The Textual Integrity of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī
A Study on the Primary Recensions, Textual Variants, and Transmission of the Ṣaḥīḥ

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Contents

Figures xv
Conventions xvii
Introduction 1

Part I | Transmission and Textual Variations
The Transmission of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 11
  Overview of the Ṣaḥīḥ 11
  Early Reception 15
  A Slow Start 19
  Causes for the Bottleneck 23
  Geographic and Chronological Spread 27
Textual Variants 31

Part II | Recensions and Analysis
The Recension of Ibrāhīm al-Nasafi 40
  Transmission 41
  Survey of Sources 44
Comparative Analysis 56
  Caveats 56
  Synopsis 60
  Main Text 62
  Chapter Headings 68
  Exegetical Comments 71
  Author Comments 73
  Scribal Variations 75
The Recension of Ḥammād b. Shākir 79
  Survey of Sources 80
  Case Study 83
Conclusion

1. Can we reconstruct the recensions of al-Nasafi and Ḥammād based on secondary sources?
2. What does a comparison of the primary recensions reveal about the textual integrity of the Ṣaḥīḥ?
3. Is al-Farabrī’s reliability as a transmitter of the Ṣaḥīḥ corroborated by al-Nasafi?

Appendices

Appendix 1: al-Nasafi’s Variants
Appendix 2: Ḥammād’s Variant
Appendix 3: al-Aʿlām’s Variants
Appendix 4: Statistical Tables

Bibliography

Index
Introduction

Described as “the most authentic book after the Quran,” Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī is an embodiment of critical scholarship and a paragon of the hadith tradition. The unrivaled standards of verification utilized to authenticate its contents require little introduction.\(^1\) What is less known, to an anglophone readership at least, is its transmission after Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī’s (d. 256 AH) demise. Thousands of people are said to have attended readings of the Ṣaḥīḥ under al-Bukhārī, but only a handful of them played an active role in transmitting the book to posterity. What further complicates the issue is that its extant oral and manuscript transmission effectively bottlenecks at one student, Muḥammad b. Yusuf al-Farabrī (d. 320 AH).\(^3\) While a single individual conveying information may not be an issue in many circumstances, in this case, a serious question is often raised: Why is it that a book so consequential to the faith—second only to its divine scripture—reached posterity via such a narrow route? To add insult to injury, the single narrator purportedly lacks explicit accreditation and praise from his contemporaries.

In his 1993 study on Islamic law, the British historian Norman Calder dismissed the ascription of several early works to their purported compilers. These collections, Calder argued, were the result of systematic pseudepigraphy, redaction, and organic growth. The written corpora of scholars like Mālik b. Anas (d. 179 AH), Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189 AH),

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3. The name of al-Farabrī is so closely tied with al-Bukhārī that a seventh century critic made the demonstrably inaccurate claim that al-Bukhārī had no other students. See al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar a’lām al-nubalā‘* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1985), 1:103.
al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204 AH), and al-Bukhārī reached their final form much later than their alleged dates of compilation. At the heart of Calder’s contentions are the absence of the autographs of these works and supposed discrepancies in their composition. His revisionist claims were challenged and discredited by subsequent studies. There is much to unpack in Calder’s contentions, but this study hopes to put these concerns regarding the Ṣaḥīḥ to rest.

In the face of thousands of manuscripts, commentaries, contemporaneous and secondary citations, and supplementary works (e.g., mustakhraj) from different epochs and regions, to deny the overall ascription


7 The Mu’assasat Āl al-Bayt catalog of hadith manuscripts lists 2,327 manuscripts of the Ṣaḥīḥ that were written in various periods of history and located in libraries throughout the world. See al-Führis al-shāmil li-l-turāth al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī al-makṭūt, 7:493–565. The catalog was published over three decades ago, and many manuscripts have been discovered since, so the current number is much higher.

8 Secondary references include al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH) citing hadith from the Ṣaḥīḥ with his own chain to al-Bukhārī, and contemporaneous citations refer to al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH) mentioning hadith that al-Bukhārī included in the Ṣaḥīḥ. Examples of both will be provided in the following chapters.
of the Ṣaḥīḥ to Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī requires a level of revisionist skepticism that lacks academic credibility—yet provocative titles arguing exactly that abound.⁹ As astutely noted by al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām, wholesale skepticism toward the provenance of ancient texts would render functioning in society unmanageable.¹⁰ Considering the efforts that scholars exerted to edit and preserve hadith collections, particularly Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, a fortiori there should be no question about the provenance of these collections.¹¹ Moving past the basic premise of ascribing the Ṣaḥīḥ to al-Bukhārī, this study will examine the textual integrity of the Ṣaḥīḥ on a granular level. Although the Ṣaḥīḥ was compiled by al-Bukhārī, how much of the current text resembles the compiler’s autograph, and if they differ, then what are the causes and extent of the divergences?

For argument’s sake, even if the veracity of the Ṣaḥīḥ were put into question, the ramifications on the hadith corpus would not be ruinous. The thoughts of the Ḥanbalī polymath Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH) on this matter are instructive for our purposes:

> The hadith of al-Bukhārī and Muslim are narrated by countless other scholars and hadith experts. Neither of them is unique in their narrations; before and after them, many have narrated those very hadith. If al-Bukhārī and Muslim were not born, the faith would not be lacking, for those hadith would exist through other routes in a manner that would meet, or even exceed, the objective.¹²

At first blush, these comments may come across as dismissive of the vaunted place of the Ṣaḥīḥayn in Muslim intellectual history. However, considering the assumption that the foundations of Islam hinge on the veracity

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¹⁰ Al-Burzulī, Fatāwā al-Burzulī, 1:79.

¹¹ Al-Suyūṭī, Tadrīb al-rāwī, 1:574; see also Ibn al-Wazīr, al-ʿAwāṣim wa-l-qawāṣim, 1:302.

¹² Ibn Taymiyya, Minhāj al-sunna fī naqḍ kalam al-Shīʿa al-qadariyya (Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad b. Saʿūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), 7:215. The research of Aḥmad Snober on the number of hadith that are unique to the Ṣaḥīḥ will be mentioned in the conclusion.
Geographic and Chronological Spread

Everything discussed thus far relates to the immediate transmission of the Ṣaḥīḥ. When the students of al-Nasafi, Ḥammād, and al-Farabrī began transmitting the Ṣaḥīḥ themselves, there now emerged a second generation of recensions of the text, each with its textual idiosyncrasies and variations. The subrecensions of al-Nasafi and Ḥammād will be addressed in their respective sections. In the case of al-Farabrī, there are at least twenty-four subrecensions. Apart from Ibn al-Sakan (d. 353 AH) and al-Naqqāsh (d. 351 AH), his students were predominantly from the neighboring towns of Khurasan and Transoxiana. His prominent students include Abū Zayd al-Marwazī (d. 371 AH), Ibn ‘Adi (d. 365), and “the Three Shaykhs:” al-Mustamlī (d. 376), al-Sarakhsī (d. 381 AH), and al-Kushmīhanī (d. 381). One of his most influential students in terms of spreading the text was Ibn al-Sakan, who was born in Baghdad but later settled in Egypt, a geographically convenient location for students traveling from the Maghreb. Thus, Ibn al-Sakan became the linchpin for al-Farabrī’s recension to travel to the other end of the Muslim world.

By the third and fourth generation of transmitters, al-Farabrī’s recension not only reached every important center of learning, but it also became the de facto route of transmission for the Ṣaḥīḥ. Figure 2 illustrates the transmission and spread of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī from its three primary recensions until the end of the fifth century AH. To be clear, scholarly activity surrounding the Ṣaḥīḥ involved more than its transmission. During the “long fourth century AH,” Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim) witnessed a period of “intense canonization” in the regions of Jurjān, Isfahan, Nishapur, and Baghdad. By virtue of groundbreaking books like al-Ismāʿīlī’s (d. 370 AH) al-Mustakhraj, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dārāquṭnī’s (d. 385 AH) al-Ilzāmāt, and al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī’s (d. 405 AH) al-Mustadrak, the Ṣaḥīḥ was foregrounded as a masterpiece of hadith literature.

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69 The biographies and information for these transmitters can be found in “Introduction,” in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (ed. Bayt al-Sunna), 1:226–420.
70 Brown, The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, 100–153.
<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>HN</th>
<th>Nasafi</th>
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<th>CR</th>
<th>SRC</th>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>“qatl”</td>
<td>MT</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>FB</td>
<td>12:219</td>
<td>Also mentioned by al-Mustamlī. This variant was preferred by Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ and others.</td>
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<td>“istaʿāna”</td>
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<td>Placement of bas-mala between kitāb and bāb</td>
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<td>Rewording of the bāb</td>
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<td>“al-muʿānidīn”</td>
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<td>FB</td>
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<td>The truncation results in a confusion between the verses.</td>
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<td>12,373</td>
<td>Resolves an objection.</td>
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