Nukhbat al-Fikr
by Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani

Introduction

In the Name of Allah, Merciful and Compassionate

Praise to Allah who never ceases being know, able. May Allah bless our liegelord Muhammad, whom He sent to humankind as a bearer of good tidings and a warner, and upon his folk, Companions, and many salutations.

To commence: The books of the nomenclature of ḥadith specialists are many and were expanded and condensed. One of my brothers asked that I summarize for them what is important. I responded to his request seeking to be counted among those who trod the [scholarly] paths. So I say:

الحمد لله الذي لم يزل عالماً قديراً، و صلى الله على سيدنا محمد الذي أرسله كثيراً إلى الناس كافة بشيراً و نيرًا، وعلى آل محمد و صحبه وسلم تسليماً

أما بعد: فإن التصانيف في اصطلاح أهل الحديث قد كثرت و بسطت فسألني بعض الإخوان أن ألخص له المهم من ذلك فأجحبته إلى و اختصرت، الاندراج في تلك المسالك. فأقول سؤاله رجاء

Reports & Their Paths

The paths of a report (khabar) are either:
1. without specific number
2. more than two paths
3. two paths
4. one path
   • The first is the mass–transmitted report (mutawātir), and conveys sure knowledge ('ilm yaqīnī) when its conditions are met.
   • The second is the well–known report (mashhūr) and it is also called the well–circulated report (mustafīq) according to one opinion.
   • The third is the rare report ('azīz). It is not the [minimal] condition for authenticity, contrary to whoever claimed it.
   • The fourth is the uncommon report (gharīb).

All of them except for the first are solitary reports (āqād). They [=these reports] encompass the accepted and the rejected since using them as evidence hinges on investigating the status of the reporters, contrary to the first category. Yet they might
contain what conveys inductive knowledge (‘ilm naḍarī) with external indicators, according to the preferred opinion.

الأخبار إما أن يكون لها
طرق بلا عدد معين، 1.
أو مع حصر بما فوق الاثنين، 2.
أو بهما، 3.
أو واحد، 4.
• فالأول المتواتر المفيد للعلم القيمي بشروطه.
• والثاني المشهور وهو المستفيض على رأي ويطلق المشهور على ما اشتهر
على الألسنة.
• والثالث العزيز وليس شرطا للصحيح خلافا لمن زعمه.
• والرابع الغريب
وكلها سواء الأول-أحاد، وفيها المقبول والمردود، لتوقف الاستدلال بها على
البحث عن أحوال رواتها دون الأول. وقد يقع فيها ما يفيد العلم النظري
بالقرائن على المختار.

Uncommonness

Then the uncommonness (gharāba) is either:
1. at the root of the chain (sanad)
2. or not.
• The first is the absolutely–unique report (fard muḥlaq) [e.g. one–ḥadīth narrator, one–
compiler narrator, one–narrator ḥadīth, one–locality narrations].
• The second is the relatively–unique report (fard nisbī), and it is rare that the term
‘unique’ (fard) is used for it without qualification.

ثم الغرابة إما أن تكون
في أصل السند، 1.
أولاً، 2.
• فالأول الفرد المطلق
• والثاني الفرد النسبي–ويقل إطلاق الفردية عليه.
Dividing Accepted Reports into Sound & Fair

الصحيح لذاته

The solitary report (āhād) transmitted by:
1. an upright (‘adl)
2. thoroughly accurate person (tāmm al-ḥabīb)
3. with a continuous chain (sanad)
4. that is not defective (mu’allal)
5. nor anomalous (shadhīd)
is the sound–in–itself report (ḥaṭṭī bi dāṭīhi). Its ranks are commensurate to variation in these conditions. Hence al-Bukhārī’s ḥaṭṭī was put first, then Muslim’s, and then what matches their criteria (shurarī).

Fair Reports

الحسن لذاته

If the accuracy decreases then it is the fair–in–itself report (ḥasan li dāṭīhi); with multiple paths it is considered sound (ḥaṭṭī).
If the grading is composite [e.g. fair–sound (ḥasan ḥaṭṭī)] it is [either] because of indecision regarding the reporter when it [=his report] is unique [either fair or sound]; otherwise it is from examining two chains [one fair and one sound].
Additions from Trustworthy Narrators

An addition from a narrator of each of these two types of chains [the sound and the fair] is accepted as long as his addition does not negate [the report of] someone who is more trustworthy.
• If the addition is contrary to something superior (arjaḥ), the stronger is the well-preserved report (maṣfūḥ), and its opposite is the anomalous report (shādhdh).
• If in addition to being contrary it is weak (ḥaʾīf), the stronger is the well-recognized (maʾrūf), and its opposite is the disclaimed report (munkar).
When a report agrees with a relatively-unique report (fard nisbī) it is called a corroborative chain (mutābiʿ).
If a report’s content (matn) is found that resembles it, then it is a witness-report (shāhid).
Investigating the paths of transmission for the above is called evaluation (iʿtibār).

Contradiction & Objection

That which is accepted (maqūl):
• if it is free from contradiction or objection (muʿāraḍa), then it is decisive (muḥkam).
If it is contradicted by something equal to it [in soundness]:
• if reconciliation (jamʿ) is possible, they are reconcilable reports (mukhtalif al-adīth);
• if not and the later one is positively established (thābit), then one is the abrogating report (nāsikh) and the other is the abrogated report (mansūkh);
• if not, superiority is sought (tarjīḥ);
• and lastly, neither one is confirmed or denied (tawaqquf).
The Rejected & its Divisions

Reports are rejected because of:
1. lacuna (ṣaqaḥ)
2. or aspersion (ḥa’n).

Lacunas

Lacunas are either:
1. at the beginning of the chain (sanad) on the part of the compiler,
2. at the end of the chain after the Successor ,
3. or elsewhere.
   • The first [case] is the suspended report (mu’allaq).
   • The second is the expedient report (mursal).
   • The third:
     o If the lacuna consists in two or more narrators consecutively then it is the problematic report (mu’ḥal).
     o If not, then it is the broken–chained report (munqa‘i‘).

The lacunas can be:
1. obvious
2. or hidden.
   • The first is recognized by lack of meeting [between inter–connected reporters]. Hence the need for [biographical] history.
   • The second is the camouflaged report (mudallas), a report related with a phrase which implies possible meeting, such as “From so–and–so”, “He said…”, (‘an, qāla). Likewise, the hidden expedient report (mursal khaffī) from a contemporary he did not meet [or did
not meet as a narrator, such as a baby Companion from the Prophet, e.g. Mūsā ibn al-Hab. 

Aspersion (ḥa’n) is because of one of the following:
1. the narrator lying
2. being accused of lying
3. making enormous mistakes
4. being heedless (ghafla)
5. being morally corrupt (fāsiq)
6. being delusionary (wahm)
7. contradicting others (mukhālafa)
8. being unknown (jahāla)
9. being an innovator
10. being chronically forgetful
• The first is the forged report (mawḥūl).
• The second is the discarded report (matrūk).
• The third is the disclaimed report (munkar) according to one opinion, as are the fourth and fifth.
• When delusion (wahm) is discovered through external indications (qarā’in) and gathering the paths of transmission, then it is the defective report (mu’āllal).
As for contradicting others (mukhālafa), if it results from:

- Changing the wording of the chain, it is the chain–interpolated report (mudraj al-isnād).
- Conflating a halted Companion–report (mawqūf) with a raised Prophetic–report (marfū’), then it is the content–interpolated report (mudraj al-matn).
- Or transposition, then the topsy–turvy report (maqlūb).
- Or inserting a narrator, then it is the insertion into an already–connected–chain report (mazīd fī muttaqī-il al-masānīd).
- Or it is substituting one narrator for another without preponderance of one chain over the other, then it is the inconsistent report (muḥḥarib). Substitution may occur intentionally for the sake of testing.
- Or it is substituting one narrator for another, then it is the dot–distorted report (muḥḍaf) and the vowel–distorted report (muḥarraf).

- It is not permissible to intentionally alter a ḥadīth’s content (matn) by omission or paraphrase, except for someone knowledgeable of what changes meanings.
- If the meaning is obscure, explaining odd words and clarifying the problematic is needed.
- The causes for which a narrator is unknown (jahāla) are:
  - The narrator may have many names and he is mentioned with one that is not well–known, for a purpose. Concerning this they compiled the clarifier (al-mūḥiḥ).
  - The narrator has few [narrations] and is not frequently taken from. Concerning this they wrote single–report narrators (al-wuḥdān).
  - Or he may be left unnamed out of brevity. Concerning this they compiled the anonymous mentions (mubhamāt).
  - The anonymous narrator (mubham) is not accepted, even if he is mentioned anonymously with a grading of commendation (ta’dīl), according to the soundest opinion.
  - If the narrator is named:
    - If only one person related from him, then he is an unidentifiable reporter (majhūl al-‘ayn).
    - If two or more related from him and he is not [explicitly] declared reliable, then he is a reporter of unknown status (majhūl al-ḥāl); and that is the veiled reporter (mastūr).

- Innovation is of two types:
  1. tantamount to apostasy
  2. or tantamount to moral corruption.

As for the first: The vast majority do not accept any narrator thus described.
As for the second: Someone who is not inviting people to it is accepted according to the soundest opinion, unless he related something supporting his innovation: in that case he is rejected according to the preferred opinion. This is what al-Nasā’ī’s shaykh, al-Jūzajānī, explicitly said.

- Then poor memory:
  - If it is chronic, then it is the anomalous report (shāhdhād) according to one opinion or occasional, then the jumbled report (mukhtalaʕ).
  - Whenever a chronically–forgetful reporter is corroborated by a reporter worthy of consideration, the veiled reporter (mastūr), the expedient reporter (mursil), and likewise the camouflager–reporter (mudallis), their ḥadīth becomes the fair (ḥasan) report, not in itself, but on the whole (lā li-dhātihi bal bil–majmū’).
ثم الطعن: إما أن يكون
لكتب الراوي،
أو تهمته بذلك،
أو فحش غلطه،
أو غفلته،
أو فسقه،
أو وهمه،
أو مخالفته،
أو جهالته،
أو بدعته.
أو سوء حفظه.
فالأول الموضوع،
والثاني المتروك،
والثالث المنكر على رأي،
وكذا الرابع والخامس.
ثم الوهب: إن يتحقق عليه بالقرآن وجمع الطرق، فهو المعلل
ثم المخالفات: إن كانت
بتبغير السياق، فمدرج الإسناد،
أو بدمع موقف بمرفوع، فمدرج المتن،
أو بتديم أو تأخر في الأسماء، فالمقلوب،
أو بزيادة راوي، فالمزيد في متصل الأسائدة،
أو بإبداله ولا مرجع، فالمضطرب.
وقد يقع الإبدال عمدا امتحانا،
أو بتبغير حروف مع بقاء صورة الخط في السياق، فالمصحف والمحرر.
ولا يجوز تعمد تغيير المتن بالنقص والمرادف إلا لعالم بما يحيل المعاني،
فإن خفي المعنى احتاج إلى شرح الغريب وبيان المشكلة.
ثم الآلالة: وسببها أن الراوي
قد تكون لمОшибкаه فيذکر بغير ما اشتهر به لغرض، وصنفوا فيه الموضوع.
وقد يكون مفاقا فلا يكثر الأخذ عنه، وصنفوا فيه الوحدان،
أو لا يسمى اختصارا، وصنفوا فيه المبهمات.
To Whom the Report is Attributed

The chain’s ascription (isnād) explicitly or implicitly goes to
1. the Prophet: consisting in his statements, or his actions, or his tacit approval
2. a Companion. He is whoever encountered the Prophet believing in him and died as a Muslim, even if [his Islam] was interrupted by apostasy according to the strongest opinion
3. or a Successor, namely anyone who met one of the Companions.
   - The first is the raised-chain (Prophetic) report (marfū‘).
   - The second is the halted-chain (Companion) report (mawqūf).
   - The third is the severed-chain (sub-Companion) report (maqūdū‘). It is the same for anyone subsequent to the Successor.
   - The last two are said to be non-Prophetic reports (āthār).

ثم الإسناد: إما أن ينتهي إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، 1
   تصريحاً،
   أو حكماً، من قوله، أو فعله، أو تقريره،
   أو إلى الصحابي كذلك. وهو من لقى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم مؤمناً به. 2
A grounded report (musnad) is a report that a Companion raised to the Prophet with a chain that has the outward appearance of being connected. If its numbers [of narrators in the chain] are few, either it ends with:

1. the Prophet
2. or an Imām with a distinguished description, like Shu’ba.

- The first is absolute elevation (‘ulūw muḥaq)
- The second is relative elevation (‘ulūw nisbī). It includes:
  - concurrent chain (muwāfaqa) which arrives at the shaykh of one of the compilers without using the compiler’s path;
  - convergent chain (badal) which arrives at the shaykh’s shaykh in the same way;
  - parity (musāwāt) which is the number of narrator–links in the chain from the narrator to the end equaling [the length of] the chains of one of the compilers;
  - and handshaking (muḥāfaṣa) which equals the chain of that compiler’s student.

Descent (nuzūl) corresponds to elevation (‘ulūw) in all of its categories.

If the narrator is the same age as someone who narrates from him and they met, then it is peer narration (aqrā’n).

If each of them related from each other then it is reciprocal narration (mudabbaj).

If he relates from someone inferior [in age, teachers or knowledge] him, then it is seniors–from–juniors narration (akābir ‘an aṭāghir). It includes: fathers–from–sons narration (al-ābā’ ‘an al-abnā’); its opposite is frequent. It includes son–from–father or grandfather narration (‘an abīhi ‘an jaddihi).

If two share the same shaykh and one’s death precedes, then it is predecessor–successor narration (ṣābiq wa-lāḥiq).

If he relates from two shaykhs whose names match and cannot be differentiated, then the fact that he specializes in narrations from one of them is a sign that the other one is irrelevant.

If he denies what is related from him

- categorically, the report is rejected
- or possibly, then it is accepted according to the soundest opinion.

Concerning this is the genre of those–who–narrated–and–forgot (man ṭaddatha wa nasiya).

If the narrators conform in the phrasing used to convey or in some other manner, then it is pattern–chained narration (musalsal).
Forms of Conveyance

The forms of conveyance are:
1. “Sami’tu” (I heard)
2. and “addathani” (he narrated to me)
3. then “akhbaran” (he reported to me)
4. and “qara’tu ‘alayhi” (I read to him)

بنسند مرفوع صحابي بسند ظاهرة الاتصال.
فإن قلل عده: إما أن ينتهي
إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، 1.
أو إلى إمام ذي صفة عليّة كـ»شعبة. 2.
فالأول العلو المطلق،
والثاني النسبي:
وفي المواقفة، وهي الوصول إلى شيخ أحد المصنفين من غير طريقه؛
وفي البلد، وهو الوصول إلى شيخ شيخه كذلك؛
وفي المساواة وهي استواء عدد الإسناد من الراوي إلى آخره آخر الإسناد
مع إسناد أحد المصنفين;
وفي المصاحفة، وهي الاستواء مع تلميذ ذلك المصنف.
ويقابل العلو بأقسامه النزول.
فإن تشارك الراوي ومن روى عنه في السن واللقي، فهو رواية الأقران.
وإن روى كل منهما عن الآخر، فهو المدبيج.
وإن روى عمن دونه في السن أو في المقدار، فالأكبر عن الأصغر -ومنه
الأباء عن الأبناء، وفي عكسه كثرة، ومنه من روى عن أبيه عن جده رواية.
وإن أشترك اثنان عن شيخ وتقدم موت أحدهما فهو السابق واللاحق.
وإن روى عن اثنين متفقين على الاسم ولم يتميزا، فباختصاصه بأحدهما يتبين
المهمل.
وإن جدد الشيخ مرويّه
جزما، رُدّ،
أو احتمالاً، قبل في الأصح.
وفيه»من حدث ونسب.
وإن اتفق الرواة في صيغ الأداء أو غيرها من الحالات، فهو المسلسل.
5. then “quri’a ‘alayhi wa–ana asma’u” (it was read to him while I heard)
6. then “anba’ani” (he informed me)
7. then “nāwalanī” (he put into my hands)
8. then “shāfahanī” (he told me verbally)
9. then “kataba ilayya” (he wrote to me)
10. then “‘an” and the like

• The first two are for someone who heard the shaykh verbatim one–on–one. If pluralized then [he heard] with someone else. The first is the most explicit and is the highest–ranked in ḥadīth dictation.
• The third and forth are for someone who read [to the shaykh] while alone. If the plural is used it is like the fifth.
• Informing [the sixth] is synonymous with reporting [the third]. However, in the custom of the later generations it is for authorization (ijāza), like “an [from].
• The indecisive–transmission terminology [‘an’ana, i.e. “from so–and–so, from so–and–so”] of contemporaries is understood to be direct audition unless from a camouflaging reporter (mudallis). It is said that a condition is that the meeting of the said contemporaries be positively proven, even if only once; it is the preferred opinion (mukhtār).
• They used mushafaha for an oral authorization and mukātaba for a written authorization [with the late scholars].
• For the authenticity of munāwala, they stipulated that it be accompanied by permission to relate; it is the highest type of authorization (ijāza).
• They also stipulated permission for a report found (wijāda i.e. “something found in a book”), likewise a book bequeathed (waḥiyya bi-l-kitāb), and in a shaykh’s public announcement that he narrates something (i’lām), otherwise it is of no consequence; as is an authorization that is universal or to someone unknown [to us], or to someone nonexistent—according to the soundest opinion concerning all of the above.

وصيغ الأداء:

١. سمعت
٢. و{حدثني
٣. ثم {أخبرني
٤. و{قرأت عليه
٥. ثم {قرئه عليه وأنآ أسمع
٦. ثم {أنبأني
٧. ثم {ناولني
٨. ثم {شافهني
٩. ثم {كتب إلى
١٠. ثم {عن ونحوها.
Names of Narrators

If the names of the narrators and the names of their fathers and on up match although they are different individuals, then it is same-name different-identity narrator (muttafaq wa muftariq).

If the names match in writing but differ in pronunciation, then it is homographic–heterophonic (mu’talif wa mukhtalif).

If the names match but differ in their fathers, or the opposite, it is same-name different–father–or–son narrators (mutashabih), and likewise if the similarity occurred in the name and the name of the father while there is a difference in the affiliation (nisba).

This and the previous can form various combinations, including:
• similarity or difference occurring except in one or two letters
• or transposition
• or the like.

الأسماء والكني

الأنواع:
• أو التنقق و المفرق.

وإن اتفقت الأسماء خطأ واختلفت الآباء نطقا مع اختلافهما خطأ.

وإن اتفقت الأسماء واختلفت الآباء أو بالعكس، فهو المتشابه،

وذكر إلى أن هناك نوعان من الأسماء:
• الأب والاختلاف في النسبة،

وإذا اختلفت آباهما، فإنها من الأسماء، وما قبلها أنواع منها.
Conclusion

It is also important to know:
1. the synchronous layers (ḥabaqāt) of narrators
2. the dates of their birth and death
3. their lands and regions
4. and their conditions: commendation (taḍīl), discreditation (jarḥ), and being unknown (jahāla).

The categories of discreditation (jarḥ) are [from worst to slight]:
1. To be described with the superlative (af’al), e.g. “greatest of all liars” “akdhab al-nās”
3. The slightest is “malleable”, “chronically forgetful”, and “he leaves something to be desired” (“layyin”, “sayyi’ al-ḥifḥ”, and “fiḥi maqāl”).

And the ranks of commendation (taḍīl) are [from highest to lowest]:
1. To be described with the superlative (af’al), e.g. “most trustworthy of people” (“awthaq al-nās”)
2. What is emphasized with one attribute or two, e.g. “trustworthy–trustworthy”, “trustworthy and memorizer” (“thiqa thiqa” or “thiqafīḥi maqāl”).
3. Something that suggests proximity to the slightest levels of discreditation, e.g. “honest layman” (“shaykh”).

Attesting someone’s good record (tazkiya) is accepted from someone knowledgeable in its criteria, even if from a single person according to the soundest opinion (al-ḥaṣa).  

Discreditation (jarḥ) takes precedence over commendation (taḍīl) if it comes in detail from someone knowledgeable in its criteria. When lacking commendation, discreditation is accepted without specifics, according to the preferred opinion (mukhtār).
It is also important to know:

- agnomen (kunā, sing. kunya) of the people referred to by [first] name,
- the names of people referred to by agnomen,
- those whose agnomen and name are one and the same,
- those with multiple agnomen or multiple titles;
- the one whose agnomen matches his father’s name,
- or vice-versa;
- or his agnomen [matches] his wife’s agnomen;
- and whoever is affiliated to someone other than his father or is affiliated to his mother,
- or to something that does not immediately come to mind;
- and whose name matches the name of his father and his grandfather,
- or his shaykh’s name and the shaykh’s shaykh, and on up;
- and whose name matches the shaykh’s name and the person narrating from him;
- and the basic names of narrators;
- and the names exclusive to one person (mufrada),
- and agnomen and nicknames.
Affiliations, i.e. to tribes, homelands, countries, localities, roads and alleys, proximity; to crafts and professions. It gives rise to similarities (ittifāq) and confusions (ishtibāh), as with names; and affiliations sometimes take place as nicknames

and the reasons for these [because it may be contrary to the obvious].

The mawālī: topwise [patrons and masters], and bottomwise [clients and freedmen],

male and female siblings,

the etiquette of the shaykh and the student,

and the age of procurement and conveyance; the manner of writing ḥadīth, reading [the shaykh’s own narrations] back to the shaykh, audition, recital, and traveling for ḥadīth;

One should also how ḥadīth is compiled: according to chains of narrators (masānīd), subject matter (abwāb), defects (’ilāl), or keywords (aʿrāf); and knowing the historical context for the ḥadīth. One of the shaykhs of al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā bin al-Farrāʾ wrote about it.

They have written books in most of these genres. This is a basic list mentioning definitions without examples. It is difficult to be thorough, so consult the longer books.
Allah is the One Who grants success. He is the Guider. There is no god except He.