

**TRANCENDING THE IMPASSE:
HADITH, COMMON HISTORICAL METHOD IN ISLAM
AND META THEORY IN SOCIOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

Hadith studies علم الحديث, *ilm al-hadīth*, knowledge of hadith: are a number of religious disciplines used in the study and evaluation of the Islamic hadith by Muslim scholars. It is knowledge of the principles by which the condition of the narrator and the narrated are determined. It is also a common historical method in Islam. The stature of hadith studies reflects the centrality of hadith to other religious disciplines. The science of hadith is from the best of the virtuous sciences as well as the most beneficial of the various disciplines. While a metatheory or meta-theory is a theory whose subject matter is some theory. All fields of research share some meta-theory, regardless whether this is explicit or correct. Meta-theoretical investigations are generally part of philosophy of science. Also a meta theory is an object of concern to the area in which the individual theory is conceived. The relationship between cosmological/science of hadith and sociological/Meta theory is said to be in an impasse. This paper attempts to transcend the impasse by setting out some epistemological/methodological principles and by the critical analysis of some theoretical and substantive issues. These issues are focused around the science of hadith and the contentious concepts and theories of sociology that have dominated the development meta theory, theoretical alternatives, and empirical research programs.

Keywords: ilm al-hadith, science of hadith, human sciences, sociology, meta-theory.

Introduction

This study is a synthesis of two concepts that touch on human life and society. The science of

Hadith is from the best of the virtuous sciences as well as the most beneficial of the various disciplines. While a metat heory or meta-theory is a theory whose subject matter

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is some theory. The scientific study of man and society in modern science is referred to Sociology. Sociology of knowledge view human relationships and society in response to the practical problems of earthly existence. Islam as *tasawwur* (world view) and from the view point of the science of hadith seen with a different perspective. Islam views the relationship between human essence and the environment in a more holistic context of temporal and implication. Micro elements in this study are two concepts that will be explored by comparing the concept of hadith- common historical method in Islam and the concept of Meta theory in Sociology.

This study should be conducted to find out the synthesis concept and the concept of hadith- common historical method in Islam and the concept of Meta theory in Sociology. Study focused on analyzing the second two components. The study will describe the concept of hadith- common historical method in Islam according to *ilm al-hadith* and the concept of Meta Theory according to Sociology. Discussion and recommendations from this study synthesis reworked to reflect on aspects of the human circle of life and strengthen the understanding and adoption of a more holistic approach to well-being.

Objectives

This study was a synthesis aims to:

- 1- Find out detailed information about the hadith- common historical method in Islam.
- 2- Find out detailed information about the Sociological Concept of Meta Theory.
- 3- Reflect on aspects of the human circle of life and strengthen the understanding and adoption of a more holistic approach to well-being

Scope and limitation

The scope of this study is dedicated to the interpretation of *Ilm hadis* and Sociology. It is a preliminary study in which the selected concept is related to the concept of man and his life spiral. Probability to get information from a variety of materials and perspectives

are high. Thus, the findings only represent the scope of the information and materials specific perspective.

Methodology of the Research

The study was specially designed network analysis and has specific objectives to be analyzed. This initial survey will involve analysis of the material on the concept of hadith- common historical method in Islam and meta theory. This study covers the background, knowledge and understanding of aspects of the research topic and conclusions and recommendations section.

Findings of The Study

Hadith- common historical method in Islam

Hadith (Arabic: حديث) in religious use is often translated as 'tradition', meaning a report of the deeds and sayings of Muhammad. Hadiths may originate from other important characters of the earliest years of Islam such as the companions of Muhammad or Shia Imams as well. These reports form the basis of Islamic law, the Quran's interpretation (*tafsir*), and early Islamic history. Each hadith is composed of two parts, a chain of authorities reporting the hadith (*isnad*) and the text (*matn*).

Hadiths are regarded by traditional Islamic schools of jurisprudence as important tools for understanding the Quran and in matters of jurisprudence. Hadith were evaluated and gathered into large collections during the 8th and 9th centuries. These works are referred to in matters of Islamic law and history to this day.

Clerics and jurists of all denominations classify individual hadith as *sahih* (authentic), *hasan* (good) and *da'if* (weak). However, different traditions within each denomination, and different scholars within each tradition, may differ as to which hadith should be included in which category.

In Arabic the word *ḥadīth* (Arabic: حديث *ḥadīṭ* IPA: [ħa'di:θ]) means 'a piece of information conveyed either in a small quantity or large'. The Arabic plural is أحاديث. *Hadith* also refers to the speech of a person. As *taḥdīṭ/taḥdīth* is the infinitive, or verbal noun, of the original verb form; *hadith* is, therefore, not the infinitive; rather it is a noun.

Definition

In Islamic terminology, the term *hadith* refers to reports of statements or actions of Muhammad, or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence. Classical hadith specialist Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani says that the intended meaning of *hadith* in religious tradition is something attributed to Muhammad but that is not found in the Quran. Other associated words possess similar meanings including: *khabar* (news, information) often refers to reports about Muhammad, but sometimes refers to traditions about his companions and their successors from the following generation; conversely, *athar* (trace, vestige) usually refers to traditions about the companions and successors, though sometimes connotes traditions about Muhammad. The word *sunnah* (custom) is also used in reference to a normative custom of Muhammad or the early Muslim community.

Hadith Qudsi

Hadith Qudsi (or Sacred Hadith) is a sub-category of hadith which are sayings of Muhammad. Muslims regard the Hadith Qudsi as the words of God (Arabic: Allah), repeated by Muhammad and recorded on the condition of an *isnad*. According to as-Sayyid ash-Sharif al-Jurjani, the Hadith Qudsi differ from the Quran in that the former are "expressed in Muhammad's words", whereas the latter are the "direct words of God".

An example of a Hadith Qudsi is the hadith of Abu Hurairah who said that Muhammad said:

When God decreed the Creation He pledged Himself by writing in His book which is laid down with Him: My mercy prevails over My wrath.

Components

The two major aspects of a hadith are the text of the report (the *matn*), which contains the actual narrative, and the chain of narrators (the *isnad*), which documents the route by which the report has been transmitted. The *sanad*, literally 'support', is so named due to the reliance of the hadith specialists upon it in determining the authenticity or weakness of a hadith. The *isnad* consists of a chronological list of the narrators, each mentioning the one from whom they heard the hadith, until mentioning the originator of the *matn* along with the *matn* itself.

The first people to hear hadith were the companions who preserved it and then conveyed it to those after them. Then the generation following them received it, thus conveying it to those after them and so on. So a companion would say, "I heard the Prophet say such and such." The Follower would then say, "I heard a companion say, 'I heard the Prophet.'" The one after him would then say, "I heard someone say, 'I heard a Companion say, 'I heard the Prophet...' and so on.

Usage

The overwhelming majority of Muslims consider hadith to be essential supplements to and clarifications of the Quran, Islam's holy book, as well as in clarifying issues pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence. Ibn al-Salah, a hadith specialist, described the relationship between hadith and other aspect of the religion by saying: "It is the science most pervasive in respect to the other sciences in their various branches, in particular to jurisprudence being the most important of them."^[14] "The intended meaning of 'other sciences' here are those pertaining to religion," explains Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, "Quranic exegesis, hadith, and jurisprudence. The science of hadith became the most pervasive due to the need displayed by each of these three sciences. The need hadith has of its science is apparent. As for Quranic exegesis, then the preferred manner of explaining the speech of God is by means of what has been accepted as a statement of Muhammad. The one looking to this is in need of distinguishing the acceptable from the unacceptable. Regarding jurisprudence, then the jurist is in need of citing as an

evidence the acceptable to the exception of the later, something only possible utilizing the science of hadith."

History

Traditions of the life of Muhammad and the early history of Islam were passed down mostly orally for more than a hundred years after Muhammad's death in AD 632. Muslim historians say that Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (the third khalifa (caliph) of the Rashidun Empire, or third successor of Muhammad, who had formerly been Muhammad's secretary), is generally believed to urge Muslims to record the hadith just as Muhammad suggested to some of his followers to write down his words and actions.

Uthman's labours were cut short by his assassination, at the hands of aggrieved soldiers, in 656. No sources survive directly from this period so we are dependent on what later writers tell us about this period.

By the 9th century the number of hadiths had grown exponentially. Islamic scholars of the Abbasid period were faced with a huge corpus of miscellaneous traditions, some of them flatly contradicting each other. Many of these traditions supported differing views on a variety of controversial matters. Scholars had to decide which hadith were to be trusted as authentic and which had been invented for political or theological purposes. To do this, they used a number of techniques which Muslims now call the science of hadith.

In Islamic sciences, all knowledge of the religion comes back to two sources: the Quran and the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ – the hadith. The Quran is of course considered the un-changed word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and is thus the foundation of all Islamic knowledge. Second after the Quran is the example set forth by the Prophet ﷺ.

The study of hadith is one that goes back centuries and has been the subject of much discussion among both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some scholars deem the collections of hadith as unauthentic and something to be disregarded, while others claim

the opposite. Where exactly does the truth lie? As a starting point, it is helpful to examine criticism according to hadith methodology compared to criticism according to modern, western historical methodology. Therefore the purpose of this paper shall be to first explain the general guidelines for authenticating and verifying historical sources, then to explain the general guidelines used in authenticating and verifying hadith, and finally to compare the two processes.

Modern, Western Historical Methodology

When events occur, they can be known by contemporaries who then pass on their knowledge and understanding. In daily life, people accept that knowledge of events can be passed on from the witnesses of those events, and that they can be transmitted exactly. Indeed, in a court of law, through the testimonies of witnesses to a particular event, facts are established beyond a reasonable doubt. According to one historian, "Testimony, sufficient, reliable testimony, is a source of unimpeachable, indisputable knowledge of historical events". It is from the reliable testimony of contemporaries of events that historical knowledge is derived. Therefore, the aim of historical methodology is to determine if the various testimonies that reach us today can be accepted as sound evidence.

Once a historian has collected his sources anything that directly or indirectly provides information about a particular event (e.g. a book, a scroll, a broken piece of pottery, a picture, a radio clip, an oral tradition) he must then evaluate them using the techniques of criticism. These historical sources or "witnesses" provide information or testimony. It is the role of external criticism to establish the authenticity of a source (the fact of testimony) and its integrity (the freedom from corruption during transmission). In comparison, internal criticism is concerned with establishing the true meaning of a testimony and the credibility of a witness. Ultimately, the basic principles of source criticism are what lead to the establishment of facts, or to the debunking of previously established ones (Marwick 1989).

External Criticism

External criticism involves investigating the origin of a particular source – as opposed to its content, which is the concern of internal criticism. The historian needs to seek out all possible information regarding the source's origin, as well as possibly restore the source to its original form. This is in order to establish the authenticity of the source. Determining the authenticity of a source means establishing that the testimony is indeed that of the person to whom it is attributed, or that it belongs to the period to which it claims to belong, and that it is what it claims itself to be. Seeking out all possible information regarding the source's origin is also necessary for establishing the integrity of the source; i.e., that it has not been corrupted during its transmission to the present time, and if it has, that the changes are identified.

There are many different kinds of questions that need to be answered in order to establish the fact of testimony, the first step of external criticism. One needs to determine the origin of the source as well as where it was originally found (Marwick 222). For example, if one finds Egyptian pottery in excavations in Yemen, then where it was found would be of great significance in that it would hint at trade between the two countries. Additionally, one needs to know the date of the source and determine how close its date is to the dates pertaining to the topic under investigation (Marwick 222). Another important matter to determine is how it relates to other important dates. All this information pertaining to the origin of the source will also prove useful in determining its credibility by way of internal criticism later on.

It is worth noting here that historians distinguish between authorship and authenticity, even though “identifying the author is the first step in establishing authenticity” (Lucey 47). It is possible for an anonymous document to be authentic, such as the early writings that appeared under pseudonyms, as long as it is known to what year or period and place the document belongs. However, in certain cases the author of a document must be established in order to determine the authenticity of a source.

The second and last step in external criticism consists of an examination of the sources integrity. In other words, it must be ascertained that the source or testimony has reached the historian uncorrupted. Only then is the fact of testimony absolutely established (Lucey 62). If changes have been made in the testimony, he must be able to distinguish the original from the changes in order for the source to remain authentic. Although there may be unintentional or intentional additions and deletions made to the original source or its copies, it must be established that the source or testimony is at least substantially integral. It is worth noting here that corruption resulting from careless copying is quite a common occurrence and can potentially lead to great misunderstanding (Lucey 62). With this much being established, the historian can now move on to evaluate the testimony.

Internal criticism is concerned with the content of the source and naturally follows its external criticism (Lucey 24). The goal in this step is to establish the credibility of the testimony. To start with, the historian must be sure to understand what the witness meant by his testimony. Only then can the historian be able to properly determine the credibility of the witness under question. Establishing the credibility of the witness means establishing both his competence (that he speaks out of knowledge) and veracity (that he is truthful). In practice, some testimonies are rejected on the basis of the aforementioned tests, though a considerable amount of testimonies are established as reliable (Lucey 24).

The Sociological Concept of Meta Theory

A metatheory or meta-theory is a theory whose subject matter is some theory. All fields of research share some meta-theory, regardless whether this is explicit or correct. In a more restricted and specific sense, in mathematics and mathematical logic, *metatheory* means a *mathematical theory about another mathematical theory*.

The following is an example of a meta-theoretical statement:^[1]

“ Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is only a hypothesis; you can never prove it. No matter how many times the results of experiments agree with some theory, you can never be sure that the next time the result will not contradict the theory. On the other hand, you can disprove a theory by finding even a single observation that disagrees with the predictions of the theory. ”

Meta-theoretical investigations are generally part of philosophy of science. Also a metatheory is an object of concern to the area in which the individual theory is conceived.

Meta Theory in Sociology

Metatheory in sociology is a relatively new specialty that aims to describe existing sociological theory systematically, and also, to some degree, to prescribe what future sociological theories ought to be like. It leaves to other specialties—most notably the sociology and history of sociology and the logic of theory construction—the problems of explaining and predicting how such theories have been, and can be, formulated.

There are two broad varieties of metatheory. One variety, synthetic, classifies whole theories according to some overarching typology; the other variety, analytic, first dissects theories into their underlying constituents and then classifies these constituents into types.

Some typologies encountered in synthetic metatheory refer to the time periods when the theories were originated, for example, forerunner, classical, and contemporary (Timasheff and Theodorson 1976 and Eisenstadt 1976 provide examples). Some refer to the places where the theories were originated, for example, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978 and Gurvitch and Moore 1945 provide examples). Some refer to the substantive themes of the theories, for example, structuralfunctional, evolutionist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist (Turner 1986 and Collins 1988 provide examples). Some refer to the ideologies supported by the theories,

for example, pro-establishment and anti-establishment (Martindale 1979 provides an example). Some refer to various combinations of all the above differences (Wiley 1979 and Ritzer 1983 provide examples).

Analytic metatheory is divisible into two broad classes: one in which the constituents of theories are required to have empirical referents, either directly or indirectly, and another in which these constituents are required or permitted to have nonempirical referents. Thus, one sociologist claims our theory should be brought “closer to nonempirical standards of objectivity” (Alexander 1982), while another claims “sense-based inter-subjective verification is indispensable [to sociology]” (Wallace 1983). (This difference in kind of analytic metatheory reflects an applicability of the synthetic-analytic distinction to metamethod in sociology: In the synthetic variety of metamethod, whole methods are characterized as empirical or nonempirical, positivistic or hermeneutical, experimental or participant-observational, and so on. In the analytic variety, such methods are dissected into their underlying constituents, which are then classified as measurement, interpretation, speculation, comparison, test, generalization, specification, deduction, induction, and so on.)

Meta theory in general has been sweepingly condemned as a dead end leading only to the study of “the grounds of other people’s arguments rather than substantive problems” (Skocpol 1987), and as holding “little prospect for further developments and new insights” (Collins 1986). Against such characterizations, however, certain unique and indispensable contributions of both synthetic and analytic meta theory to sociology should not be overlooked.

Synthetic meta theory plays obviously central roles in descriptive classifications of sociological theory (e.g., textbooks and course outlines), but they are no less central to the sociology and history of sociology, where efforts to account for the rise and fall of schools, or perspectives, in sociological analysis require systematic conceptualization of such groupings. The contributions of nonempirical analytic meta theory remain unclear (as mentioned, the kinds of ideological commitment and moral foundation to which it refers, and their consequences for sociological theory, have yet to be specified) and,

therefore, will not be examined here. The contributions of empirical analytic meta theory will occupy the rest of this article.

Three Contributions of Empirical Analytic Meta theory

Empirical analytic meta theory can aid

- (1) Systematic cumulation of the end product of sociological investigation (namely, collectively validated empirical knowledge about social phenomena);
- (2) Systematic construction of new versions of the principal means employed in generating that end product (namely, collectively shared theory and method); and
- (3) a sense of discipline-wide solidarity among sociologists of all theoretical traditions, all specializations and, eventually one hopes, among all social scientists.

Cumulation of Sociological Knowledge

Knowledge can only cumulate when new knowledge of a given phenomenon is added to old knowledge of that same phenomenon (or, rather, insofar as no phenomenon is ever repeated exactly, that same type of phenomenon). The key to holding such objects of investigation constant is, of course, communication. That is to say, only the communication to investigator B of the identity of the exact phenomenon investigator A has examined, together with the exact results of that examination, can enable investigator B systematically to add new knowledge to A's knowledge.

Disciplinary Communication, now it may be imagined that we already possess such communication in sociology, but we do not. Consider the terms social structure and culture. One can hardly doubt that, by denoting the substantive heart of our discipline, they indicate what the entire sociological enterprise is about. By virtually all accounts, however, each term signifies very different kinds of phenomena to different sociologists.

Thus, social structure has been authoritatively said, at various times for over two decades, to be “as fundamental to social science as to render its uncontested definition virtually impossible” (Udy 1968); to attract “little agreement on its empirical referents” (Warriner 1981); and to possess a meaning that “remains unclear” (Turner 1986). “Few words,” it has been said, “do sociologists use more often than ‘structure,’ especially in the phrase ‘social structure.’ Yet we seldom ask what we mean by the word” (Homans 1975). In a more detailed statement, one analyst asserts that

The concept of social structure is used widely in sociology, often broadly, and with a variety of meanings. It may refer to social differentiation, relations of production, forms of association, value integration, functional interdependence, statuses and roles, institutions, or combinations of these and other factors. (Blau 1975)

Indeed, we can still read that “sociologists use the term [‘social structure’] in diverse ways, each of which is either so vague as to preclude empirical application or so broad as to include virtually all collective features of human behavior” (Gibbs 1989). As recent evidence of this diversity, it is noteworthy that, where one sociologist claims that “for sociologists, the units of social structure are conceived of . . . as relational characteristics” (Smelser 1988), another refers, without explanation, to a type of “social structure” in which the participants “have no relations” (Coleman 1990).

The situation is no different with the term culture. Some years ago it was said that “by now just about everything has been thrown into ‘culture’ but the kitchen sink,” and the author of this remark then reflected that “the kitchen sink has been thrown in too” as part of “material culture” (Schneider 1973). Years later, it has again been pointed out that “Theorists of culture remain sorely divided on how best to define culture” (Wuthnow et al. 1984) and “values, orientations, customs, language, norms, [and religion]” have been referred to as though they were all somehow different from “culture” (Coleman 1990). No wonder at least one sociologist has simply given up: “Any definition” of culture, he claims, “will be

(1) Inclusive to the point of being meaningless,

(2) Arbitrary in the extreme, or

(3) So vague as to promise only negligible empirical applicability” (Gibbs 1990).

More recently still, Gilmore affirms that “there is no current, widely accepted, composite resolution of the definition of culture,” and claims that as a result “the contemporary concept of culture in sociology does not exclude any particular forms of [collective] activity.” This difficulty notwithstanding, there has arisen, Gilmore says, “a new appreciation of the salience of culture as an explanatory perspective in contemporary sociological research” (1992). To the extent that these judgments are true, one can only wonder what contribution an explanatory perspective that lacks even a rudimentary and tentative definition of its own central variable (and which expresses a kitchen- sink inclusiveness that “does not exclude any particular empirical forms of activity”) can possibly make to social science.

Regarding social structure, Rytina asserts his conviction that “Social structure is a general term for any collective social circumstance that is unalterable and given for the individual” and that such social structure “is the same for all and is beyond the capacity for alteration by any individual will” (1992). Apart from noticing, again, the kitchensink inclusiveness of this claim (“any collective social circumstance”), one wonders what good can come of conceptualizing social structure in a way that rules out the possibility of variable individual power (i.e., “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will” [Weber 1978]). See, however, Sewell (1992) for explicit inclusion of “power” in structure”— although Sewell lumps “resources” and “schemas” (i.e., what others would distinguish as components of social structure and culture, respectively) together into a single undifferentiated “structure” concept.

Some other discussions of the ongoing social structure versus culture problem may be found in Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994), Hays (1994), Holmwood and Stewart (1994), Wallace (1986), and Whitmeyer (1994). It will also be noticed that in addition to “social structure” and “culture” the concept “agency” appears in some of these discussions,

and a brief comment on it may be useful. Human “agency” is said, by Sewell, to refer to “the efficacy of human action,” and to arise from the actor’s “ability to apply [known schemas] to new contexts” and to act “creatively” (1992, pp. 2, 20). It is not easy to understand, however, why a special anthropocentric term is needed for such a phenomenon inasmuch as all action, by whatever agent, is (by any physical definition of “action”) efficacious, and all “applications,” by definition, occur in “new” contexts and are thus “creative.”

In response to such expressions of disciplinary decline (and acknowledging their strong evidential basis), empirical analytic metatheory falls back on Durkheim’s argument that insofar as “Every scientific investigation concerns a specific group of phenomena which are subsumed under the same definition,” it follows that “the sociologist’s first step must . . . be to define the things he treats so that we may know—he as well—exactly what his subject matter is. This is the prime and absolutely indispensable condition of any proof or verification” (1982).

Empirical analytic metatheory, then, seeks a common disciplinary language for sociologists everywhere, regardless of their specializations. Its proponents believe that only with the adoption of some such language can our discipline begin solving its central problems, namely, systematic knowledge cumulation, theory innovation, and solidarity enhancement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aforementioned classifications constitute only a fraction of the total number of classifications that exist. The studies in hadith are very complex, and it seems that the scholars thought of every imaginable angle from which to analyze hadith. All this was for the purpose of distinguishing between different types of narrations, especially for distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic.

Metatheory and methodology are "second order" studies in the sense that they are the study of studies. While metatheory focuses on the "subtheoretical level of the

'infrastructure' of theory," methodology examines the philosophical underpinnings of empirical research. In sociology, both metatheory and methodology are concerned with the nature of social theory and the logic of social inquiry. A major issue that has been periodically addressed but remains largely unresolved is the persistent failure of sociologists to construct cumulative theory of universal applicability. Metatheoretical and methodological examinations of this perplexing issue become a useful exercise that can deepen our understanding of the aim of social research.

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