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Narrators: Unreliable Hadith

# **Chapter 2: The Sources And Narrators**

# **The Hadith Sources**

A disproportionate number of *hadith* on the *rajʻah* (72 out of 192) originate from a relatively obscure, although not maligned book called *Muntakhab al–Basa'ir* by Shaykh Hasan ibn Sulayman, a student of Al–Shaheed al–Thani<u>1</u>. *Tafsir ʻAli ibn Ibrahim* is the second most plentiful source, supplying thirty–two *hadith*, only twelve of which have chains of narration. *Muntakhab al–Basa'ir* and *Tafsir ʻAli ibn Ibrahim* are the only sources with 'very strong' *rajʻah hadith*.

The remaining *hadith* are scattered among a plethora of other sources, many of which offer only one or two *hadith*. Only a handful of *hadith* come from the collections considered most authentic; namely, *Al-Kafi*, *Man La Yahdhuruhu al-Faqih*, *Tahdheeb al-Ahkam*, and *Al-Istibsar* as well as *Kitab al-Ghaybah* by Al-Nu'mani, and *Kitab al-Ghaybah* by Al-Tusi. However, despite their renowned sources, many of these *hadith* have particularly weak chains of narration; in fact, one of the *hadith* from *Al-Kafi* has, arguably, the worst chain of narration in all of *Kitab al-Rajʻah*2. Many of these *hadith* also offer little content, and several are simply quotations of *ziyarat*.

As for why the most renowned *hadith* scholars chose only to include these truncated, problematic *hadith* in lieu of others, there are a couple possibilities. The lesser possibility is that they did not have access to the other *hadith*; this seems unlikely given the variety of other sources that they appear in. The greater possibility is that they themselves considered these *hadith* unreliable. Identifying which material they might have had access to but chose not to include would provide another clue as to which *hadith* can be reliably traced to the Imams; however, it will not be the subject of this analysis3.

In general, no one source dominates *hadith* on any particular topic; rather, the number of *hadith* per topic is roughly proportional to the number of *hadith* from that source. (Exceptions have been noted) For instance, *Muntakhab al–Basa'ir* supplies 37% of the *hadith* in *Kitab al–Raj'ah* and 38% of the *hadith* on the return of Imam al–Husayn. Therefore, most topics cannot be traced a single compiler.

A chart of the *hadith* from different sources and their relative reliability can be found in Appendix B.

# **Common Narrators: Reliable Hadith**

However, the sources and narrators of the reasonably verifiable *hadith* (that is to say, 'average' and better) are a different matter, as they are dominated almost exclusively by *hadith* from Sa'd through lbn Abi al-Khattab and lbn 'Isa4. The remaining *hadith* come mostly from Ibn Abi 'Umayr.

A breakdown of the paths of narration of the *hadith* per category is as follows:

### Very strong hadith

Muntakhab al-Basa'ir:

- 5 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn Abi Al-Khattab and Ibn 'Isa together (or, in one case, the two sons of Ibn 'Isa)
- 2 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn Abi al-Khattab (without Ibn 'Isa)
- 1 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn 'Isa (without Ibn Abi al-Khattab)

Tafsir 'Ali ibn Ibrahim:

• 4 hadith from the father of 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, 3 of which are related through Ibn Abi 'Umayr

## Strong hadith

Muntakhab al-Basa'ir:

- 4 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn 'Isa
- 2 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn Abi Al-Khattab
- 3 hadith through other chains of narration

Amali al-Saduq:

• 1 hadith transmitted from Ibn 'Isa

Kamil al-Ziyarah:

• 1 hadith related through Ibn Abi 'Umayr

Al-Kafi, Kitab al-Ghaybah by Shaykh Tusi, and Majalis al-Mufeed each also contribute 1 hadith with unrelated chains of narration5.

## **Average hadith**

Muntakhab al-Basa'ir:

- 3 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn Abi al-Khattab
- 2 hadith from Sa'd through Ibn 'Isa
- 5 hadith reproduced from a book called Kitab Ta'weel Ma Nuzzila min al-Qur'an fi al-Nabi wa Alihi (S)
- 2 hadith with other chains of narration

5 hadith, 4 of which are quotations of *ziyarat*, are also included from other books. Since *Al-Basa'ir*, the source book of *Muntakhab al-Basa'ir*, is attributed to Sa'd ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abi Khalaf, it is natural that he would relate so many *hadith* in it. However, while none of these individuals is known to be unreliable, and in fact Ibn Abi 'Umayr is considered to be extremely reliable (Al-Fadli, 2002), the fact that most of the material comes from these two paths does give some pause for thought. The authenticity of *hadith* on the *raj'ah* is, in essence, dependent on the reliability and good judgment of these four individuals. Had Sa'd not transmitted this material or had 'Allamah Majlesi not had *Muntakhab al-Basa'ir*, modern Shi'a beliefs regarding the *raj'ah* might have been very different.

## **Common Narrators: Unreliable Hadith**

Over thirty narrators were identified as unreliable. However, as can be seen in the chart in Appendix C, no one of them narrated any significant number of *hadith*, and most only narrated one *hadith*. Nonetheless, some specific ideas can still be traced to specific personages, as will be seen in the next chapter. Additionally, as a whole, unreliable narrators dominated *hadith* on certain topics, such as vengeance.

Just as Sa'd played a strong role in narrating 'strong' *hadith*, he also played a strong role in narrating unreliable *hadith*, as he related about half of the 'very unreliable' *hadith* and a quarter of the 'unreliable' *hadith*. Since – as will be seen – the content of many 'unreliable' *hadith* differs sharply from the more reliable *hadith*, it is not clear whether he passed them on because he agreed with their content or had other reasons to believe they were authentic. However, the remaining unreliable *hadith* come through different narrators and from a variety of different sources.

- 1. Biographical information taken from Mukhtasar al-Basa'ir (Al-Hilli, 2005 [15th century AD]).
- 2. This hadith, Hadith #103, has been quoted in the next chapter.
- 3. I am indebted to M. Samiei for a long discussion on this point.
- 4. Sa'd ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abi Khalaf, Husayn ibn Abi al-Khattab al-Zayyat, and Ahmad ibn 'Isa al-Ash'ari al-Qummi.
- 5. Although the hadith in Amali al-Saduq and Al-Kafi share Al-Saffar as a narrator, he does not narrate any other raj'ah hadith.
- 6. The author of Mukhtasar al-Basa'ir says that, according to Al-Iffindi, Sa'd transcribed the material in Muntakhab al-

Basa'ir but not necessarily the material in Al-Basa'ir. In any case, he is still associated with Muntakhab al-Basa'ir (Al-Hilli, 2005 [15th century AD]).

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