū Hurayrah*, (Qum: Intishārāt Ainšārīān); Ya‘qūb, al-Muḥāmi Aḥmad Ḥusayn, *nazariyat ‘adālat al-sahāba*, (London: Mu’assasat al-Fajr).

⁷ See. Al-Sibā‘ī, Muṣṭafā, *al-sunnah wa makānatuhā fī al-tashrī‘ al-islāmī*, (Dimashq: Matbat al-Islāmī, 1978), 130-135; See also Al-Juwayny, ‘Abd al-Malik b ‘Abd Allāh, *kitāb al-talkhiṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Edited by ‘Abd Allāh Juwalim al-Nabāly and Bashyr Aḥmad al-‘Amry, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Bashā‘ir al-Islāmiyat, 1996), v.2, 375-376.

sound perception of the *sunnah* since it plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'ān, reasons of revelation and their application to cases. The *sunnah* is considered deterministic due to its secondary role after the Qur'ān in judicial terms. For this reason, desertion of hadith will inevitably cause different religious perceptions.

These differences pertain to both *usūl* (fundamental) and *fur'ū* (fringe) issues. These disputes remain alive within *al-shī'ah al-imāmiyyah al-ithnā 'ashariyyah* (followers of the Twelve Imam), also known as the Jafariyyah School. Arguments of many schools, which are thought to have disappeared in the course of history, such as Mutazilah, against the *sahabah* are still being discussed in academic circles in modern forms. This proves that such discussions maintain their vitality even today.

The brief historical background demonstrates the historical depth of the issue. The historical roots of which still affect and orient the present. This problem is also closely connected to modernity. The modern criticism of the *sahabah* is associated with the historical evaluation of events in order to base its criticisms on historical facts. Modern critics aim to read and reinterpret Islam by isolating it from the *sahabah* and inevitably from the Prophet (ﷺ).

Although the modern criticism of the *sahabah* is reinforced by the historical arguments against the integrity of the *sahabah*, the methods and motivations of these two approaches are essentially different. Despite sharing the core criticism, modern and historical approaches have glaring differences. The modern school has perennial problems with any interpretation of Islam that is not in accord with modern perspectives. By reason of its existence, the modern school attempts to keep the Muslim perception of religion parallel to the modern edifice of the world and its values.

The modernist approach, with its huge impact on Islamic studies, exploits the *sahabah* as a tool for weakening the authority of hadith or arousing suspicion against it. This conception of suspicion limits the role of *sunnah* as a defining source for the Muslim infused with modern arguments against the *sahabah*.

Modern critics of the *sahabah* mainly criticize the *ahadith* which contradict the modern values of the world. Unlike the old

approach, they disparage the narrators of such *ahadith* not due to the roles they played in history, but rather because they are narrators of these specific *ahadith*. In brief, undermining the integrity of the *sahabah* seems to be a way to get rid of the hadith that contradicts modernity.⁸ The modernist approach does not recognize the science of hadith as a science of transmission, and its adherents denounce the

⁸ *Sahabah* critics view that ahādīth on bad omen of women, crooked ribs, deficient intellects, and etc. are products of a troubled social context which clearly defile women. They have accused those *sahabah* who reported the so called anti-women ahadith without checking their context. According to them most of the patriarchal, chauvinist and misogynist ahadith that are demeaning to women are related by Abū Hurayrah. This kind of allegations are common among *sahabah* critics such as the Progressives, the Orientalists, the Shī'ah, the anti-ḥadīth and their ilk.

For instance Fatima Mernissi criticizes the personality of Abū Hurayrah and accuses him for being the author of anti-women ahādīth that saturates the daily life of every Muslim woman. She further states that he is an unreliable source of religious literature and that his credibility has long been under attack by the *sahabah* of his own generation.

(See Mernissi, Fatima, *The Veil and Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland, (Canada: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc. 1991), 78-79. Abou El Fadl is another writer who doubts the credibility of Abū Hurayrah and accuses him of reporting many of the ahādīth which are anti-women. Abou El Fadl, Khaled, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 224. These two ahadith are examples of ahadith that they consider as anti-women: Al-Bukhārī and Muslim quotes that Abū Hurayrah reported that Allah's Messenger said:

“Take good care of women, for they have been created from bent rib, and the most curved part of a rib is its upper end. If you insist on straightening it, you will break it; if you leave it, it will remain bent. So take a good care of women”

(Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4/161, hadith no. 3331; Muslim, *Al-Saḥīḥ*, 4/178, hadith no. 3720)

Another hadith considered to be anti-women by *sahabah* critics is one reported by al-Bukhārī, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās:

The Messenger of Allah said: “I have seen the Hell where women will make up the majority of its inhabitants as they are ungrateful.” It was asked whether they are ungrateful to Allah. The Prophet said: “They are ungrateful to their companions of life (husbands) and ungrateful to good deeds. If you are benevolent to one of them throughout the life and if she sees anything (undesirable) in you, she will say, ‘I have never had any good from you.’”

(Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1/14, hadith no. 29)

scientific discipline despite the great endeavors of scholars of hadith throughout the centuries. Theoretical principles of logic and the so-called empiricist's modern epitaph of the world form the foundations of this approach. Thus, modernists aim to "deconstruct" and align the Muslim mind with modernity.

In my opinion, today, modern critics are the most vociferous and formidable actors in the criticism of the *sahabah*. They get their power from the modern claim of empiricism, global approval of this claim and both local and global political centers in favour of the modernization of Islam.

The Trustworthiness of the *Sahabah*, from Theory to Reality

The relationship between narrators and texts of the hadith plays a vital role in acceptance or rejection of the text of a hadith. This is explicitly stated in the definition of accepted (*sahih*) hadith: *sahih* hadith is the hadith which is reported by a reporter who is honest and in possession of a good memory, without any break in the chain of narrators, without any *shudhûdh* (rareness/whose narrator is trustworthy, but contradicts the narration of trustworthy narrators) and without any *'illah* (defect).⁹

Sahih hadith should fulfill five criteria. As stated in the definition, all five criteria should be applied in order to prove that a hadith can be attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ). The first three pertain to the criticism of the chain of narrators while the last two refer to both the narrators and the text. According to the criteria, the transmitters should be *'ādil* (of confirmed integrity and probity). *'Adl* indicates abstaining from all kinds of small and big sins such as *shirk* (association of partner with Allah) and *fisq* (departure from the obedience of Allah), and the person must be a sincere and devout Muslim.¹⁰ The minimum requirement of this condition is that the

⁹ See Ibnī Ḥajar, Aḥmad bin 'Alī al-'Asqalānī, *sharḥu nukhbat al-fikri*, (Dimashq: Maktabat al-Ghazālī, n.d), 1; al-Suyūṭī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Abī Bakr, *tadrību al-rāwī*, Edited by 'Abdu al-Wahāb 'Abdu al-Laṭīf, (al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Riyāḍ al-Ḥadīthat, 1st edition, n.d), v.1, 66.

¹⁰ See al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin Abū Ḥāmid, *al-mustaṣfā fi 'ilmi al-'uṣūl*, Edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām 'Abdu al-Shāfi, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyat, 1st edition, 1413h), 125, al-Rāzī, Muḥammad bin 'Umar bin

person must not commit a major sin; however if he has committed one, he should repent and should not persist in committing minor ones.

The definition stipulates that trustworthiness of the narrator is the first condition for a hadith to be authenticated. The *ahl al-sunnah* scholars meticulously scrutinize each and every narrator according to the criteria of the *jarh* and the *ta'dīl* discipline (sciences of narrator criticism) except the *sahabah*, since all the *sahabah* are regarded as people of integrity and justice. Of course, as human beings the *sahabah* generation was not, according to scholars or Islamic legal schools, free of error. Nevertheless, according to the *ahl al-sunnah*, the first generation of Islam was different from other generations in many aspects. Firstly, they witnessed the revelation of the Quran, and secondly, they were educated by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. The trustworthiness of the *sahaba* does not indicate that they are free from error or infallible. On this ground, trustworthiness means authenticating hadith narrated by the *sahaba* without applying the criteria of *jarh* and *ta'dīl* on them.¹¹

At this point, the question of “who were the *sahaba*?” arises. How many of the *sahabah* had their trustworthiness examined by any criteria? Researchers analyzed this question from a theoretical perspective. In our opinion, although the theoretical structure of the issue is important, the most important aspect of it is to determine what the concept of *sahabah* corresponds to. We believe there are two answers to this question from the perspective of theory and reality.

We shall begin with the theoretical answer. Muslim scholars have had disputes about the theoretical definition of the *sahabah*. Scholars of method (*usūl*) narrowed down the scope of the definition of the *sahabah*, while the *muḥaddithūn* (scholars of hadith sciences) expanded it excessively.¹²

al-Ḥusayn Abū ‘Abd Allāh, *al-maḥṣūl*, Edited by Ṭaha Jābir Fiyāḍ al-‘Alwānī, (al-Riyāḍ: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad bin Sa‘ūd al-Islāmiyyat, 1st edition, 1400h), v.4, 571.

¹¹ al-Shawkānī, Muḥammad bin Alī, *irshād al-fuḥūl*. Ed. Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Badrī, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1st edition, 1992), v. 1, p. 129; al-Ghazālī, 130.

¹² Methodologists and *muḥaddithūn* disagreed on the definition of the *sahabah*. The differences in the definition of justice affect the application of the concept. Some

We shall trace this issue by following the definition set by the *muhaddithun*. Based on their conceptual definition, tens of thousands of people can be regarded as *sahabah*.¹³ Imam Bukhāry said a *sahabah* is someone who was in the company of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) or had seen him.¹⁴ According to Ibn al-Şalāh al-Şahruzūrī, someone who saw the Prophet (ﷺ) and believed in him, as well as died as a Muslim, should be regarded as a *sahabah*.¹⁵ The author of the comprehensive collection of the *sahabah* biographies, *al-işābat fī tamyīzi al-sahāba*, and an expert in the field, Ibn Hajar ended the disputes on the definition of the *sahabah* with a detailed, thorough and comprehensive definition of *sahabah*. According to him, the *sahabah* is “someone who met the Prophet (ﷺ) as a believer and believed in him as well as died as a Muslim.”¹⁶

methodologists, such as al-Bakillānī, Mazirī and al-Taftāzāny, asserted that the principle of justice is valid only for the famous *sahabah* for their closeness to the Prophet (ﷺ). After acknowledging that the Quran and hadith texts approve the justice of the *sahabah*, al-Bakillānī attaches a condition and states that the definition does not include all the Muslims who met the Prophet (ﷺ), but only those who were close to the Prophet (ﷺ) and who risked their lives and properties to defend him. Al-Juwayny, *kitāb al-talkhiyis fī uşul al-fiqh*, v.2, 374-375.

Methodologists in general state that only the *sahabah* who spent a long time with the Prophet (ﷺ) and were known for their long conversations with him can be regarded upright. They exclude those whose conversations were short. For example a famous methodologist, al-Taftāzāny states that the principle of justice can be applied to only the famous *sahabah*. See al-Taftāzāny, Sa'd al-Din, Sharḥ al-Talwyḥ 'Alā al-Tawḍīḥ, edited by Zakariyyā 'Amiyrāt, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Imiyyat, 1ed, 1996), v.2, 10.

¹³ Here it should be pointed out that although *shias* and the *ahl al-sunnah* differ in their justice of the *sahabah*, they both share the same views in the definition of *sahabah*. See al-Māmaqānī, 'Abd Allāh, *miqbāsu al-hidāyah fī 'ilmi al-dirāyat*, edited by Muḥamad Riḍā al-Māmaqānī, (Qum: Mu'asasat Āli al-Bayti Liihyā'i al-Turāth, 1st edition, 1441h.), v.3, 300, al-Şadr, Āyāt Allāh al-Sayyid Hasan, *nihāyat al-dirāyah fī sharḥi al-risālah al-mawsūmah bilwajizat lil-bahā'ī*, edited by Mājid al-Ghurbāwī, (Nashr al-Ma'shari, n.d.), 341, al-Subḥānī, Ja'far, *uşul al-ḥadīth wa aḥkāmihī fī 'ilmi al-dirāyat*, (Qum: Lajnat Idāruh al-ḥawzat 'ilmiyyah, 1st edition, 1420 h), 110.

¹⁴ al-Bukhāry, Muḥammad Bin Ismā'īl, *Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhāry*, edited by Muştafā Dīb al-Bughā, (Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Kathīr al-Yamāma, 3rd edition, n.d), v.3, 1335.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Şalāh, al-Şahruzūrī, *muqadimat ibn al-salāh*, (Pakistan/Multan: Farūki Kutüb Hāne, n.d), 146.

¹⁶ Ibni Hajar, Aḥmad bin 'Alī al-'Asqalānī, *nuzhat al-nazar sharḥu nukhbat al-fikri*,

This definition of the *sahabah* corresponds to the definition of *muhaddithūn* in their hadith collection. Ibn Ḥajar reached this definition through induction by comparing the people defined as *sahabah* in hadith literature. His biographical work provided him with this opportunity.

This definition obviously includes tens of thousands of people in the definition of the *sahabah*, most of whose identities are unknown to us. The most comprehensive *sahabah* biography compilation, “*al-iṣābat fī tamyīzi al-ṣaḥāba*” by Ibn Ḥajar comprises the biographies of 12,304 *sahabah*, including around two thousand female *sahabah*.¹⁷ If the *sahabah* whose names were repeated in identification chains are deducted, the number reaches around ten thousand, and some of these *sahabah* too remain unknown to us. Thus, there are thousands of *sahabah* whose existence we know about, and therefore, theoretically, can be included in the definition of *sahabah*. However, no information has reached us about their lives.

The disputes about the trustworthiness of *sahabah* usually revolve around theoretical concerns. The theoretical debates support the position of the critics of the *sahabah* because the *ahl al-sunnah*'s regard for tens of thousands of *sahabah*, whose biographical details are unknown to us, are just not easily acceptable to the modern mind. This regard stems from the respect for those people who believed and had the privilege of seeing the Prophet (ﷺ). Thus, they were collectively revered, and they were not subjected to ill-intentioned criticism.

When the matter is transferred from the theoretical plane to reality, the issue alters drastically and the core problem on what is actually discussed and disputed about the trustworthiness of the *sahabah* becomes apparent. It then becomes clear who maintains the agenda on the issue of trustworthiness of the *sahabah* and which *sahabah* are specifically targeted. We shall proceed by bearing in mind that the number of the *sahabah* whose identity has reached us is about ten thousand and the issue of the trustworthiness of the

(n.d), 55.

¹⁷ See Ibn Ḥajar, Aḥmad bin ‘Alī, *al-iṣābat fī tamyīzi al-ṣaḥāba*, edited by ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bukhāry, (Bayrūt: Dār Jīl, 1th edition, 1414).

sahabah can pertain only to these *sahabah*. When the issue is reckoned from the perspective of hadith narration, the number reduces considerably, revealing the exact number in terms of hadith narration techniques.

Hence, among the ten thousand *sahabah* whose identity has reached us, only about 1002 of them narrated *ahadith* directly from the Prophet (ﷺ). About 500 narrated only one single hadith. Table 1 demonstrates the number of the narrators and the number of ahadith they narrated.

Table 1

Narrator	Narrations
500 Sahabah	1 hadith
123 Sahabah	2 ahadith
80 Sahabah	3 ahadith
52 Sahabah	4 ahadith
32 Sahabah	5 ahadith
26 Sahabah	6 ahadith
27 Sahabah	7 ahadith
18 Sahabah	8 ahadith
11 Sahabah	9 ahadith
60 Sahabah	10-20 ahadith
55 Sahabah	≥ 100 ahadith
11 Sahaba	≥ 500 ahadith
7 Sahabah	≥ 1000 ahadith
Total: 1002	

As the table illustrates, the *sahabah* who narrated hadith and thus whose justice is of our concern are quite few.¹⁸ This can be observed in the *musnad* literature.¹⁹ Here it will be important to give

¹⁸ Sīddīqī, Muhammad Zubayr, 1993, *Hadith Literature, Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society), 15-19.

¹⁹ *Musnad* technically means collections of ahadith whose material is arranged according to the names of their original narrating authorities, irrespective of subject matter. Such are the *musnads* of Abu Daud al-Tyalisi (d.204/819), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.233/847), 'Abdullah ibn Abī Shayba (d.235/849), Abū Khaythama (d.234/844), and a number of others. The collector of a *musnad* is known as a

a list of those companions who narrated 20 or more ahadith.

	Name of Companion	No. of Ahadith
1.	Abu Shurayh al-Kab	20
2.	'Abd Allah ibn Jarrad	20
3.	Musawwir ibn Makhrama	20
4.	'Amr ibn Umayya al-Damari	20
5.	'Amr ibn Umayya (another)	20
6.	Safwan 'Ibn 'Assal	20
7.	Sa'd ibn 'Ubada	21
8.	al- Rabi'	21
9.	al- Sa'ib	22
10.	Qurra	22
11.	'Umayr ibn Rabi'a	22
12.	Umm Qays	24
13.	Laqit ibn Amir	24
14.	Al- Syarid	24
15.	Rifa'a ibn Rafi'I	24
16.	'Abdullah ibn Unays	24
17.	Aws ibn Aws	24
18.	Al-Fadl ibn Abbas	24
19.	Abu Waqid al Laythi	24
20.	Abu Talha al-Ansari	25
21.	'Abd Allah ibn Salam	25
22.	Sahl ibn Abi Haythama	25
23.	Abu al-Mulayh al-Hudhali	25
24.	'Abd Allah ibn Jaa'far	25
25.	Ya'la ibn Murra	26
26.	Abu Humayd al-Sa'idi	26
27.	Abu Malik al-Ash'ari	27
28.	'Abd Allah ibn Buhayna	27

musnid or *musnadi*. *Musnad* works differ in the detailed arrangement of the authorities who originally related them. In some of works, their names are arranged in alphabetical order. In others, they are arranged according to their respective merit in the acceptance of Islam and in taking part in the early important events of the Prophet's (ﷺ) mission. Others are arranged according to the affinity of their tribe to the Prophet (ﷺ). There are, however, some *musnad* works which are divided into chapters dedicated to particular subjects; in each such chapter the ahadith are arranged according to the original companions who narrated them.

29.	Abu Usayd al- Sai'di	28
30.	'Utba ibn 'Abd	28
31.	Ya'la ibn Umayya	28
32.	'Uthman ibn Abi'l-As	29
33.	Umm al-Fadl bint Al-Harith	30
34.	Suhayb	30
35.	'Iyad ibn Himar	30
36.	Mu'adh ibn Anas	30
37.	'Irbad ibn Sariya	31
38.	Khubab ibn al-Aratt	32
39.	'Abd Allah ibn al- Zubayr	33
40.	Fatima bint Qays	34
41.	Ma'qil ibn Yasar	34
42.	al-'Abbas ibn Abd al-Mutalib	35
43.	'Amr ibn 'Abasa	38
44.	Khuzayma ibn Thabit	38
45.	Talha ibn Abd Allah	38
46.	al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam	38
47.	'Amr ibn Al-'As	39
48.	Umm 'Atiyya	40
49.	Abu Tha'laba al-Khushani	40
50.	Hakim ibn Hizam	40
51.	Sahl ibn Hunayf	40
52.	Mu'awiyya ibn Hayda	42
53.	Al-Miqdad	42
54.	'Abd Allah ibn Mughfil	43
55.	Jundab ibn 'Abd Allah	43
56.	Bilal al- Habashi	44
57.	Abu Juhayfa	45
58.	Umm Hani	46
59.	Abu Barza	46
60.	Ka'ib ibn Ujra	47
61.	al-Miqdam	47
62.	'Abd Allah ibn Zayd	48
63.	Sa'id ibn Zayd ibn 'Amr	48
64.	'Abd Allah ibn Bishr	50
65.	Shaddad ibn 'Aws	50

66.	Asma' bint Abi Bakr	58
67.	Asma' bint 'Umayy	60
68.	Hafsa Umm al-Mu'minin	60
69.	Jubayr ibn Mu'tim	60
70.	Salman al-Farisi	60
71.	'Amr ibn 'Awf	62
72.	'Ammar ibn Yassir	62
73.	'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf	65
74.	Umm Habiba Umm al-Mu'minin	65
75.	'Adi ibn Hatim	66
76.	Abu Ra'uf	68
77.	Zayd ibn Arqam	70
78.	Wa'il ibn Hujr	71
79.	Maymuna Umm al-Mu'minin	76
80.	Salama ibn al-Akwa	77
81.	Rafi'i ibn Khudayj	78
82.	Zayd ibn Kalid	81
83.	Zayd ibn Thabit	92
84.	'Abd Allah ibn Abi Awfa	95
85.	Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah	100
86.	Abu Mas'ud al-Ansari	102
87.	al-Nu'man ibn Bashir	144
88.	Samura ibn Jundab	123
89.	Tahwban	128
90.	Usama ibn Zayd	128
91.	Abu Bakra Nufay'	132
92.	al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba	136
93.	Abu Bakr al-Siddiq	142
94.	Jabir ibn Samura	146
95.	'Uthman ibn 'Affan	146
96.	Abu Ayyub al-Ansari	155
97.	Mu'adh ibn Jabal	157
98.	Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan	163
99.	Ubayy ibn Ka'b	164
100.	Burayda ibn Hasib	167
101.	Abu Qatada	170
102.	Abu al-Darda	179

103.	‘Imran ibn al-Husayn	180
104.	‘Ubada ibn al-Samit	181
105.	Sahl ibn Sa’d	188
106.	Ma’d ibn Yaman	225
107.	Abu Umama al-Bahili	250
108.	Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas	271
109.	Abu Dharr al-Ghifari	281
110.	al-Bara’ ibn ‘Azib	305
111.	Abu Musa al-Ash’ari	360
112.	Umm Salama, Umm al-Mu’minin	378
113.	‘Ali ibn Abi Talib	536
114.	‘Ummar ibn al-Khattab	537
115.	‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-’As	700
116.	‘Abd Allah ibn Mas’ud	848
117.	Abu Sa’id al-Khudri	1170
118.	Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah	1540
119.	‘Abd Allah ibn Abbas	1660
120.	‘Aisha Umm al-Mu’minin	2210
121.	Anas ibn Malik	2286
122.	‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar	2630
123.	Abū Hurayrah	5374 ²⁰

The number of *sahabah* who narrated hadith is between 208 and 213, with 149 common ones, in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*. *The Musnad of Aḥmad b Ḥanbal* consists of the narrations of 700 *sahabah*. The *Muwatta’ of Imam Mālik* mentions 98 *sahabah*, while for the *Musnad of al-Tyālisi* the number is 281.²¹

The *sahabah* who narrated the most are Abū Hurayrah, ‘Abdullah b. Omer, Anas b. Mālik, ‘Aisha binti Abī Bakr, ‘Abdullah b ‘Abbas, Jābir b ‘Abdullah and Abū Saīd el-Khudrī.

Those who maintain the agenda of the *sahabah* in modern times and argue on the trustworthiness of the *sahabah*, both from a theoretical perspective and for the role they played in history, do not allude to the tens of thousands of *sahabah* who did not narrate from

²⁰ See more detail, Karataş, Mustafa, *Hadislerin Sayısı*, (Istanbul: Nun Yayıncılık, 1 ed. 2008), 300-337.

²¹ Sıddiqî, Muhammad Zubayr, 18.

the Prophet (ﷺ) and whose information we have not received. Neither do they discuss around ten thousand *sahaba* whose identities have been recorded in *sahaba* biographies literatures (*al-kutub fī ma'rifat al-sahābat*) and the biographies of narrators' literature (*kutub al-rijāl*). On the contrary, they focus only on the famous *sahabah*. For example, Shia schools reject the trustworthiness of the more famous *sahabah*, especially the first three caliphs: Abū Bakr, Omar and Othman as well as 'Aisha.

Another interesting point is that the modern critics of the *sahabah* target a small number of the *sahabah* out of the 1002 who narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ), especially those who narrated the most. Their special interest in Abū Hurayrah,²² Anas b. Mālik and others is not mere coincidence but is related to their historical role in hadith narration.

We maintain that the target of the modern critics is not the unknown *sahabah* or those who did not narrate any hadith or narrated a few. The *sahabah* who narrated a considerable number of ahadith and the tradition of the Prophet (ﷺ) have been subjected to harsh and pejorative criticisms. When the *sahabah* issue is considered from the narration point of view, critics of the *sahabah* should conclusively prove their claims and abstain from generalizations.

It is apparent from scrutiny that the focus of orientalist such as Ignaz Goldziher²³ or scholars who question the reliability of hadith such as Mahmoud Abu Rayyah²⁴ are actually the narrations and not the narrators themselves. In their criticism of Abū Hurayrah for example, they defamed him in order to destroy the link between

²² Famous modern Turkish theologian, Prof. Dr. Yaşar Nuri Öztürk portrays Abū Hurayrah as “someone who knows no limits in lying”. Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri, *İslam Nasıl Yozlaştırıldı*, (İstanbul: Yeni Boyut, 13th edition, 2001), 539.

²³ Ignic (Yitzhaq Yehuda) Goldziher (June 22, 1850 – November 13, 1921), often credited as Ignaz Goldziher, was a Hungarian orientalist. Along with German Theodore Noldeke and Dutch Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, he is considered the founder of modern Islamic studies in Europe.

See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ign%C3%A1c_Goldziher Retrieved: 07-06-2015.

Ignaz Goldziher's criticism of Abū Hurayrah, *Islamic Encyclopedia*, translated by Ahmad Santanāwī and Ibrāhīm Zakī and Abd al- Hamīd Yūnus, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah), vol. 2, 25-27.

²⁴ Abu Rayyah, *adwa 'ala al-sunnah muhammadiyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1969).

him and the Prophet (ﷺ) and hence rendering his narrations useless. This should suffice to give an overall picture of the modern criticism of the *sahabah*. Some orientalist criticize the *sahabah* for their political views and depict them as untrustworthy. These orientalist include individuals like Hugh Kennedy²⁵ and H. Lammens²⁶ along with others are united in terms of criticizing the *sahabah*. This shows that one of the common grounds for modern hadith criticism is the criticism of the *sahabah*.

Conclusion

The relationship between the *sahaba* and the sacred texts of Islam is crucial in terms of the reliability of the texts because the reliability of

²⁵ Hugh Kennedy is one of the most prominent contemporary orientalist. He is a professor of Middle Eastern History at the University of St Andrew and had written *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*. In his book, Kennedy made many accusations against the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). He, for example, alleges: “When Muhammad’s death became known the Muslims were ‘like sheep on a rainy night’. While the Ansar debated in *saqifa* of Banu Saïda, Umar seized the initiative by swearing allegiance to Abū Bakr as leader. Then the triumvirate of Muhājirīn leaders, Abū Bakr, Umar and Abū Ubayda went to the meeting place of the Ansar and put end to their deliberations, obliging them to acquiesce in their own choice....probably with the title of khalīfat Allah, the title was probably intentionally vague; Abū Bakr could not be a Prophet, but at the same time it was unthinkable that he should take a secular title like king.....”. See Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet (ﷺ) and the Age of Caliphates*, (London: Pearson Longman, 2nd edition, 2004), 51-52.

²⁶ In 1910, H. Lammens published his article on the “triumvirate of Abū Bakr, Umar and Abū Ubayda” in which he argued that: “It was the common purpose and close co-operation of these three men, initiated in the life time of Muhammad, which enabled them to found the successive caliphates of Abū Bakr and Umar. The latter would have appointed Abū Ubayda as his successor if Abū Ubayda had not died during his caliphate”. See J. Sauvaget and C. Cahen, *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East: A Bibliographical Guide*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1965), 126. Although, Lammens did not speak of a conspiracy to seize the succession, his presentation of the activity of the triumvirate suggests this. In particular, through Abū Bakr and Umar’s daughters ‘Aisha and Hafsa, he conclusively contended that their father were kept informed about every move and secret thought of their husband Mohammad, these two men came to exert great influence on the Prophet’s action and thus prepared their stage for their seizure of power. See, J. Sauvaget and C. Cahen, *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East: A Bibliographical Guide*, 126.

narrations is closely linked to the reliability of the narrators and the *sahabah* in general. Therefore, the approach to the issue of the *sahaba* had a profound impact on the perception of Islam of various *madhabs* within Islam. *Shiites*, *Mutalifah* and *Kharijites* built an edifice of religion and history based on their criticisms of the *sahabah*. The *ahl al-sunnah*, on the other hand, built its edifice of religion on the fundamental belief of reliability of the *sahabah*.

We can summarize the reason for this: The perception of religion is determined by the Quran and the Prophet (ﷺ). It is also a fact that the ahadith of the Prophet (ﷺ) were delivered to us by the *sahabah*. In other words, Muslims can reach the Quran and the *sunnah* only through the *sahabah*; there is no other material means. Their narrations of the Quran and the legacy of the Prophet in words, verbal and written, constitute the main essence of Islam.

Therefore, the issue of the *sahabah* is not merely a story of some people who lived at a certain period of time. They are not objects of history or the science of narration. The issue of the *sahaba* is very sensitive because their position plays an important role not for their individual biographies, but for the role they played in the transmitting of the ahadith of the Prophet (ﷺ). For these reasons, the *ahl al-sunnah* has oriented itself in defence of the *sahabah*.

The reason for the modern criticism of the *sahabah* is for detaching Islam from the Prophet (ﷺ). In order to establish a modern interpretation of Islam, hadith texts which obstruct modern constructions, should be eliminated. This is also the reason why the *sahabah* who transmitted most ahadith are deliberately targeted rather than others, and historical disparities are used as leverage for this purpose. This also demonstrates that theoretical criticism of the *sahabah* does not target unknown *sahabah*, but prioritizes the *sahabah* whose identities and reputation and proximity to the Prophet (ﷺ) have been proven.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	ک	—	g	g	
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʒ	ل	l	l	l	
پ	p	p	p	ژ	—	zh	zh	م	m	m	m	
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ʃ	ه	h	h	h ¹	
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ʃ	و	w	v/u	v	
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	ی	y	y	y	
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	-a ²	
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	¹ – when not final ² – at in construct state ³ – (article) al - or l-				
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh					
ذ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q					
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k				

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
		uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چ jh گ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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