Major Topics of the Hadith

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Abstract
Hadiths – reports of what the Prophet Muhammad said, did, or tacitly approved – have exerted an extraordinary influence on Muslims for over a millennium. Despite the significance of this literature, its contents remain largely inaccessible to non-Arabic readers, in part due to many Western scholars’ preoccupation with the question of its authenticity rather than the function of hadith in Islamic thought. This article provides an overview of the contents of the canonical Sunni hadith collections along with a sample of ethical hadiths in idiomatic English.

1 Overview of Sunni Hadith Literature

Sunni hadith literature forms one of the most significant domains of the vast Islamic library. A hadith is a report of what the Prophet Muhammad (ca. 570–632) said, did, or tacitly approved. Each hadith consists of a chain of transmitters, called the *isnad*, and the actual text that was transmitted, called the *matn*. As we shall see, hadiths touch upon all aspects of Islamic thought and practice, ranging from law to theology, ethics to hagiography, and eschatology to Qur’anic exegesis.

While hadiths are important to both Sunni and Shi’i Muslims, this article will restrict itself to the vast Sunni hadith literature (for a good introduction to Shi’i hadith, see Kohlberg 1983; Gleave 2001). Most of the topics we will be encountering are common to both Sunni and Shi’i hadith books, and the primary differences between these two bodies of literature are found in the rules governing the *isnad* and theological issues. It should also be noted that Shi’i scholars frequently read Sunni hadith books, whereas it is unusual for a Sunni scholar to read a Shi’i hadith book. The reason for this discrepancy is that Sunni hadith books contain many hadiths that are in agreement with Shi’i positions, whereas Sunnis consider most of the *isnads* in Shi’i hadith books to be highly defective and thus unworthy of study.

Sunni hadith literature consists of three broad genres of texts: hadith compilations, critical biographical dictionaries of transmitters, and technical manuals. Hadith compilations generally take one of three formats – *musnad*, *musannaf*, and ‘forty hadiths’. A *musnad* book is arranged according to the
Companion of the Prophet (sahabi, pl. sahaba) who reported the Prophet’s action, statement, or tacit approval of something. Thus, in the famous Musnad of Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), all of the hadiths that Abu Bakr al-Siddiq transmitted on the authority of the Prophet Muhammad are in one chapter, followed by all of the hadiths that ʿUmar b. al-Khattab transmitted, and so on for over 800 companions. The musnad format was useful for the analysis of isnads, but highly impractical for locating specific prophetic utterances or practices. Scholars who composed works in this style that are extant include Abu Dawud al-Tayalisi (d. 819–20), Abu Bakr al-Humaydi (d. 834), Abu Yaʿla al-Mawsili (d. 919), and Abu ʿAl-ʿAbbas al-Asamm (d. 957–8).

The second, and most popular, format for hadith compilations was the musannaf, or topical arrangement. All six of the canonical collections, about which we will have more to say below, are arranged topically by book and chapter, so that one can easily locate hadiths pertaining to specific legal, ethical, or theological subjects. Most of the classical hadith compilations have between 35 and 95 books and several thousand chapters. Examples of early extra-canonical works in the musannaf format include the Sunan of al-Darimi (d. 869), Sahih of Ibn Hibban (d. 965), Sunan of al-Daraqutni (d. 995), and Mustadrak of al-Hakim al-Naysaburi (d. 1014).

The final format, which became increasingly popular after the year 1000, was the ‘forty hadiths’ book. According to a hadith that is generally considered inauthentic, the Prophet Muhammad said, ‘God will resurrect in the company of jurists and religious scholars anyone who memorizes forty religious hadiths for the sake of my community’ (Ibrahim & Johnson-Davies 1976). Given the massive and intimidating size of most classical hadith collections, the ‘forty hadiths’ format provides a user-friendly introduction to the rich hadith literature. In fact, to this day, al-Nawawi’s (d. 1277, near Damascus) book, Forty Hadith, remains one of the most successful works of this genre. The famous Sufi master Ibn ʿArabi (d. 1240) also composed an expanded ‘forty hadiths’ book of ‘sacred hadiths’ that actually includes over 100 reports.

The six canonical hadith collections were compiled during the second half of the ninth century by scholars who, on their own initiative and at their own expense, traveled in search of prophetic reports from central Asia to Egypt (for more on canonization, see Brown 2007a). The two most highly revered collections are the Sahih of Muhammad b. Ismaʿil al-Bukhari (d. 870) of Bukhara (in modern-day Uzbekistan) and the Sahih of Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (d. 875) of Nishapur (Iran). The four remaining canonical collections, all of which are known by the title Sunan, are by Abu Dawud al-Sijistani (d. 889, in Basra), Ibn Maja (d. 887) of Qazvin (Iran), Abu ʿIsa al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) of Tirmidh (Uzbek/Afghani border), and Ahmad b. Shuʿayb al-Nasaʾi (d. 915, in Palestine). Hadith compilation continued for over a century after these books were produced and original works with complete isnads were assembled until at least the time of the great Persian hadith scholar, Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi (d. 1066). Most hadith
books that were composed after the eleventh century were based on reports found within the 20 or so hadith compilations that date to the formative period of 850–1070. Several important later works that draw heavily on the earlier collections include *The Lamps of the Sunna* by al-Baghawi (d. 1122); *The Niche of the Lamps* by al-Tibrizi (d. 14th century; translation by Robson 1963–5); *Gardens of the Righteous* by al-Nawawi; *The Attainment of Desire* by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (d. 1449); *The Short Comprehensive Compilation* by al-Suyuti (d. 1505); *Treasure of the Practitioners* by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi (d. 1567); and *The Achievement of the Goals* by al-Shawkani (d. 1839).

Biographical dictionaries are essentially large ‘Who’s Who’ guides to hadith transmitters (an excellent introduction to Arabic biographical dictionaries is Wadad al-Qadi 1995; see also Roded 1994). The earliest of these books, the *Book of Generations* by Ibn Sa‘d (d. 845) of Baghdad, discusses several thousand transmitters, generation by generation, according to where they lived (it also includes an extensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad and entries for over 1,000 companions of the prophet; for more on this book, see Lucas 2004; Khalidi 1996). Ibn Sa‘d, like many authors of biographical dictionaries, frequently provides a qualitative grade for many transmitters. These grades include ‘trustworthy’, ‘sincere’, ‘weak’, and ‘rejected’. Unlike Ibn Sa‘d’s book, most biographical dictionaries in the Sunni tradition are arranged alphabetically, and some of the more important works of this genre are: *The Book of Validation and Invalidation* by Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 939) of Rayy (Iran); *The History of Baghdad* by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071) of Baghdad; *The History of Damascus* by Ibn ‘Asakir (d. 1175) of Syria; *The History of Islam and The Lives of Notable Noble Figures* by Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi (d. 1348) of Syria; and *The Refinement of the Refinement* by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani of Cairo. All of these voluminous books are in Arabic and, unfortunately, none of them has been translated into any European language as of this time; the one general biographical dictionary that has been translated into English is Ibn Khallikan’s (d. 1282) *Wafayat al-a‘yan* (see Baron William de Slane 1970).

The final genre of hadith literature consists of technical manuals that explain the multiple disciplines (or sciences) of hadith. Muslim scholars invented a vast array of technical terms to describe and analyze hadith texts, transmitters, and modes of transmission. The pre-eminent work of this field, popularly known as *The Introduction (al-Muqaddima)*, by the Syrian of Kurdish origin, Ibn al-Salah (d. 1245), has just received a magnificent translation into English (Dickinson 2005). Ibn al-Salah identifies 65 hadith disciplines, ranging from definitions of the qualitative grades ‘sound’, ‘fair’, and ‘weak’ that are applied to hadiths, to the methods of writing hadiths, to the clarification of nicknames and homographic names of transmitters found in *isnads*. Many great Mamluk-era scholars (ca. 1260–1516) wrote commentaries on or abridgements of Ibn al-Salah’s *Introduction*, including al-Nawawi, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373), ‘Abd al-Rahim al-‘Iraqi (d. 1404), Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, al-Sakhawi (d. 1497), and al-Suyuti.
The vast majority of works belonging to Sunni hadith literature remain entirely inaccessible to non-Arabic readers. Western scholarship on hadiths has been concerned primarily with debating the historical value of hadiths for unraveling Islamic origins rather than the religious, moral, or spiritual influence of these texts on Muslims over the past millennium (for an excellent overview of the major debates over the authenticity of hadiths by Western scholars, see Motzki 2004, Introduction). There are practically no academic monographs on any of the major hadith compilers or compilations in Western languages, and most translations of these books into English are marred by stylistic infelicities and a habit of leaving numerous Arabic words untranslated (two hadith compilations that have been translated into highly readable English are Ibrahim & Johnson-Davies 1976 and Hamid 2003; see also Robson 1963–5). In light of the challenges facing most students interested in learning more about Sunni hadiths, two of the primary goals of this article are to provide an overview of the contents of the canonical Sunni hadith collections along with a sample of 22 ethical hadiths in idiomatic English.

2 Two Canonical Compilations: Muslim’s Sahih and Abu Dawud’s Sunan

Muslim’s Sahih (2000) and the Abu Dawud’s Sunan (1997) have long been held in high esteem by the Sunni Muslim community. Muslim’s compilation is arranged into 54 books (kutub) and Abu Dawud’s Sunan contains 35. The following 26 books are common to both compilations:

(1) Ritual purity (tahara) (14) Blood money (diyat)
(2) Prayer (salat) (15) Special crimes (hudud)
(3) Funerary Rites (jana’iz) (16) Adjudication (aqdiya)
(4) Alms tax (zakat) (17) Lost and found (luqta)
(5) Fasting (siyam/sawm) (18) Warfare (jihad)
(6) Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj/manasik) (19) Governance (imana)
(7) Marriage (nikah) (20) Hunting (sayd)
(8) Divorce (talaq) (21) Animal sacrifice (adhai)
(9) Manumission (‘itq) (22) Beverages (ashriba)
(10) Sales (buyu’) (23) Clothing (libas)
(11) Inheritance (‘ara‘id) (24) Morals and Etiquette (adab)
(12) Wills/Testaments (wasaya) (25) Religious knowledge (‘ilm)
(13) Oaths and Pledges (ayman, nudhur) (26) Apocalypse (fitan)

This list provides an introductory overview of the major topics of the hadith. Most of these topics relate to Islamic law and address the three broad legal categories of acts of worship (‘ibadat), transactions (mu‘amalat), and punishments (‘uqubat). Ethical topics are more visible in Muslim’s Sahih than in Abu Dawud’s Sunan, since Abu Dawud groups most of his ethical material in the Book on Morals and Etiquette, while Muslim has separate books on ‘Greetings’, ‘Kindness and Good Relations’, ‘Remembrance of God’, and ‘Repentance’. Theological topics, such as the apocalypse,
are common to both books, and Abu Dawud has a unique book called ‘Sunna’ that highlights several sectarian positions of Sunni Muslims. Only Muslim includes independent books on ‘excellences’ (faḍā’il) and ‘excellences of the companions of the Prophet’ that fall into the realm of hagiography, although Abu Dawud does include chapters extolling the virtues of the ‘rightly guided caliphs’, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali, in his Book on the Sunna.

Given that these books vary tremendously in length, we shall compare the largest books in Muslim’s Sahih with the largest ones in Abu Dawud’s Sunan, in order to obtain a clearer sense of the major topics of the hadith:6

This list indicates several additional structural similarities between the contents of Muslim’s Sahih and Abu Dawud’s Sunan. Prayer is the pre-eminent topic, having twice as many hadiths as the second largest books in both compilations. Pilgrimage, ritual purity, and fasting are also found on both lists, indicating a greater utility of prophetic hadiths for regulating the acts of worship than transactions or punishments. Were we to combine all of Muslim’s books on ethical topics, we would arrive at a similar number of hadiths to those found in the large Book on Morals and Etiquette in Abu Dawud’s Sunan. Finally, this comparison shows Muslim’s greater attention to extra-legal topics, like hagiography, than that of his contemporary Abu Dawud.

Given the significance of prayer in these two collections, let us examine more closely what types of regulations the hadith provide. Our case study will be the ‘holiday prayer’, which is performed on the two major Muslim holidays, ‘Id al-Fitr and ‘Id al-Adha.10 The holiday prayer is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an and appears to be a prophetic practice (sunna) that was adopted by the entire Muslim community. Muslim devotes a short book in his Sahih to this topic, while Abu Dawud covers the holiday prayer in Chapters 245–257 of his Book on Prayer.

Muslim’s Book on the Two Holiday Prayers consists of a preface with four chapters. The preface presents hadiths reporting that the schedule of the ‘Id al-Fitr holiday began with a congregational prayer, followed by a
sermon, and concluded with the Prophet’s exhortations to the women’s section in which he urged them to donate some of their jewelry as alms. Several hadiths mention that the call to prayer (adhan) that accompanies the five daily prayers was not recited for the holiday prayers. Muslim next proceeds to relate hadiths addressing the following four issues:

1. it is permissible for women of all ages to attend the holiday prayer and listen to the sermon;
2. there are no supererogatory prayers either prior to or after the holiday prayer;
3. the Prophet recited from *Sura Qaf* (50) and the *Sura of the Moon* (54) in the holiday prayer; and
4. public festivities are permissible and singing may be done in private during the holiday.

The first three topics related to the holiday prayer that Muslim discusses are found in Abu Dawud’s *Sunan*. Abu Dawud also addresses the following additional issues and points of interest on the basis of hadiths:

1. the two Muslim holidays were the same days as pre-Islamic holidays in Medina;
2. the prayer leader (imam) should not tarry on his way to the holiday prayer;
3. menstruating women can sit at the back of the holiday prayer and join in praising God;
4. the Prophet delivered the sermon from on top of a bow (qaws);
5. one says ‘Allahu akbar’ (God is greatest) seven times in succession in the first cycle of prayer and five times in succession in the second cycle;
6. it is not obligatory to stay and listen to the sermon after the units of prayer have been performed;
7. the Prophet took one route to the place where the holiday prayer was performed and a different route back home;
8. if the prayer leader does not perform the Holiday prayer on the first day of the holiday, he should perform it on the second day; and
9. the holiday prayer can be prayed in the mosque in the case of inclement weather.

It is apparent from this brief case study that Abu Dawud derives a greater number of rulings from hadiths than Muslim does. A likely reason for this discrepancy is that Abu Dawud’s standards for including hadiths are lower than those of Muslim, the latter of whom insisted that all of the transmitters in the isnads should be graded at the level of ‘trustworthy’ and that the lives of the people who form the links in the chains of transmitters overlap. Thus, the vast majority of Sunni Muslim scholars have considered Muslim’s book secondary only to the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari with respect to the authority of the hadiths it contains, but they have also found Abu Dawud’s *Sunan* to be more useful than Muslim’s *Sahih* for their task of
determining Islamic law. It is also apparent from this example that many (and perhaps most) of the legal hadiths in Muslim’s Sahih are found in Abu Dawud’s Sunan, so it would be more efficient for a religious scholar to go straight to Abu Dawud’s book, especially since the bulk of its contents have been graded by other Muslim scholars as either ‘sound’ or ‘fair’.

3 A Sample of Ethical Hadiths: How to Be a Good Muslim

Although hadiths do play a role in Islamic jurisprudence, it is very likely that the hadiths most Muslims hear in sermons or study in school are of an ethical nature. The very concept of Islam’s ‘five pillars’ derives from a hadith, as does the tripartite hierarchy, favored by many Sufis, of ‘submission – faith – beautiful conduct’ (islam – iman – ihsan) (for a thorough discussion of these concepts, see Murata & Chittick 1994; the hadiths that give rise to both of these concepts are found in Ibrahim & Johnson-Davies 1976, nos. 2, 3). Basic social interactions, such as greetings and the proper response to a sneeze, are made ‘Islamic’ through hadiths. An-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith, mentioned above, consists mostly of ethical teachings that encourage righteousness and piety rather than specific legal injunctions. In light of the aforementioned language barrier to most of the hadith literature, we will offer a selection of 22 ethical hadiths found in the Book on Morals and Etiquette in Abu Dawud’s Sunan.17

• The virtues of mercy, kindness, and affection
  1 ‘Abd Allah b. Mughaffal said that the Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: God is gentle and loves tenderness. His gifts to the gentle person surpass all that He gives to the harsh one.18
  2 Abu Hurayra reported that [the Bedouin] al-Aqra’ b. Habis saw the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) kissing [his grandson] al-Husayn and said, ‘I have ten children, none of whom I have ever kissed!’ The Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) replied: He who shows no mercy shall receive no mercy.19
  3 A’isha (Peace be upon her)20 said: The Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) never, ever struck a servant or a woman.21
  4 Hudhayfa said: Your Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: Every good deed (ma’rif) is an act of charity.22
  5 A’isha (May God be pleased with her) reported that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: The Angel Gabriel kept advising me [to be kind to] neighbors, so much so that I thought he was going to grant them a share of inheritance!23
  6 Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: By He in whose hand my soul rests! None of you will enter Paradise until you truly believe, and none of you will truly believe until you love one another. Shall I indicate to
you how you might love one another? Extend your greetings amongst each other far and wide.24

• Some vices

7 Abu Hurayra reported: Someone said, ‘O Messenger of God, what is character assassination (ghiba)?’ He replied, ‘It is your act of mentioning your brother in a manner he despises.’ [The interlocutor] said, ‘But what if your brother matches the description that you have mentioned?’ [The Prophet] replied, ‘If he is as you describe him, then you have committed character assassination; if he is not as you describe him, you have committed slander.’25

8 Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: Beware of jealousy! Jealousy consumes good deeds like fire consumes wood.26

9 Anas b. Malik reported that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: Do not engage in mutual hatred or jealousy, and do not sever relations between one another. O servants of God, be brothers! It is not lawful for a Muslim to be estranged from his brother for more than three nights.27

• Assisting others

10 Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: Whoever removes a worldly affliction from a believer, God will remove one from him on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever alleviates [the lot of] a needy person, God will alleviate [his lot] in this world and the Hereafter. Whoever covers the fault of a Muslim, God will cover his fault in this world and the Hereafter. God will aid His servant so long as His servant aids his brother.28

• Filial piety

11 The grandfather of Bahz b. Hakim said: ‘O Messenger of God, whom should I treat with kindness?’ He replied, ‘Your mother, then your mother, then your mother, then your father, and then your relatives, according to their proximity to you.’29

12 Abu Usayd Malik b. Rabīʿa al-Saʿādi said: Once when we were with the Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) a man from Banu Salama came by and said, ‘O Messenger of God, are there any acts of filial piety which I should perform after my parents have passed away?’ He replied, ‘Yes. You should offer blessings and prayers upon them, ask God to forgive them, fulfill their outstanding pledges, maintain good relations with their relatives, and honor their friends.’30

• Etiquette for greetings

13 Abu Hurayra said: The Messenger of God said: The rider on horseback should initiate greetings with a man on foot; the youth should initiate greetings with the adult; the person walking should initiate greetings with the seated person; and the smaller group of people should initiate it with the larger group.31

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14 Asma’, the daughter of Yazid, said: The Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) passed by us, a group of women, and greeted us with, ‘Peace be upon you.’

15 al-Bara’ b. ‘Azib said: The Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: Whenever two Muslims meet, clasp hands, praise God (Mighty and Majestic is He), and request His forgiveness, they are both forgiven.

• Etiquette when one sneezes

16 Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: When one of you sneezes, say, ‘All praise belongs to God, unconditionally!’ Let his brother or companion then say, ‘May God have mercy on you.’ The one who sneezed may say, ‘May God guide you and improve your condition.’

17 Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said: A Muslim is obliged to do five things for his fellow Muslim brother: return his greeting; say ‘May God have mercy on you’ when he sneezes; reply to his invitation; visit him during his illness; follow his funeral procession.

• Etiquette for seeking permission to enter a house

18 Abu Sa’id al-Khudri said: We were sitting in a gathering of Helpers (Ansar) when Abu Musa al-Ash’ari arrived in a vexed state. We said to him, ‘What vexes you?’

Abu Musa replied: ‘Umar ordered me to visit him, so I went and sought permission to enter his house three times. He did not grant me permission, so I returned home. [Later, ‘Umar] said, ‘What kept you from coming by my place?’ I replied, ‘I came by your house, requested permission to enter three times, and nobody granted me permission to do so. The Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said, “Whenever anyone seeks permission to enter three times and does not receive it, he should return home.”’ ‘Umar demanded that I provide corroborating evidence [that the Prophet said this].

Ubayy b. Ka’b said, ‘Only the youngest one of us should go with you [to see ‘Umar].’ Abu Sa’id left [with Abu Musa] to testify [to ‘Umar that the Prophet said this].

• Prohibition against killing certain creatures

19 Ibn ‘Abbas said that the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) prohibited the killing of four creatures: ants, bees, hoopoe birds, and sparrow hawks (surad).

20 ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Uthman reported that a physician asked the Prophet (May God bless him with mercy and peace) about a frog that he wished to use as an ingredient in some medicine he was making. The Prophet forbade him from killing the frog.

• Nighttime invocations

21 al-Bara’ b. ‘Azib said: The Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) said to me: Before you get into bed, do the
ritual ablutions for prayer, then lie in bed on your right side and say, ‘O God, to You I submit; to You I entrust my whole being; with You I seek refuge, out of hope in You and fear of You. There is neither refuge nor escape from You except through You. In Your book that You revealed and Your prophet whom You sent, I believe.’ [The Prophet said:] If you die [after having recited this invocation], you will die in a state of natural perfection (fitra). Make these lines your final words.

al-Bara’ asked the Prophet: Is it permissible for me to substitute ‘Your messenger whom You sent’ [for ‘Your prophet whom You sent’]? He replied: No, say, ‘in Your prophet whom You sent.’

22 Shariq al-Hawzani said: I visited ‘A’isha (May God be pleased with her) and asked her, ‘What words did the Messenger of God (May God bless him with mercy and peace) say prior to his nighttime prayer?’ She replied, ‘You have asked me about something which no one else has previously asked. When nightfall descended, he would say, ‘God is greatest’ ten times, followed by, ‘All praise belongs to God’ ten times; then ‘Glory be to God and by His praise [I glorify Him]’ ten times; then ‘Glory to [God] the King, the Holy,’ ten times; then ‘I seek forgiveness from God’ ten times; then ‘There is no god but God’ ten times; then ‘I seek refuge with You from the anguish of this world and the anguish of Resurrection Day’ ten times; and then he would commence his [nighttime] prayer.

4 Conclusion

Western scholars have barely begun to scratch the surface of the vast Sunni hadith literature. This short essay proposes that comparative thematic analyses between major hadith collections have the potential to shed light on the role of hadiths in Islamic law, ethics, and theology (see Burton 1994). Additional studies on the Muslim practice of hadith criticism and the technical vocabulary of hadith scholarship will enhance our knowledge of these core intellectual Islamic traditions. As our research continues to shift from the question of historical authenticity of hadiths to their actual contents and social influence, we should witness tremendous expansion in our understanding of the dynamics and development of Sunni Islam.

Short Biography

Scott Lucas’ research explores the writings of Sunni hadith scholars and jurists, especially those who lived in the ninth and tenth centuries under the ‘Abbasid caliphate. In his first monograph, *Constructive Critics, Hadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam*, he argued that hadith critics played a far greater role in the ninth-century formation of Sunni Islam than that which most scholars had assigned to them. He is currently...
investigating questions concerning the legal methodologies and opinions of scholars, such as Ibn Abi Shayba, al-Bukhari, Ibn al-Mundhir, and al-Tahawi; some of his findings have been published in *Islamic Law and Society* and the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Lucas has been an assistant professor in the Near Eastern Studies Department and Religions Studies Program at the University of Arizona since 2004, and, prior to this appointment, taught at Mount Holyoke College and the American University of Beirut. He holds a BA from Yale University in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and Political Science, and a PhD from the University of Chicago in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

Notes

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1 There exists a small group of hadiths, called ‘sacred hadiths’ (*hadith qudsi*), which report God’s statements, as opposed to those of the Prophet. For more on this topic, see Graham (1977).

2 Numerous hadiths can be found in most Islamic texts, especially works in the legal and mystical traditions. However, I am restricting the concept of ‘hadith literature’ to those works whose primary mission is to present, sort, or elucidate hadiths. One of the finest introductions to Sunni hadith literature remains Siddiqi (1993).

3 The most important skeptics of the validity and historical utility of hadiths are Ignaz Goldziher et al. (1971), Joseph Schacht (1950), and G. H. A. Juynboll (1969, 1983, 1996, 2001); the leading scholars who disagree with the skeptics’ most radical assertions include Fuat Sezgin (1967), Nabia Abbott (1967, 1983), M. M. al-Azami (1985, 1992), and Schoeler et al. (2006). Some of the most exciting work in this field is being done by Harald Motzki (2002) and several additional European scholars whose work can be sampled in Herbert Berg (2003). Apocalyptic hadith is one genre of hadiths that has elicited a modest degree of attention by Western scholars; see the publications by David Cook (2003), Michael Cook (1992, 1997), and Wilferd Madelung (1986).

4 The *hudud* are a set of crimes mandating corporal punishment that can only be inflicted by the political authorities. These crimes are usually limited to theft, fornication, false accusation of fornication, intoxication, and banditry; apostasy is frequently added to this list.

5 While the contentious word ‘jihad’ means ‘to exert oneself, struggle’, its use in the context of hadith books and legal texts is restricted to the laws of warfare.

6 Counting hadiths is an imprecise science, as there is no clear convention as to whether two hadiths with very slight textual differences but identical meanings should count as one hadith or two. The edition of Muslim’s *Sahih* that I am using tends not to count repetitions of closely related or identical *matn* as multiple hadiths, while the edition of Abu Dawud’s *Sunan* counts every single hadith report. Thus, the numbers of hadiths in Muslim’s column would be substantially higher were every single report counted.

7 Muslim actually has seven books on the topic of prayer, so this number represents the aggregate of prayer-related hadiths in his *Sahih*.

8 Muslim’s *Book on Belief* (kitab al-iman) covers more than theological issues and contains many core teachings recognized by most Muslims. A less literal rendering of this book’s title could be ‘Fundamentals’ or, in modern parlance, ‘Islam 101’.

9 Muslim has a separate *Book on Menstruation* that I have added to the *Book on Purity*, since Abu Dawud discusses menstruation in his *Book on Purity* in the *Sunan*.

10 *Id al-Fitr* celebrates the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan), while *Id al-Adha* celebrates the conclusion of the major pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.
This is in contrast to the weekly Friday prayer, in which the sermon precedes the communal prayer.

It is recommended for Muslims to perform prayers in addition to the obligatory ones. For example, there is agreement that one should pray at least two extra units of prayer prior to and after the midday prayer, but no supererogatory prayers after the daybreak and afternoon prayers.

Menstruating women are not supposed to perform the obligatory prayers until their period has ended and they have taken the ritual bath, according to Islamic law.

There is disagreement among the Muslim jurists as to the precise number of times one says ‘Allahu akbar’ in the holiday prayer; this repetition of ‘Allahu akbar’ is what makes the holiday prayer different from the regular obligatory prayers, in which it is never said more than once in each stage of the prayer cycle.

This ruling arises from the fact that the Muslim calendar is lunar and it is possible for one person to see the new moon a day earlier than his neighbors, resulting in him praying on the second day of the holiday. ‘Id al-Fitr begins on the first day of the Muslim month Shawwal and ‘Id al-Adha begins on the tenth day of the Muslim month Dhu al-Hijja.

Some hadiths in these chapters indicate that the Prophet and his companions prayed the holiday prayers outdoors, presumably due to the presence of so many members of the community on these occasions.

All translations are by the author of this article unless otherwise noted. The isnads have not been included in the interest of space.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 11); this hadith is found in Muslim’s *Sahih*; see also Hamid 2003, p. 62, #276.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 156); this hadith is found in the canonical books of al-Bukhari, Muslim, and al-Tirmidhi; see also Hamid (2003, p. 24, #56).

This blessing is normally reserved for prophets, but appears in the text of Abu Dawud’s *Sunan*.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 5); this hadith is found in the Muslim’s *Sahih*.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 68); this hadith is found in Muslim’s *Sahih*; see also Hamid 2003, p. 37, #129.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 132); this hadith is also found in the canonical books of al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Maja; see also Hamid 2003, p. 25, #63.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 142); this hadith is found in the books of Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Maja; for a related hadith, see also Hamid 2003, p. 41, #149.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 40); this hadith is also found in the books of Muslim and al-Tirmidhi.


Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 55); this hadith is found in the books of al-Bukhari, Muslim, and al-Tirmidhi; see also Hamid 2003, pp. 56–7, #240.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 68); my translation is adapted from Ibrahim & Johnson-Davies 1976, p. 114, #36.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 129); see also Hamid 2003, p. 13, #3.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 129); this hadith is found in Ibn Maja’s *Sunan*; see also Hamid 2003, pp. 17–18, #20.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 145); this hadith is found in the books of Muslim and al-Tirmidhi; very similar hadiths can be found in Hamid 2003, pp. 99–100.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 148); this hadith is found in the books of al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maja; for a longer version, see Hamid 2003, p. 103, #485.


Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 99); this hadith is found in al-Bukhari’s *Sahih*; see also Hamid 2003, p. 95, #442.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 98); this hadith is found in the books of al-Bukhari, Muslim, and al-Nasa’i. There are variants in which six or seven obligations are enumerated; see Hamid 2003, p. 95.

The Helpers were the native inhabitants of Medina (Yathrib) who embraced Islam between 620–22 and invited the Prophet Muhammad to serve as a supreme arbitrator between their two main tribal factions, Aws and Khazraj. ‘Umar, who appears in this hadith, was from Mecca and counts as one of the emigrants. The incident reported in this hadith appears to have taken place during the Caliphate of ‘Umar (634–44).
Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 138); this hadith is found in the books of al-Bukhari and Muslim; a longer version of this hadith can be found in Hamid 2003, p. 105, #490.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 176); this hadith is also found in the Ibn Maja’s *Sunan*.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 177); this hadith is also found in al-Nasa’i’s *Sunan*.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 107); this hadith is found in the books of al-Bukhari, Muslim, and al-Tirmidhi; see also Hamid 2003, p. 116, #545.

Abu Dawud, *Sunan* (Adab: Chapter 110); this hadith is also found in al-Nasa’i’s *Sunan*.

Examples of recent research in this vein include Brown 2007b; Dickinson 2001, 2002; Fadel 1995; Lucas 2006; Melchert 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Speight 2002.

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