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Source: *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 42, Issue 3, Arabic Literature and Islamic Scholarship in the 17th/18th Century: Topics and Biographies (2002), pp. 356-372
Published by: BRILL
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1571419
Accessed: 30/03/2011 21:21

ʿABDALLAH IBN SALIM AL-BASRI AND 18TH CENTURY HADITH SCHOLARSHIP[1]

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The long-standing traditions and themes of renewal (*tajdīd*) in Islamic history developed in important ways during the eighteenth century. Some scholars have noted both the existence of activist movements of renewal in many regions of the Islamic world and also the possibility of connections among at least some of these movements.[2] The importance of these connections can be overstated as well as underestimated, and it is important to set a balance. The eighteenth century Muslim world was neither seething with Wahhabi conspiratorial networks nor was it composed of totally separate and isolated parts. In the complex set of connections within the Muslim world of that time, an important role appears to have been played by informal networks of scholars who combined the study of hadith with adherence to a *tajdīd*-oriented Sufism.

There are many different types of individuals who were part, in some diverse ways, of these networks.[3] There were the visible leaders of activist renewal movements like Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, and the prominent thinkers of renewal, like Shah Wali Allah

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[1] An early version of this paper was presented at an annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Baltimore, Maryland, 1987. The author received helpful comments from people attending the session and others. Most recently, helpful comments were provided by Stefan Reichmuth and Basheer Nafi, whose work on Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī is an important addition to the scholarship dealing with the networks of scholars discussed in this paper.

[2] See, for example, Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

[3] "Network" is a useful concept for examining the interactive relationships among scholars (and other groups) within the Muslim world. See, for example, Roman Loimeier and Stefan Reichmuth, "Zur Dynamik religiös-politischer Netzwerke in muslimischen Gesellschaften," *Die Welt des Islams* 36, 2 (1996): 145-185.

al-Dihlawi. It is, however, important not to stop with these "front-line *mujaddid*s (renewers)" if we are to understand the sentiments and movements of renewal in the eighteenth century. There are also those who stand more in the shadows of history, helping to provide the training or the inspiration for the more visible leaders.[4] These are teachers and preservers, people whose message may not have been overtly activist but who contributed to a spirit of renewal in a number of ways. One such contribution was in shaping the discourse in the eighteenth century for the articulation of the long-continuing tradition of *tajdid* within Islamic history.

These more quiet scholars may be thought of as linking groups who bring together different peoples and who also link their students to the Islamic tradition of renewalist discourse. Some of these linking people have been studied. An examination of the students and teachers of Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi, for example, showed intellectual links among a number of prominent reformers in the eighteenth century (like Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, Shah Wali Allah, and ʿAbd al-Raʾuf al-Sinkali).[5] A Yemeni ʿulamāʾ family, the Mizjajis, also performed these linking functions.[6]

These linking figures were scholars—ʿulamāʾ—and made their contacts and had their influence as teachers and guides. Their work involves content as well as inspirational example. To a surprising degree, this content seems to have involved the study of hadith. It is not clear whether or not there was a "revival" of hadith studies in the eighteenth century, since scholarship about hadith studies in the immediately preceding centuries is relatively limited.[7] However, it does appear that there was an important long-term evolution of

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[4] This concept of the importance of people who operate "in the shadows of history" is drawn from Theodor Heuss, *Schattenbeschwörung Randfiguren der Geschichte* (Frankfurt/M.; Hamburg: Fischer, 1954).

[5] John O. Voll, "Muhammad Ḥayyā al-Sindi and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: an analysis of an intellectual community in eighteenth century Madina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London) 38, Part 1 (1975), p. 32-39.

[6] John O. Voll, "Linking Groups in the Networks of Eighteenth Century Revivalist Scholars: The Mizjājī Family of Yemen," in Levtzion & Voll, *Eighteenth Century Renewal.*

[7] On this issue, see Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism, Egypt 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), especially chapters 2 and 3.

the discipline of hadith studies that reached a particular climax in the eighteenth century. Hadith studies, whether in a state of revival or as a part of a long term continuity, played an important role in the development of eighteenth century Islamic renewalist thought.

In hadith studies there are a number of figures who have some importance in the eighteenth century, but who are typically "low profile" from the perspective of the beginning of the twenty-first century. One such person is ʿAbdallah ibn Salim al-Basri (1048/1638-1134/1722). He is mentioned in the biographies of a number of key people in the network of scholars in the *Haramayn* complex during the eighteenth century. On the basis of a study of the documents of scholarly credentials (*ijāzāt*) and biographical information, it is possible to say that al-Basri was an important linking figure in a network of hadith scholars in the Islamic world during the early eighteenth century.

Knowledge of the details of his life is relatively limited. For reasons unknown, Muhammad Khalil al-Muradi chose not to include an entry for ʿAbdallah ibn Salim in his biographical dictionary of notables who died in the twelfth Islamic century,[8] although Muradi listed al-Basri as a teacher of at least thirty of the scholars who were included in his dictionary. This makes al-Basri one of the teachers most frequently mentioned by Muradi. The Egyptian historian, ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, provides a biographical note that basically lists al-Basri's teachers and his more prominent students.[9] Al-Jabarti's reasons for noting al-Basri include the fact that al-Jabarti's father, Hasan, studied under al-Basri. Al-Jabarti comments that he has a copy of al-Basri's book of authorizations (*sanad*) and the permission to transmit studies (*ijāza*) given by al-Basri to his father, written in his own hand. More recently, ʿAbd al-Hayy al-Kattani brought together important information about ʿAbdallah al-Basri, and also his son. Salim, who was important in transmitting the works of his father.[10]

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[8] Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1301).

[9] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *ʿAjāʾib al-āthār fī al-tarājim wa al-akhbār*, ed. Hasan Muḥammad Jawhar, et al. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Bayān al-ʿArabī, 1957-1968) 1: 208-209.

[10] ʿAbd al-Ḥayy ibn ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris wa al-athbāt wa muʿjam al-maʿājim wa al-mashyakhāt wa al-musalsalāt* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1402/1982) 1:193-199 and 2:979.

Al-Basri's reputation is based on his work as a scholar of hadith. In the honorific titles noted for him by al-Jabarti, he is called "the seal of hadith scholars" (*khātim al-muḥaddithīn*), and the basic poetic notices of his death written by various notables focus on his prominence as a *muḥaddith*. One dating notice, whose letters' numerical values add up to the death date of 1134, for example, says, "The science of hadith has died."[11] Another near contemporary biographer from South Asia declared that al-Basri was the "renewer of studies" (*mujaddid al-dars*) in Makka.[12]

The bare biographical details are simple. His family was from Basra and he was born in Makka in 1048/1638. He does not appear to have traveled widely but studied with a cosmopolitan group of scholars in the Haramayn. He is identified as being Shafiʿi in his school of law, but the focus of his studies was hadith not fiqh. He died in Makka in 1134/1722, where he is buried.

He was a very active teacher, attracting many good students and people who later became quite influential in a variety of areas. He does not, however, appear to have been a prolific writer. Only two works, for example, are mentioned by Umar Rida Kahhala: a three volume discussion of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhari and a volume called *al-Imdād bi maʿrifat ʿulūw al-isnād* ("Aids in understanding the elevation of isnad"),[13] while Carl Brockelmann lists only the second work.[14] While the study of al-Bukhari is sometimes mentioned, it is *al-Imdād* which is his best known and most widely cited work.[15]

An examination of both the career of al-Basri as a scholar and the nature of his work, *al-Imdād*, may provide some assistance in understanding the nature of hadith studies in the eighteenth century. Such a study also helps to identify further some of the impor-

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[11] Al-Jabartī (Jawhar), 1:209.

[12] Al-Shaykh Ghulām ʿAlī b. Nūḥ al-Ḥusaynī al-Hindī al-Bilgrāmī al-Hanafī, *Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindustān*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Ta'rīkh 3373.

[13] ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʾallifīn* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-taraqqī, 1377/1956): 6:56.

[14] Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Reprint; Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996): 2:506 (386), and S2:521 and S2:931, where the title is given as *al-ifrād fī maʿrifat ʿulūw al-isnād*.

[15] The text for *al-Imdād* that was used as the basis for this study is ʿAbdallāh b. Sālim al-Basrī, *al-Imdād bi-maʿrifat ʿuluw al-isnād*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Al-Zakiyya 500.

tant connections among scholars in the Muslim world of that time.

As a teacher-scholar, ʿAbdallah ibn Salim is identified specifically in two different ways. He is a *muḥaddith*, and the study of hadith is the subject on which he lectured. He is also identified in some way as participating in Sufi *turuq* and active in their transmission. Al-Jabarti, for example, explicitly states that he was "dressed in the cloth [of Sufism]" by a North African teacher, and he is listed as a transmitter of a number of devotional tariqahs by Murtada al-Zabidi.[16] He is thus both a scholar of the Prophetic Traditions and a Sufi teacher. In this, his work helps to confirm the hypothesis that eighteenth century scholars in a network of people interested in renewal were in some significant way active in both hadith studies and Sufism. His activities in both of these areas reflect intellectual developments in the important network of scholars of which he was a part and the two dimensions of his work – in hadith studies and in Sufism – shall be examined.

It is as a scholar of hadith that ʿAbdallah al-Basri seems to have been most notable in his time. He was a well-known presenter of the major sources of hadith study. One biography attached to the end of a manuscript of *al-Imdād* notes that al-Basri taught in the sanctuary mosque in Makka, presenting the Sahihs of Bukhari and Muslim, and the rest of the major books of hadith.[17] It is especially noted that al-Basri taught the Sahih of al-Bukhari at the Ka'ba in 1109/1697/98 and also in 1119/1707/08, on the occasion of its rebuilding at the orders of the Ottoman Sultan Ahmad III.[18] In other words, it appears that al-Basri was a notable scholar with good connections.

ʿAbdallah ibn Salim studied and taught the full range of available hadith literature. *Al-Imdād* is specifically a list of al-Basri's teachers and the works that he studied under their guidance and which he was then authorized to transmit, along with their authenticated lines of scholarly transmission. Probably because of its comprehensive

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[16] Abū al-Fayḍ Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī [al-Zabīdī], *ʿIqd al-jawhar al-thamīn fī al-dhikr wa turuq al-ilbās wa al-talqīn*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Taṣawwuf/ Taymūr 332. Pages 37, 57, 62, and 73.

[17] Sālim b. Aḥmad al-Sammā', "Biography of the author," attached to Dār al-Kutub, Cairo, manuscript al-Zakiyya 87: *Al-Imdād bi-maʿrifat ʿulūw al-isnād*.

[18] The corresponding dates in the Common Era (CE) are 1109= 1697/8 and 1119 = 1707/8.

coverage and al-Basri's own reputation, *al-Imdād* became a well-known list of sources to study. In this way, the book provides an important description of the "course of study" for scholars like al-Basri in the early eighteenth century. The book itself became a representation of that curriculum. Later scholars would cite *al-Imdād* and other similar volumes as the list of what they had been allowed by their teachers to transmit.[19]

In these early eighteenth century listings, it is difficult to see any real priorities set for the importance of particular books, once the "classics" of the six great collections of Traditions are presented. However, by the 1780s, a prominent hadith scholar like Murtada al-Zabidi (1732-1791) could insist "on the existence of sound traditions outside the six canonical collections."[20] During the eighteenth century, there are suggestions that some hadith scholars paid more attention to collections that were earlier than al-Bukhari's and Muslim's, especially *al-Muwaṭṭa'* of Malik. For example, in the important book listing the authorizations of a later teacher in the Haramayn, Salih al-Fulani, *al-Muwaṭṭa'* is the first work that is listed, and it is then followed by the authorization listings for the "Six Books."[21] A prominent contemporary of al-Basri, Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Maghribi presents, in his listing of teachers and works that he is authorized to transmit, *al-Muwaṭṭa'* as the first collection of hadith.[22] This shift is not done in *al-Imdād*. The first book mentioned in each section is al-Bukhari's Sahih, and this is in accord with the more traditional approach of the discipline at the end of the seventeenth century. However, as will be seen later, al-Basri's emphasis on "elevation" of *isnād* may reflect the beginnings of the new approach.

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[19] See, for example, the authorization to transmit presented by Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī to Ismāʿīl al-ʿAjlūnī, written in 1134 (Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Muṣṭalaḥ ḥadīth, Taymūr 97) and the authorization listing of Muḥammad al-ʿArabī al-Saqqāṭ, "Thabt al-Saqqāṭ," Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Muṣṭalaḥ ḥadīth, al-Zakiyya 842.

[20] Stefan Reichmuth, "Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī (D. 1791) in Biographical and Autobiographical Accounts. Glimpses of Islamic Scholarship in the 18th century," *Die Welt des Islams* 39, No. 1 (March 1999): 83.

[21] Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad al-Fulānī, *Qaṭf al-thamar fī rafʿ asānīd al-muṣannafāt fī al-funūn wa al-āthār*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Tal'at 195.

[22] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Maghribī, *Sīlāḥ al-khalaf bi-mawṣūl al-salaf*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Muṣṭalaḥ ḥadīth, majāmīʿ *sh*6.

Al-Basri's scholarship and most notable lectures appear to have given primary attention to al-Bukhari's collection of hadith. However, he was also famous for his presentations of *al-ḥadīth al-musalsal bi-al-awwaliyya.* The prominent Egyptian scholar Shaykh ʿAbdallah al-Shubrawi, is explicitly noted by al-Jabarti as having attended the lectures of al-Basri on *al-Awwaliyya* while on pilgrimage, and another important Egyptian teacher, Shaykh Ahmad al-Malawi "studied the *Awwaliya* and the basic principles of the Six Books under Shaykhs al-Basri and al-Nakhli" when he went to the Haramayn in 1122/1710-1.[23] Al-Basri's work in this was an important resource both at the time and for later scholars, as reflected in the collection of al-Kattani.[24] *Al-Awwaliyyah* was a distinctive form of presentation and transmission that appears to have been important in eighteenth century hadith studies. In this form, the distinctive conditions of transmission relate to the practice of having the first hadith that the teacher relates to the receiving person be the same hadith in a chain of first presentations from teacher to receiver, using the famous *Ḥadīth al-Raḥma.*[25] This distinctive transmission format came "to be widely used as an initiation into the transmission of prophetic transmissions[26] and was often a special occasion. One scholar notes that when he received this first transmission, it took place in the presence of a number of distinguished teachers.[27] Al-Basri's *isnād* for this transmission was highly regarded.

The place of *al-Imdād* in hadith studies of the time is shown by its inclusion in an important authorization document (*ijāza*) written by Abu Tahir Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Kurani,[28] whose father played such a significant role for eighteenth century revivalism from Mo-

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[23] *ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's History of Egypt,* edited by Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlman (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994) 1:209 and 286. (Bulaq pagination as used in Philipp & Perlman)

[24] See al-Kattānī, *Fihris,* 1: 85-96.

[25] An example of how this process is reported can be found in the presentation of authorizations in al-Kattānī, *Fihris,* pp. 85-93.

[26] Reichmuth, "Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī," p. 74.

[27] Muhammad ibn Ahmad ʿAqīla, *al-mawāhib al-jazīla fī marwīyāt Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ʿAqīla.* Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Muṣṭalaḥ ḥadīth, 104 majāmīʿ *m.*

[28] *Ijāza min Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan al-Madanī al-Kūrānī,* Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Taymūr 97. For biographical information see al-Murādī, 4:27.

rocco to southeast Asia.[29] Abu Tahir Muhammad grew up in the Ḥaramayn and studied with the important associates of his father. His teachers seem in many ways to represent the Arabian core of the network of revivalist scholars of the time. In his *ijāza*, Abu Tahir lists those of his teachers whose *fahāris*, or lists of scholars and works, are included in his authorization to transmit materials. Abu Tahir states that he is authorized to transmit the works listed in those fihrists. The shaykhs listed are 1) his father, Ibrahim al-Kurani, 2) Hasan b. Ali al-ʿUjaymi al-Makki, 3) Ahmad al-Nakhli al-Makki, 4) ʿAbdallah b. Salim al-Basri, and 5) Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Maghribi.

This is a remarkable list that, in varying forms, appears time after time among the lists of teachers of people who have studied hadith in Makka and Madina in the early eighteenth century. This particular list is also part of the authorization of a later important teacher and member of a notable family in Damascus, Ismail al-ʿAjluni, and a similar list of teachers appears for scholars from other areas as well. When the scion of the great al-Ahdal family of Yemen, Yahya b. ʿUmar, for example, came on pilgrimage in 1106 and continued to develop his credentials as a major muhaddith in Yemen, he is specially noted as studying with Ahmad al-Nakhli, Hasan al-ʿUjaymi, and ʿAbdallah al-Basri.[30]

Al-Basri's popularity may provide some information about the nature of hadith studies in the early eighteenth century. It is possible that he simply was an inspirational lecturer who did not publish much and students came to him because of the brilliance of his presentations. There is, however, no particular mention in the sources of his being unusually eloquent. He may also have been actively involved in the controversies of his time, either as an antagonist or as a mediator, and this might explain why people were drawn to study with him. However, again, there are no indications in the sources of his involvement in the great controversies of the day, as was the case with some of his colleagues like Ibrahim al-

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[29] A. H. Johns, "Al-Kurani, Ibrahim," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed., 1981): 5:432-433. See also: Basheer Nafi's article about him in this issue.

[30] ʿAbd al-Khāliq b. ʿAlī al-Mizjājī, *Nuzhat al-riyāḍ al-ijāza*. Manuscript in Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. Tal'at 207.

Kurani.[31] He was not identified as being part of a major organization like the Naqshbandiyya (as al-Nakhli was), and thus gain some public visibility through organizational leadership.

The appeal of al-Basri is less spectacular than that of some of his colleagues and contemporaries. The basis for his position of public respect is probably related to his understanding of the chains of authorization (*isnāds*) and his own particularly sound *isnāds*. This is the focus of *al-Imdād*, which is aptly entitled "an aid to the understanding of the elevation of isnāds." In addition to being a listing of his shaykhs and the books that he studied, it is an informal running commentary on the importance of the length of *isnāds*. The "elevation" of an *isnād* is simply how "high" it is in terms of the shortness of the list of transmitting authorities. This "elevation" does not, in al-Basri's presentation, involve an analysis of the authorities between the Prophet Muhammad and the person recording the account as recorded in the classical hadith collections. It is, rather, the length of the authorities transmitting the recorded account. Thus, in *al-Imdād*, a "higher" *isnād* is one in which the number of transmitters between al-Bukhari (or any of the other recorders) and the scholar is smaller.

This "elevation" of an *isnād* was an important concern for traditionists of the time. This sometimes took unusual forms. The important Yemeni scholar, Muhammad al-Shawkani (d. 1250), for example, placed great importance on the "elevation" of his *isnād* in hadith instruction which he traced back through Ibrahim b. Hasan al-Kurani. However, this elevation was based on being able to skip almost a complete generation of transmitters by noting that al-Kurani had authorized *all* of the sons of his student, ʿAla al-Din al-Mizjaji, to transmit on his authority. This authorization was understood to include one son of al-Mizjaji who was born after al-Kurani's death.[32] This presents an extreme case of the logically allowable elevation of *isnāds*. It is this emphasis and concern to which ʿAbdallah al-Basri could appeal.

In *al-Imdād*, the teacher of al-Basri, Ibrahim al-Kurani, is favorably

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[31] See, for example, Johns (1981) and al-Nafi on "al-Kūrānī."
[32] Voll, "Linking Groups," p. 76.

quoted as saying that his *isnād* is so elevated that it is as if he were a contemporary of Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) and able to study directly under Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 1449/ 852), two of the great traditionists of an earlier age. An interesting reflection of the continuing attention given to the "elevation" of *isnāds* is that the later expert on chains of authority, Abd al-Hayy al-Kattani, makes a point of noting, in his identification of the chains of his authority to transmit *al-hadīth al-musalal bi-al'awwaliyya*, that one is the "most elevated among them" and this is the first one that is presented.[33]

It is not fully clear why "elevation" has such importance in the prestige of a *muḥaddith*. However, it may be an indication that the study of hadith continued to remain, at least in principle, reliant on the concept of the authenticity and validity of person-to-person transmission. In this way, it is possible to see that while the "Six Books" of hadith had become standard sources, the authority of hadith scholars was still rooted in their personal *riwāya*. Muslim scholars continued to refer to hadith chains which were directly transmitted to them.

It is possible that in the eighteenth century, this attitude was becoming a part of the renewalist mood. *Tajdīd* (renewal) usually involved a reassertion of *ijtihād* (exercise of independent analytical judgement), either explicitly or implicitly. There are, for example, renewalists who say that they are not engaging in *ijtihād*, but who, for all practical purposes, are.[34] With *ijtihād*, one must first be willing to go to earlier sources and ignore one's more immediate predecessors in interpretation and transmission. An emphasis on the elevation of an *isnād* could reflect a beginning in this attitude and an opening for greater use of hadith sources earlier than the Six Books. Scholars had always been free to use works like *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, but there may have been a greater likelihood of their doing so in the eighteenth century. In this way, relatively conservative scholars like ʿAbdallah b. Salim al-Basri may have contributed to the developing mood of renewalism at that time.

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[33] Al-Kattānī, *Fihris*, 1:85.

[34] See, for example, the discussion of the position of Uthman dan Fodio in F. H. El Masri, "Introduction," in ʿUthmān ibn Fūdī, *Bayān wujūb al-hijra ʿalā al-ʿibād*, ed. and trans. El Masri (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1978), pp. 29-33.

The importance of an elevated isnād was significantly expanded later in the eighteenth century to include analysis of chains of transmission from the Prophet different from and shorter than those provided by al-Bukhari and Muslim. These were presented in the hadith studies of Murtada al-Zabidi, in Egypt, and were an important part of his new style hadith studies.[35] The concept of elevated isnād, as consolidated by al-Basri, thus was an important component part of the emerging mode of hadith studies.

In broader terms, the discussion of elevated isnād also appears to be connected with a more philological, textualist approach to Hadith studies that came to distinguish scholarship in the eighteenth century.

It defined the difference, for example, between the scholarship of al-Zabidi and the scholarly establishment in Cairo.[36] This textualist approach could focus on the isnād part of the text directly, sometimes with spectacular results as shown by the famous lectures of al-Zabidi. It could also lead to a direct analysis of the *matn* or content of the hadith, as Shah Wali Allah, one of the major figures in the network and student of al-Kurani's son, notes, in order to determine the "import for religious law."[37] Scholars of hadith in this emerging mode, like Ibrahim al-Kurani, wrote essays on controversial issues that were informed by his hadith studies, or like Shah Wali Allah saw the discipline of hadith studies as the foundation for the religious disciplines and wrote books of renewalist correction and interpretation like *Hujjat Allah al-Baligha.*

Al-Basri was at the beginning of this process of developing hadith studies but he played a possible linking role, both in bringing scholars together and in assisting in the development of the new discourse, as reflected in the importance of the concept of elevated isnād.

Al-Basri also represents a second important linkage that was developing in the late seventeenth century, a linkage between hadith studies and affiliation with Sufi tariqahs. By the late eighteenth century, most people in the network of scholars identified with the

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[35] Reichmuth, "Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī," pp. 80-81.

[36] B. Nafi on "al-Kurānī" and Reichmuth, "Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī," pp.79-82.

[37] *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha* (trans. Marcia K. Hermansen; Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996), p. 5.

textualist approach to hadith studies were also identified as part of a Sufi tariqah. This reflects an interesting transition that began in the mid-seventeenth century. In the chains of authority for the generation before al-Basri, the major hadith scholars are not identified strongly with a Sufi tariqa. In the long biographical entry for Muhammad Babili (1592-1666) presented by Muhibbi, for example, there is no identification of this important hadith scholar with a tariqa.[38] In the next generation of scholars, people like Ibrahim al-Kurani and al-Basri, the identification with a Sufi tradition was much more apparent.

Similarly, in a Sufi chain of authority (*silsila*) that became important in the later network, Ahmad al-Qushashi, the shaykh of Ibrahim al-Kurani, was the *khalīfa* of Ahmad b. ʿAli al-Shinnawi (1568-1619). In describing the relationship of al-Qushashi with al-Shinnawi, Muhibbi notes that al-Qushashi "became attached to the great shaykh Ahmad ibn Ali al-Shinnawi, famous as al-Khami, adopted his *madhhab* and followed his path (*ṭarīqa*) and read the books in his movement, and took hadith from him and other things, and he continued to be attached to him so that it distinguished him, and he married his daughter, and he was appointed his *khalīfa* (successor)."[39] There is an interesting transition that is taking place in this succession. Al-Shinnawi came from an important Egyptian Sufi family but "had an interest in studying hadith."[40] However, he did not study hadith with his major Sufi guides; it was with non-Sufi major scholars of hadith. As a teacher he does not seem to have been regarded as a scholar of hadith since there is no mention of hadith scholarship in Muhibbi's biographical entry.[41] When al-Qushashi is described as the successor to al-Shinnawi, it is as guide in the Shattariyya Tarīqa, and the line of succession to al-Shinnawi is as a tarīqa transmitter, not as a hadith scholar.

Al-Qushashi, however, was involved in visible hadith scholarship. His many writings "include Sufi interpretations of *hadith*, rare among

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[38] Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar* (Beirut: Dār Sadir, n.d.): 4:39-42.

[39] Muḥibbī, 1:344.

[40] Azyumardi Azra, "Networks of the *Ulama* in the Haramayn: Connections in the Indian Ocean Region," *Studia Islamika* 8, No. 2 (2001): 94.

[41] Muḥibbī, 1:243-246.

Sufi authors, who devote most of their exegetical skill to the Qur'ān. He was noted for the extent to which he associated Kur'anic and *hadith* quotations with his views, and his skill in presenting the *isnad* of every *hadith* that he cited."[42] This approach is an early reflection of the mode of presentation of hadith study seen later in the lectures of al-Zabidi in Cairo[43] A similar mode of hadith presentation, combining a Sufi interpretation of hadith with a detailed knowledge of *isnāds* can be seen in the records of the major early nineteenth century Sufi teacher, Ahmad b. Idris. It is reported that his scholarly enemies, for example, tried to test him by mixing chains of transmissions, but he bested them in all debates.[44] The emerging mode of hadith studies appears to be an interesting and possibly important part of the position of those Sufi teachers who combined more active involvement in Sufism with more visible study of hadith in the newer modes.

By the generation of scholars that included al-Basri, following al Qushashi, it was becoming more natural for scholars to combine hadith scholarship and Sufi affiliation in their careers. In al-Basri's case, his emphasis on the importance of knowledge of *isnāds* was well within the developing mode of studies.

Al-Basri's Sufi affiliations were somewhat conservative in nature. He appears to have been a Sufi involved in tariqahs in the sense of devotional paths rather than as major social associations. In the listing of *salāsil* (lineages of the passing of Sufi authorizations to instruct and guide) presented later in the century by Murtada al-Zabidi, there is no sense of exclusivism in tarīqa affiliation. It may be that al-Basri performed essentially the same function for ṭuruq that he performed in hadith studies: he was a respected transmitter, in this case of devotional exercises and the chains of authority associated with them.

The devotional paths that he is identified as transmitting are not, in the early eighteenth century, prominent as major social organi-

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[42] A. H. Johns, "al-Ḳushāshī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New edition; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982): 5: 525.

[43] Reichmuth, "Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī," pp. 79-81.

[44] R. S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 77.

zations. They appear, instead, to be sets of prayers and recitations associated with special traditions of pious devotions. Some of these are al-Bistamiyyah, al-Sabʿiniyyah, the ṭuruq of Ibn Barrajan and Sidi Abu Yaʿqub al-Badis, al-Shadhiliyyah, and al-Salafiyyah, an interesting order that is a transmission going back to Abu Tahir al-Silafi, who was a scholar in the eleventh century who combined hadith scholarship with a reputation for Sufi instruction. Al-Basri lived and worked in what appears to be an era of transition in this area as well. A number of his students are associated with tariqahs that were involved in movements of renewal, but al-Basri was their teacher in hadith, not as an initiator into a more highly organized order. In particular, his students include Mustafa al-Bakri of the Khalwatiyya,[45] and members of the Mizjaji family who were associated with the Naqshbandiyya, whom he instructed in hadith studies but is not part of their Sufi chains of authority.

Al-Basri may have been more conservative than some of his peers. Ahmad al-Nakhli,[46] for example, was a relatively close associate of al-Basri's. The two of them were "dressed in the Sufi cloth (*khirqa*)" by the same North African shaykh, they shared many of the same teachers, and fourteen of the thirty people explicitly identified by al-Muradi as students of al-Basri are also students of al-Nakhli.[47] These fourteen include some of the most important figures in the development of eighteenth century revivalism. However, even as early a person as al-Nakhli is specifically identified with a more socially-organized tariqah like the Naqshbandiyya. Although possibly more conservative than others in the grouping, al-Basri is a part of the group of teachers who were involved in the transition to more activist orders as they become active in the Haramayn.

This increasing activism can be seen in the example of the spread of the Shattariyyah in a more renewalist form to southeast Asia. In

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[45] Al-Murādī, 4:190-200.

[46] Al-Murādī, 1:171-172.

[47] These shared students, with references to their listings in al-Murādī, are Ibrāhīm Ibn Hamza (1:21-24); Aḥmad al-Khālidī (1:97); Aḥmad al-Manīnī (1:133-145); Ḥāmid al-ʿImādī (2:11-19); Saʿd b. Hamza (2:156-158); ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Sharābātī (3: 63-64); ʿAbdallāh al-Buṣrāwī (3:86-87); ʿAlī al-Saqqāṭ (3:229); Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (4:27); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad ʿAqīla al-Makkī (4:30-31); Muṣṭafā b. Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bakrī (4:190-200); Yaḥyā al-Tājī (4:232-233).

the Muslim communities of Sumatra and Java there had developed by the middle of the seventeenth century a sharp rivalry and polemic between a Sufi tradition emphasizing the mystic union and an emerging group of more legalist scholars led by Nur al-Din al-Raniri (d. 1666) who accused the Sufis of pantheism. However, a student of al-Qushashi, ʿAbd al-Raʾuf al-Singkel, firmly established the Shattariyya in the southeast Asian islands as a more moderate force. This was "part of a general shift in the archipelago in the 17th century for legalists and mystics to be reconciled... [T]here was a great tendency to combine Sufism with *Shariʿa*. Thus, the attempt was made for every pantheistic element in *tariqa*, including the Shattariyya, to be reshaped in accordance with more orthodox features."[48] One might see in this type of development the reflection of the coming together of hadith studies and Sufism among the people involved in the widespread networks of scholars of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

These specifics can be viewed in the framework of the broader picture of which ʿAbdallah b. Salim al-Basri was a part. Renewal (*tajdīd*) is a long standing theme in Islamic history and experience that goes back to the very first years of the community's history and it takes many forms.[49] The historical changes that necessitate the emergence of movements of renewal are distinctive in every age, and this is true, of course, of the time of al-Basri. By the late seventeenth century, people inspired by a vision of renewal for the Islamic world tended to articulate their vision in discourses shaped by Sufi thought and their critique of existing conditions and practices was often expressed in terms that were informed by an emerging textualist mode of hadith studies. In this way, the networks of scholars who combined a Sufi affiliation with hadith studies in a distinctive mode became the heart of the sentiments and movements of renewal in the eighteenth century. In this network, there was great diversity

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[48] Tommy Christomy, "Shattariyyah Tradition in West Java: the Case of Pamijahan," *Studia Islamika* 8, No. 2 (2001): 69.

[49] John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 32-47.

ranging from the movement of Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab in Arabia, which had anti-tariqa views and in which the discourse of Sufism had limited if any influence, to early nineteenth century teachers like Ahmad b. Idris who fully combined developing Sufi discourse with new style hadith studies and who inspired the establishment of new tariqahs representing "a new organizational phenomenon" of orders that often introduced "new forms of social organization" into the areas where they worked.[50]

ʿAbdallah b. Salim al-Basri and his teachers and students are a part of a network of scholars that was giving shape to the discourse of renewal at the beginning of the eighteenth century. An important dimension of this network was the combination in the works and thought of its scholars of engagement in a more textualist approach to hadith studies, giving attention to elevation of *isnāds* and the actual content of the message, with participation in the process of transmission of Sufi tariqas.

Modern analysis of these developments has resulted in important controversies over whether or not the developments represented the emergence of a "neo-Sufism" or if dimensions of the intellectual and social dynamism represented some form of an "Islamic Enlightenment."[51] Regardless of the particular identifications and interpretations developed by later scholars, the developments in hadith studies and Sufi tarīqa transmissions represent a significant stage in the long term evolution of movements and conceptualizations in the long traditions of *tajdīd* in Islamic history and experience. Al-Basri represents an interesting moment or phase in this development. He

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[50] O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, p. 4.

[51] See, for example, the use of the term "neo-Sufi" in Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (2nd. ed; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) and the strong critique of the term in R. S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70, 1 (1993). An important "middle" position can be found in O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, Chapter 1. Some earlier statements of the debate regarding an Islamic "Enlightenment" can be found in Reinhard Schulze, "Das islamische achtzehnte Jahrhundert: Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik, *Die Welt des Islams* 30 (1990): 140-159, and Bernd Radtke, "Erleuchtung und Aufklarung. Islamische Mystik and europeaischer Rationalismus," *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994): 48-66. The most recent continuation is Bernd Radtke, *Autochtone islamische Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Utrecht 2000, with bibliographical reference to most other contributions, pp. VIff., 1ff., 99ff.

combines being a noted *muḥaddith* with identification as a transmitter of ṭuruq. He himself is neither a renewer (*mujaddid*) nor a founder of a new sufi movement but he seems to reflect, in a number of ways, the emergence of both of these themes in the eighteenth century world of Islam.