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The Significance of Sanad ‘Ālī in Ninth-Century Hijri Hadith Transmission: An Analysis of Ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalani’s Thought

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Abstract

Scholars of hadith from the Salaf period generally preferred hadiths with a minimal number of narrators in the isnad, known as ‘*āli*’ hadiths. This preference was partly due to the reduction of potential distortion in transmission associated with fewer narrators. It is evident that the ‘*āli*’ isnad was regarded as significant by hadith scholars during the early period. However, the importance of the ‘*āli*’ isnad following the codification of hadith has not been sufficiently examined. This study aims to ascertain whether the ‘*āli*’ isnad retained any significance after the period of hadith codification, with particular attention to the ninth century. Focusing on the work of Ibn Hajar *al-Abādīth al-‘Ashrah al-‘Ushārīyyah*, this research endeavors to demonstrate the high status attributed to the chain of narration within that text, as asserted by the author. By tracing contemporary reports (*ṭābi’* and *shāhid*) related to the hadiths included by Ibn Hajar, it is possible to reconstruct the attitudes of scholars in the ninth century towards high chains (*‘āli*). Consequently, this study aims to reveal the perception of high chains during that period, both theoretically and practically. Furthermore, the research indicates that the transmission of hadiths persisted even when not all were documented in written sources, in contrast to practices observed in earlier periods.

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Introduction

Attention to the ‘*āli*’ isnād, which is a shorter chain of hadith transmission, has become one of the important aspects in the study of hadith sciences since its early development. According to the tradition of hadith sciences, ‘*uluww al-isnād*’ (*highness of the isnād*) refers to an isnād with a smaller number of narrators between a narrator and Prophet Muhammad ṣallallāhu ‘alaihi wa sallam. The ‘*āli*’ isnād is considered special because the smaller number of narrators is believed to minimize the potential for errors or distortions in the process of hadith transmission. (al-Salah, 2002). Sanad comes from Arabic, meaning 'to attach something to something else,' while al-sanad can mean the front or the bottom of a mountain, or the foot of a mountain, because it is its support. The word isnad in hadith means relying on the narrators to know the statements of the Prophet ṣallallāhu ‘alaihi wa sallam. (Ali, 2016).

In the early period of the development of hadith and hadith studies, scholars paid special attention to hadiths with a *'ālī* chain (hadiths that have a shorter chain of narration), considering them to have an advantage over hadiths with a *nāzil* chain (which have a longer chain of narrators). This belief was based on the assumption that the fewer links in a chain, the lower the likelihood of errors in narration. (Maizuddin, 2013). Among the scholars who stated the virtue of a high isnad is Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. He stated that seeking a high isnad is part of religion. (al-Baghdadi, 1975). Because hadiths with an elevated chain of narrators (*'ālī*) have a chain of transmission that is closer to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), this led some scholars to be willing to undertake journeys (*riḥlah*) to various regions in order to seek or obtain hadiths with an elevated chain of narrators (*'ālī*). Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī recorded several narrations about journeys undertaken by some people with this purpose. (al-Baghdadi, 1975).

Al-Baghdadi's report shows the scholars' attention to the *'ālī* isnad during the golden period of hadith transmission. Unfortunately, reports indicating that the high isnad remained significantly important afterward have not been found. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ indeed included the discussion of the *'ālī isnad in his Muqaddimah*. (al-Salah, 2002). Al-'Iraḳī then included it in *Alfiyyah* (al-'Iraḳī, 2008). Unfortunately, the conception of isnad *'ālī* in those two books still revolves around the practices carried out by predecessors and does not show a high model and practice of isnad tracing in their time. Therefore, questions arise regarding the significance of sanad *'ālī* in the post-hadith transmission period.

Attention to the *'ālī* chain of transmission can also be found in the era of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852 H/1449 AD). This study will focus on the examination of hadiths with a *'ālī* chain of transmission reflected in Ibn Ḥajar's work, namely *al-Aḥādīth al-'Ashrah al-'Ushāriyyah*. This book specifically collects ten selected hadiths with the same number of narrators, namely ten narrators, which in Ibn Ḥajar's era were claimed to be special, considering that the usual chains of transmission at that time consisted of more narrators. (al-'Asqalani, 2003).

However, the question that arises and needs to be examined more carefully is whether the hadiths in the book *al-Aḥādīth al-'Ashrah al-'Ushāriyyah* truly meet the criteria as *'ālī* hadiths when compared to other similar narrations from different chains of transmission. This question is important to clarify whether the selection of these hadiths was based solely on the elevation of the isnad, or whether other considerations were at play. In addition, further analysis is needed to understand the extent to which attention to a *'ālī* isnad remains relevant in the era of the later scholars, such as in the time of Ibn Ḥajar, especially in the context of the shift in scholars' focus towards the integrity of the narrators.

A number of studies on the development of hadith in the era of Ibn Ḥajar *al-'Asqalānī* focus more on models of understanding and commentary on hadith. This is illustrated in Afwazdi's research on the semiotic model of hadith commentary in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*. (Afwazdi, 2020). Similarly, Ritonga's analysis of Ibn Ḥajar's interpretation of anthropomorphic hadiths shows attention to the commentary of hadiths (Ritonga, 2016). Attention to the commentary on hadith is also evident in Blecher's research on the *Fatḥ al-Bārī* manuscript, which he states is the earliest accessible version (Blecher, 2017). Broader attention was shown by Khan, who compared the models of commentary on various hadiths applied by Ibn Ḥajar and Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī (Khan, 2022). Different attention is shown by Karagozoglu and Topgul, who studied the Shia narrators mentioned by Ibn Ḥajar in *Lisān al-Mizān* (Karagozoglu & Topgul, 2023).

The novelty of this article lies in its in-depth and contextualized analysis of the concept of *sanad 'ālī* (elevated chains of transmission) specifically within the ninth century Hijri, a period that has received relatively limited focused attention in hadith studies. By centering the thought of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, this study goes beyond general discussions of sanad criticism and instead uncovers how the preference for shorter chains functioned not only as a technical معيار (criterion) of authenticity but also as a symbol of scholarly distinction and intellectual prestige. Furthermore, the article offers a new contribution by integrating textual analysis of Ibn Ḥajar's works with the broader socio-intellectual context of his time, showing how the pursuit of *sanad 'ālī* was shaped by networks of transmission, competition among scholars, and the culture of hadith learning. This approach provides a fresh interpretive framework that connects methodological theory with historical practice, thereby filling an important gap in the literature on late classical hadith scholarship.

No one has yet created a research model that discusses the narration of hadith in that era, particularly the conception of the 'ālī and nāzil isnad. This is necessary to understand the possible shifts in the value of the isnad's height over time. Therefore, this research is expected to provide an explanation regarding the position of the 'ālī isnad in the post-hadith narration era, especially in the ninth century AH. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's book *al-Aḥādīth al-'Asrab al-'Ushāriyyah* will be used as a representation of the practice of seeking the 'ālī isnad.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research design in the field of hadith studies, with particular emphasis on isnād analysis. The primary source of data is the work *al-Aḥādīth al-'Asrab al-'Ushāriyyah*, authored by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, which serves as the main corpus for investigation. In addition, secondary sources include classical hadith compilations (such as *Kutub al-Sittah* and other relevant collections), biographical dictionaries (*ketub al-rijāl*), and contemporary scholarly studies on sanad criticism. These sources are utilized to support the identification, verification, and contextualization of the narrations under study.

The data collection process begins with the inventory and selection of hadiths from *al-Aḥādīth al-'Asrab al-'Ushāriyyah*, which constitute the research corpus. Each hadith is then systematically traced to identify its *shāhid* (corroborating narrations with similar meaning) and *tābi'* (supporting narrations with similar chains or transmitters). This tracing prioritizes narrations transmitted by Ibn Ḥajar's contemporaries to capture the scholarly dynamics of the ninth-century Hijri, while earlier narrations are incorporated for comparative purposes where relevant. The process also involves documenting each chain of transmission in detail, including the names and sequence of narrators, and selectively filtering reports based on their relevance and availability within the same temporal framework.

The analytical stage applies the technique of *ī'tibār al-sanad*, which involves reconstructing and comparing multiple chains of transmission for each hadith. This includes examining the number of transmitters in each sanad, identifying points of convergence and divergence, and evaluating the relative length of each chain. Through this comparative analysis, the study determines whether the sanad presented by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī can be classified as *'ālī* (elevated, with fewer intermediaries) or *nāzil* (lower, with more intermediaries) in relation to parallel narrations from his contemporaries. This method enables a more precise understanding of the structural position and scholarly significance of the hadiths within their historical transmission context.

Findings and Discussion

The Chain of 'Ālī and Nāzil in Hadith Narration

Sanad, linguistically meaning reliance or support, refers in hadith studies to the chain of narrators through which the statements of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) are transmitted. The term *isnād* specifically denotes this reliance on narrators to preserve and convey the hadith. In some contexts, related terms such as *ṭariq* and *wajb* are also used interchangeably to refer to the chain of transmission. (Azami, 1995). Attributing a hadith to a narrator is a meaning that is analogical (*qiyās*) (Ibn faris, n.d.). Sanad is also understood as *mu'tamad* (reliable or authoritative). In hadith terminology, it refers to the chain of narrators that connects a report to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). (Thahhan, n.d.). In hadith studies, the *isnād* is a key factor in determining the quality of a narration. Differences in its structure affect the scholarly value of a hadith, leading scholars to closely examine distinctions such as *sanad 'ālī* (high) and *sanad nāzil* (low) in assessing its merit.

Sanad 'ālī refers to a chain of transmission with fewer narrators compared to others reporting the same hadith. Because it is closer to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), it is considered higher in status and often associated with greater reliability. (al-Salah, 2002). *Sanad nāzil* is the opposite of *sanad 'ālī*, referring to a chain with more narrators for the same hadith. Although it is considered less proximate to the source, it does not necessarily indicate weaker authenticity. (al-Salah, 2002). Hadith scholars highly valued *'ālī* chains because shorter transmissions were seen as less prone to error. This emphasis led to the tradition of *riḥlah* (scholarly travel) to obtain hadith directly from reliable sources. As outlined by Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, this journey aimed to collect hadith, verify their authenticity, seek higher chains, examine narrators, and engage in scholarly discussion on hadith criticism. (al-Baghdadi, 1975).

The distinction between *sanad 'ālī* and *sanad nāzil* concerns the number of narrators rather than the authenticity of a hadith. While an *'ālī* chain has fewer transmitters and is closer to the Prophet, scholars prioritize narrator reliability over chain length, meaning a sound *nāzil* hadith may be preferred over a weak *'ālī* one. Nevertheless, *'ālī* chains remain valued for their closer proximity and lower risk of transmission errors. (Aisyah & Abdurrahman, 2022). Although seeking a *sanad 'ālī* was a key aim of *riḥlah*, scholars differed on its superiority over *sanad nāzil*. Some even preferred *nāzil* chains, arguing that they require greater *ijtihād* in evaluating narrators and offer a broader scope for analysis, making them sufficient even when an *'ālī* chain exists. (al-Ramahurmuzi, 1971).

'Abd Rabbih Abū Ṣā'īlayk highlights several advantages of *sanad nāzil*, emphasizing that it encourages re-verification, careful transmission, and critical evaluation of narrators. It also reflects selectivity in choosing reliable transmitters, may include additional clarifications in the text, and often serves as a necessary alternative when higher chains are unavailable. He concludes that narrator credibility (*thiqah*) should take precedence over chain length, making *sanad nāzil* both valid and valuable in hadith scholarship. (Abu Sa'īlayk, 2013).

Some scholars argue that *sanad 'ālī* is more virtuous because it reduces the need for *ijtihād* in evaluating narrators, thereby minimizing the risk of error. (al-Ramahurmuzi, 1971). Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī emphasizes the importance of *sanad 'ālī*, arguing that reliance on *sanad nāzil* may lead scholars to neglect the tradition of *riḥlah*, which is essential for obtaining higher chains of transmission. (al-Baghdadi, 1996). Yāsir Shaḥātah Muḥammad Ḍiyāb supports the preference for *sanad 'ālī*, except when the narrators in a *sanad nāzil* are more trustworthy (*thiqah*).

Ibn Ḥajar and the 'Ushāriyyah Chain

Muntasir Zaman notes that during the Muta'akhhirīn I period (500–900 AH), Egypt and Syria became key centers of hadith development, marked by the systematic growth of *riwāyah* and *dirāyah*. At the end of this period, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī emerged as a major figure whose works significantly shaped hadith scholarship. (Muntasir, 2025). Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī was born on 12 Sha'bān 773 AH with the name Aḥmad. As noted by his student Al-Sakhāwī, his full lineage is Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Kinānī al-'Asqalānī, though he is widely known by the title "Ibn Ḥajar," a name also borne by some of his ancestors. (Sakhāwī, n.d.). However, al-Sakhāwī does not specifically identify the ancestor in question. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, born in Egypt and raised as an orphan under the care of al-Zakī al-Kharūbī, memorized the Qur'an in Mecca by the age of nine under al-Ṣadr al-Ṣaftī. He later undertook extensive scholarly journeys, traveling to Qus (793 AH), Alexandria, the Hijaz, Yemen, and Syria, where he studied with various scholars such as Nūr al-Dīn al-Anṣārī, al-Tāj Abū 'Abd Allah al-Shāfi'ī, and al-Taqī al-Fāsī. (Sakhāwī, 1999).

Al-Sakhāwī classified the teachers of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī into three groups: those who transmitted hadith, those who granted *ijāzah*, and those who served as close discussion partners—the most influential category. He later organized and expanded Ibn Ḥajar's own list by adding further names. (Sakhāwī, 1999). Several of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's teachers were leading hadith scholars, including al-Sirāj al-Bulqīnī, Ibn al-Mulaqqin, and al-'Irāqī, who transmitted hadith to him and trained him in fiqh. (Ṭabīshī, 2024). Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's scholarly breadth is reflected in his extensive writings across multiple disciplines, including Qur'anic studies, hadith, jurisprudence, history, and literature. His works are classified into 24 categories and are estimated to total around 283 titles, including several attributed to him. (Amiruddin, 2012). This massive number made Ibn Ḥajar one of the prolific scholars in the history of Islamic knowledge.

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī began writing at a young age, around 796 AH (approximately 24 years old), which contributed to his prolific output. However, as his knowledge developed, he became dissatisfied with some of his early works and wished to revise them, though he managed to revise only a few, such as *Fath al-Bārī*, *Tabḍīb al-Tabḍīb*, and *Lisān al-Miẓān*. (Sakhāwī, 1999). Joel Blecher finds that an early manuscript of *Fath al-Bārī* contains fewer annotations than later, more developed versions, indicating that Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī continued refining his work over time. (Blecher, 2017).

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's prominence in hadith studies stems not only from his title as *al-ḥāfiẓ* but also from his diverse scholarly works, including commentaries, summaries, and *takhrīj*. His writings reflect a strong اهتمام with *sanad 'ālī*, as seen in works like *al-Arba'ūn al-'Āliyyah*, *Ḍiyā' al-Anām*, and *Takhrīj al-Arba'īn*. His theoretical views are articulated in *Nukhbāt al-Fikar* and *Nuḥbat al-Nazar*, and further elaborated across his works, especially *Fath al-Bārī*. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī defines *sanad 'ālī* as a chain with relatively fewer narrators compared to parallel transmissions. He distinguishes two types: *al-'uluww al-muṭlaq*, which refers to a shorter chain directly to the Prophet, and *al-'uluww al-nisbī*, which refers to a chain closely connected to prominent hadith authorities such as Shu'bah ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Mālik ibn Anas, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and Al-Bukhārī.

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī classifies comparative *'ālī isnād* through *al-muwāfaqah*, which refers to a chain that corresponds to an imam's sanad by meeting the same teacher, without passing through the imam himself. If this alternative chain reaches the same source with fewer narrators, it is considered higher (*'ālī*) due to its shorter transmission path. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī further classifies

comparative isnād into several types. *Al-badal* refers to a chain that meets the same source as an imam’s sanad (e.g., at Mālik) but through a different route, serving as an alternative path. Meanwhile, *al-musāwāb* denotes a chain with the same number of narrators as the imam’s sanad, and *al-muṣāfaḥab* refers to a chain equal in length to that of the imam’s student.

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī maintains that *‘ulum al-isnād* (a high chain) is generally preferred because fewer narrators reduce the likelihood of cumulative transmission errors, making the report closer to accuracy. (al-Asqalani, 2011). Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī notes that scholars such as Al-Bukhārī paid close attention to variations in chains of transmission and, at times, preferred to include hadiths with *sanad ‘ālī*. (al-Asqalani, 1960). Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī explains that Al-Bukhārī sometimes included *sanad nāẓil* alongside *‘ālī* because it contained stronger transmission indicators. For example, a *nāẓil* chain may explicitly show direct transmission (*taḥdīth*), while an *‘ālī* chain may rely on *‘an‘anab*, which is less explicit. (al-Asqalani, 1960). *Sanad ‘ālī* is preferred only when its quality matches that of a *nāẓil* chain. If the *nāẓil* hadith has stronger qualities—such as more reliable (*awṭbaq*) or more knowledgeable (*afqab*) narrators—it is considered superior despite having more transmitters. (al-Asqalani, 2011). Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī emphasizes that while the length of the isnād affects accuracy, the reliability of narrators plays a more decisive role in evaluating a hadith.

The Rank of Sanad in the Ten Uṣūl Hadith

The tradition of scholars in seeking hadiths with high chains of transmission (hadith ‘ālī) has become common knowledge, although this does not mean that a small number of narrators is a standard for authenticity. Nevertheless, their efforts to obtain them are not something to be underestimated. Some scholars were willing to travel to distant lands to acquire hadiths with this distinction. Reports from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in *al-Riḥlah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥadīth* indicate that the pursuit of high chains of transmission was frequently conducted. One indication that the ‘ālī chain was considered special among hadith scholars is their pride when acquiring hadiths with such characteristics. A number of authors compiled books that collected hadiths with a certain chain of transmission. For example, Ibn al-Naqqūr al-Baghdādī collected hadiths with a chain of five narrators. It is different from Zāhir al-Shaḥḥāmī, who collected hadiths with a chain of seven narrators in *al-Aḥādīth al-Subā’iyyāt al-Alf*. Similarly, Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd collected hadiths with a chain of nine narrators in *Arba’ūn Hadīthan Tusā’iyyat al-Isnād*. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī also did the same for hadiths that have ten narrators in their chain.

Ibn Ḥajar claimed that ten narrators were the minimum number, making it the highest chain of transmission he possessed. He stated that the hadiths he obtained with such characteristics approached a thousand. Unfortunately, he only chose ten, which he included in *al-Aḥādīth al-‘Ashrah al-‘Ushāriyyah*. (al-Asqalani, 2003). Proving the claim of the high isnad possessed by Ibn Ḥajar is not an easy matter. This is due to the scarcity of works by his contemporary scholars that list hadiths with isnads obtained firsthand. Of course, this does not mean that the enthusiasm for seeking hadith reports was also minimal. It is possible that hadith narration was still thriving, but its recording was not extensive. Ibn Ḥajar's choice to only include ten out of hundreds of his *‘ushāriyyah* hadiths on one hand shows that narration was still ongoing, and on the other hand, it indicates that the recording of narrations that was done was very limited compared to what was obtained.

In general, the method of writing the book *al-Aḥādīth al-‘Ashrah al-‘Ushāriyyah* provides substantial support for the narrations (tābi’ and shāhid). After citing a hadith with its *‘ushāriyyah*

chain, Ibn Ḥajar gave commentary on the hadith. He mentioned other chains that he found and referred to similar hadiths in books compiled by his predecessors. Commentary on the narrators' credibility was also an explanation he considered important in several hadiths he reported. The mention of other chains that Ibn Ḥajar had only indicates the superiority of the hadith chain compared to the hadiths he possessed himself. This does not indicate the strength of the chain in his time, as it may be that his peers had fewer narrators. However, not many of them listed hadiths with a complete chain of transmission that they had obtained themselves.

Table 1: Ten hadiths of Ibn Ḥajar in *al-Aḥādīth al-‘Ashrah al-‘Ushāriyyah*

| No. | Final Chain | Contents of Hadith | Contemporary Witness/Successor |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Zuhayr bin Ṣurad | Zuhayr bin Ṣurad recited a poem in front of the Messenger of Allah which contained a request for forgiveness and a plea for his grace. The Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) responded to the poem, followed by responses from several companions from the Quraysh and Ansar. | 1. Al-Suyūṭī in <i>al-Taḥadduth bi-ni‘mat Allāh</i> 2. Al-‘Irāqī in <i>al-Arba‘in al-‘Ushāriyyah</i> |
| 2 | Jamrah bint ‘Abd Allāh al-Yarbū‘iyyah | Jamrah's father visited the Prophet Muhammad and asked for a prayer for his daughter. The Prophet Muhammad patted Jamrah's head and prayed for her. | 1. Al-‘Irāqī in <i>al-Arba‘in al-‘Ushāriyyah</i> 2. Ibn al-Jazarī in <i>al-‘Awālī</i> |
| 3 | Anas bin Mālīk | Heavenly reward for those who are tested with the loss of sight. | |
| 4 | Anas bin Malik | The practice of ablution carried out by Anas was based on what he saw from the ablution practices of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). | 1. Al-‘Irāqī in <i>al-Arba‘in al-‘Ushāriyyah</i> 2. Al-Suyūṭī in <i>al-Taḥadduth bi-ni‘mat Allāh</i> |
| 5 | Umm Nahār | The habit of Anas bin Malik riding a donkey, wearing a head covering, and dyeing the hair on his head yellow every Friday. | |
| 6 | ‘Abd Allāh bin Umm Ḥarām | ‘Abd Allāh bin Umm Ḥarām prayed facing two qiblahs together with the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). | |
| 7 | Anas bin Malik | The levels of the followers of Prophet Muhammad are divided into five | |

| | | |
|----|----------------------|---|
| | | groups, each group covering a span of 40 years. |
| 8 | Al-Nabighah al-Ja'di | Al-Nabighah recited poetry and received praise from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). |
| 9 | Anas bin Malik | The story of Abu Talhah and Umm Sulaym who intended to host the Prophet (PBUH), but he came with many people even though the food prepared was only specifically for him. |
| 10 | Abu Umamah | Heaven is guaranteed for those who maintain six practices: honesty, trustworthiness, keeping promises, guarding the eyes, hands, and private parts. |

Of the ten hadiths listed by Ibn Ḥajar, only three have chains of narration (sanad) that are complete back to the scholars of his time. The rest tend to mention hadiths by referring to books compiled by earlier hadith scholars. Among the latter are several hadiths also included by al-Suyuti in *Jāmi' al-Aḥādīth*. In that book, al-Suyuti does not mention the chains of narration and only refers to other books. This applies to the eighth through tenth hadiths. Besides *Jāmi' al-Aḥādīth*, al-Durr al-Manthūr also serves as a source to support the narration of the sixth hadith, while *Fath al-Kabīr* is used for the seventh hadith. The third hadith also relies solely of narratives from previous scholars, rather than a complete, contemporary chain of transmission. Al-'Irāqī, when encountering a similar hadith in *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazālī, performed takhrij of the hadith by referring to al-Ṭabarānī and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal. He also noted variations in the wording of al-Bukhari's narration (Al-'Irāqī, 2005). Similarly, al-Sakhawī, when asked about hadiths related to the loss of vision, also referred to earlier scholars such as al-Ṭabarānī, al-Bukhari, al-Bayhaqī, and others. (al-Sakhāwī, 1998).

One of the hadiths also narrated with a complete chain of transmission by scholars contemporary with Ibn Ḥajar is the hadith about the poem recited by Zuhayr bin Ṣurad in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, *ṣallallāhu 'alaihi wa sallam*. This hadith is also narrated by al-Suyūṭī with the same number of narrators. (al-Suyūṭī, 2021). As for al-'Irāqī, he found it with fewer narrators, namely nine (al-'Irāqī, 1995). However, this hadith is considered by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr as a hadith with a broken chain of narration. According to him, Ziyād bin Ṭāriq did not receive directly from Zuhayr bin Ṣurad, but rather from Ziyād bin Ṣurad bin Zuhayr bin Ṣurad through his father, and only then from Zuhayr. If that is the case, this hadith can no longer be classified as an 'ushari hadith because there are two additional narrators, making it a hadith with twelve narrators. However, Ibn Ḥajar rejected Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's opinion that the chain of narration of this hadith is broken. He stated that there are additional reports supporting the chain's continuity. (al-'Asqalānī, 2003). Thus, its position as a 'ushari hadith belonging to Ibn Ḥajar remains.

As for the second hadith, it is also narrated by al-'Irāqī in *al-Arba'ūn al-'Ushāriyyah*. The teacher of Ibn Ḥajar mentioned it as a hadith with a chain of ten narrators, listed as number 29 in his book. (al-'Irāqī, 1995). The total is the same as the amount possessed by the student. A similar hadith was

also narrated by Ibn al-Jazari with the same number of narrators. Ibn al-Jazari mentions it as the 34th hadith in *al-'Awāli*. (al-Jazari & Shams, n.d.). The last hadith with supporting reports and a complete chain of transmission up to contemporary muhaddith Ibn Ḥajar is the fourth hadith, which records the practice of ablution (wudu) of Anas bin Malik, based on his observation of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) way of purification. This hadith is the 40th hadith in *al-Arba'ūn al-'Ushariyyah by al-'Irāqī*. (al-'Irāqī, 1995). Al-Suyuti also found the same number of narrators for the hadith (al-Suyūṭī, 2021).

The third hadith's support in all three narrations is transmitted with the same number of narrators, except for al-'Irāqī's narration regarding the poem recited by Zuhayr bin Ṣurad before the Messenger (peace be upon him). It is clear that this shows that al-'Irāqī's narration is more 'ālī compared to Ibn Ḥajar's, because al-'Irāqī transmitted it with a chain of nine narrators while Ibn Ḥajar mentioned it with ten narrators. This is reasonable considering that al-'Irāqī lived earlier than Ibn Ḥajar. In general, the 'ushari hadiths belonging to Ibn Ḥajar have the same level of prominence as those of his contemporaries. Ibn al-Jazari, al-Suyūṭī, and al-'Irāqī had similar hadiths with the same number of chains of transmission. They all claimed the elevation of the chains in the hadiths they possessed. When a hadith with the same number of chains is encountered, hadith scholars conceptualize special characteristics that make it superior to others, namely, considering the time of hearing the hadith and the death of the narrator. Unfortunately, this categorization requires that the same teacher be present, whereas al-'Irāqī, Ibn Ḥajar, and al-Suyūṭī lived in different periods, making it unlikely that they shared the same teacher.

Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn al-Jazari lived during the same period. It is possible that they both had the same teacher in the transmission of hadith. Unfortunately, the similar hadiths they transmitted are not from the same source. Ibn Ḥajar received the hadith of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) supplication to the Jamrah from Maryam bint Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin al-Adhra'i, while Ibn al-Jazari received it from Najm al-Dīn Aḥmad bin al-Najm Ismā'īl bin Aḥmad al-Maqdisi. Thus, the categorization of the chain's strength based on the period of death cannot be applied, even though Ibn al-Jazari died 19 years earlier.

The Position of Sanad 'Ālī in the Ninth Century

Al-'Irāqī, Ibn Ḥajar, and al-Suyūṭī are three hadith scholars from different generations. Interestingly, they all claim that the highest isnad obtained is ten narrators ('ushariyyah). However, in several aspects, their 'ushariyyah isnaads have their own characteristics. In terms of quantity, the 'ushariyyah hadiths they possess vary. Al-Suyūṭī, who is the latest narrator among the three, only has 30 narrations of this nature. (Al-Suyūṭī, 2004). As for Ibn Ḥajar, he claimed to have such narrations in a quantity approaching a thousand (al-'Asqalani, 2003). It is different from al-'Irāqī, who does not make a claim about the number of 'ushariyyah hadiths he possesses. He only compiled 40 hadiths with such characteristics. (al-'Irāqī, 1995).

In terms of quality, the 'ushariyyah hadiths of al-'Irāqī are superior to those of Ibn Ḥajar and al-Suyūṭī. Al-'Irāqī stated that ten narrators were the minimum number in his time, considering that all the narrators were reliable hadith scholars (*thiqah*). The majority of his 40 selected hadiths are narrations that are at least hasan. Very few are otherwise. This differs from Ibn Ḥajar and al-Suyūṭī, whose selected 'ushariyyah hadiths do not possess the quality achieved by *al-'Irāqī*, or if so, only in very few cases. Attention to the 'ālī isnad is also shown by Ibn al-Jazari (d. 833 AH) in his book *al-*

'Awālī. He collected 40 hadiths with high isnad, the majority of which are hadiths with a ten-transmitter isnad ('ushariyyah) (al-Zayyān, 2019). Such characteristics of hadith are similar to those of Ibn Ḥajar, his contemporary. This supports Ibn Ḥajar's claim that the highest sanad at that time was a hadith with ten narrators.

The practice carried out by al-'Irāqī, Ibn al-Jazari, Ibn Ḥajar, and al-Suyūṭī shows that the 'ālī isnad had a significant position in their time. They indicated that hadiths with a small number of chains were considered to have a special privilege. Therefore, they wrote specific works that compiled 'ālī hadiths, even though not all the 'ālī narrations they had were included. The teacher-student relationship between al-'Irāqī and Ibn Ḥajar also serves as an indication of the hadith scholars' attitude towards the 'ālī isnad. Three out of ten 'ushariyyah hadiths of Ibn Ḥajar are also narrated by al-'Irāqī. Interestingly, two of them have the same number of narrators, even though the consequence of this teacher-student relationship would normally make Ibn Ḥajar's sanad longer than al-'Irāqī's. Ibn Ḥajar's achievement in matching the number of narrators in al-'Irāqī's sanad shows that the virtue of hadiths with fewer narrators is still taken into consideration.

Apart from practical aspects, scholars of the ninth century also demonstrated the theoretical superiority of 'ālī hadiths. Indeed, there are not many works that specifically discuss this issue. However, discussions about the distinction of 'ālī hadiths are never absent from books on muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth. Ninth-century scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar, al-Sakhāwī, and al-Suyūṭī highlighted the excellence of hadiths with fewer narrators in each of their respective books. Ibn Ḥajar in *Nukhbat al-Fikar* and its commentary, *al-Sakhāwī in Fath al-Mughīth*, and *al-Suyūṭī in Tadrīb al-Rāwī* and his *Alfiyyah*. Al-Sakhāwī, when explaining the *Alfiyyah* by al-'Irāqī, endorsed the view of his predecessors that seeking a high chain of narration is the practice of the early scholars. He presented several arguments in favor of this opinion. Among them is the command of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Tamīm al-Dārī to directly convey to the people the news he received, rather than the Prophet conveying news from Tamīm. (al-Sakhāwī, 2003). The Prophet's command emphasizes the virtue of conveying directly rather than through an intermediary, even if that intermediary is the Prophet himself, who is the most trustworthy and honest person.

In general, ninth-century scholars had a similar concept regarding the superiority of 'ālī hadiths compared to nāzil hadiths, although there were differences in other aspects concerning high isnad. Among these differences is the categorization of 'ālī hadiths. Al-'Irāqī lists five categories of 'ālī hadiths: hadiths that are close to the Prophet; hadiths that are close to the muhaddith imam; hadiths that are close to the primary book; hadiths transmitted by narrators who heard earlier; and hadiths transmitted by narrators who died earlier. (al-'Irāqī, 2008). The same categorization is explained by al-Suyūṭī (Al-Suyūṭī, 1996). Unlike al-'Irāqī and al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ḥajar only provides two category models (al-Asqalani, 2011): The 'ālī mutlaq hadith, which is similar to the first category according to al-'Irāqī, and the 'ālī nisbi hadith, which combines the second and third categories according to al-'Irāqī. Ibn Ḥajar did not include consideration of the time of hearing or the death of the narrators in either *Nukhbat al-Fikar* or his commentary. Al-Sakhāwī commented that Ibn Ḥajar's action of setting aside the consideration of the time of death is the same as the attitude of *Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd*, who did the same thing. (al-Sakhāwī, 2003). This attitude indicates that the category is not a consideration in determining the length of the sanad.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī conceptualizes *sanad 'ālī* not merely as a shorter chain of transmission, but as a relative and comparative construct shaped by both structural proximity and scholarly context. The findings reveal that while shorter chains are generally preferred due to their reduced risk of transmission error, Ibn Ḥajar consistently prioritizes the reliability and intellectual authority of narrators over the mere length of the isnād. His analysis also shows a nuanced application of *'ulumm*, including both *al-'ulumm al-muṭlaq* and *al-'ulumm al-nisbī*, as well as comparative categories such as *al-muwāfaqah* and *al-badal*, which reflect the dynamic practices of hadith transmission in the ninth century Hijri.

The primary contribution of this article lies in its contextualized reconstruction of Ibn Ḥajar's thought by integrating theoretical concepts with practical analysis of transmission patterns among his contemporaries. Unlike previous studies that treat *sanad 'ālī* as a purely technical classification, this research demonstrates its function as a scholarly strategy embedded in networks of transmission, competition, and intellectual authority. By foregrounding the comparative dimension of isnād analysis and emphasizing the interplay between chain length and narrator credibility, this study offers a new perspective that bridges classical hadith theory with its historical application, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of late medieval hadith scholarship.

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