

Research Article

A Critical Analysis of Abū Rayyah's Perspectives on Ḥadīth Recording

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Received : January 18, 2025

Revised : February 14, 2025

Accepted : March 16, 2025

Available online : April 24, 2025

How to Cite: Lafiagi, S. (2025). A Critical Analysis of Abū Rayyah's Perspectives on Ḥadīth Recording. *AL-IKHSAN: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies*, 3(1), 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.61166/ikhsan.v3i1.67>

Abstract. Abū Rayyah, a prominent 20th-century Egyptian Islamic scholar, has sparked significant debate with his critical stance on the traditional processes of Ḥadīth collection and documentation. His arguments challenge long-standing views and practices, questioning the reliability of certain narrators and the methodologies employed in the early Islamic centuries. Aiming to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the authenticity and methodology of Ḥadīth compilation within Islamic tradition, this paper provides a critical analysis of the views of Abū Rayyah on the recording of Ḥadīth, examining the historical context and scholarly responses to his critiques. Through a comprehensive review of primary sources, including Abū Rayyah's own writings and the responses from other Islamic scholars, the paper evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of his arguments. This involves analyzing his methodological approaches, his use of evidence, and the broader implications of his critiques for Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a balanced assessment of Abū Rayyah's contributions to the study of Ḥadīth, acknowledging his role

in prompting critical reflection and debate while also considering the validity of the critiques against his views. By doing so, the paper aims to enhance the understanding of Ḥadīth recording practices and their impact on Islamic thought and practice.

Keywords: Ḥadīth documentation, Orientalists, Hijrah, Isnad, Riwayah

INTRODUCTION

The value of Ḥadīth literature as a legal source in Islam is a subject of considerable debate among Ḥadīth critics. Two major political sects that emerged in the first century Hijrah after the Prophet's demise, the *Khawārij*¹ and the *Shī'ah*,² rejected all *Aḥādīth* recorded by those they perceived as their political adversaries among the Prophet's Companions and their successors. Similarly, the *Mu'tazilites*³ and the *Mutakallimūn*⁴ dismissed a large number of *Āḥādīth*, particularly those narrated as *Āḥād* or those contradicting logical reasoning, affirming only the *Mutawātir*⁵ narrations as valid proofs of *Sharī'ah*.⁶

Orientalists have also attempted to undermine the Ḥadīth as the second most important source of Islamic legislation.⁷ Between 1848 and 1950, leading Orientalists produced works that shaped the entire Orientalist tradition's views on the *Ḥadīth*.⁸ For instance, Reinhart Dozy argued that because most *Aḥādīth* were not recorded until the second century Hijrah, many fictitious Ḥadīth infiltrated the literature, leading him to conclude that the entire Ḥadīth corpus was fabricated by later Muslim scholars.⁹ Ignaz Goldziher echoed this sentiment, contending that most Ḥadīth were the result of religious, historical, and social developments in the first two centuries of Islam.¹⁰ He concluded that the Ḥadīth could not serve as a historical document of early Islam but rather reflected the community's tendencies during its maturation.¹¹

Furthermore, Alfred Guillaume¹² questioned the authenticity of many reports attributed to the Prophet's Companions. He cited narrations by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, Abū Hurayrah, and Sahl b. Sa'd, which suggested that the Prophet and his Companions forbade recording Ḥadīth. Guillaume concluded that it was difficult to regard the Ḥadīth literature as a whole as an accurate and trustworthy record of the Prophet's sayings and actions. These views significantly influenced modern Muslim writers such as Abdullah Chakralawi, Khwaja Ahmed Din Amritsari, Ghulam Ahmed Parwez, Rashad Khalifa, Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi, and Ahmad Amīn. Ahmad Amīn's principal work, "Fajr al-Islām," notably impacted Abū Rayyah's stance on the authenticity of Ḥadīth literature.

The major arguments revolve around conflicting reports in some Ḥadīth literature indicating that the Prophet not only prohibited recording Ḥadīth but also ordered the destruction of such materials. Additionally, it is claimed that Caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar discouraged excessive narration of Ḥadīth and imprisoned

Companions who were too prolific in their narration of the Prophetic Tradition. Abū Rayyah¹³ cited these reports and concluded, like his predecessors, that the Aḥādīth were fabrications of later generations influenced by the political and theological differences of the first and second centuries of Islam.

This paper examines the misleading conclusion regarding the recording of Ḥadīth during the time of the Prophet and his Companions, providing an in-depth analysis of the reports on the prohibition of Ḥadīth writing.

RECORDING OF ḤADĪTH : AN ARGUMENT

The recording and transmission of the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet both in written and oral forms began during his illustrious era. It was a task undertaken by the *Ṣaḥābah* who were keen to learn from him and to pass this knowledge to posterity. The *Ṣaḥābah* understood the triangular formula in Q.16:44 which defined the role of the Prophet as the teacher of the divine messages, who is expected to give interpretations and detailed information of the golden messages, as well as their own role as recipients to functionally use their intellect and to consult the Prophet to get proper understanding of the religion.¹⁴ It is on record that the *Ṣaḥābah* used to learn the Prophet's *Aḥādīth* and that they used to revise them among themselves. Anas bn Mālik said,

كُنَّا نَكُونُ عِنْدَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ فَنَسْمَعُ الْحَدِيثَ فَإِذَا قَمْنَا تَذَكَّرْنَاهُ فَيَمَانِنَا

We used to sit with the Prophet, listening to the *ḥadīth*. And whenever we departed, we revise it amongst ourselves.¹⁵

Furthermore, there are also ample of incontrovertible proofs that the Prophet granted express permission to some *Ṣaḥābah* to record his *ḥadīth*¹⁶ and also ordered that his instructions during the farewell pilgrimage be written down for Abū Shāh.¹⁷ In addition, he wrote several letters to various regions outside Arabia containing legal instructions on business transactions, legal penalties, *fatāwā*, religious obligations, etc.¹⁸ These statements no doubt support the claim that the Prophetic Traditions were well recorded during his lifetime. Moreover, Al-Azami mentioned fifty Companions who recorded and were in possession of large collections of *ḥadīth*, some of which he claimed were done in the Prophet's mosque.¹⁹ Such action, it is believed could never have taken place without the Prophet's knowledge and permission.

Abū Rayyah²⁰ argued that the Traditions of the Prophet were never written down during his lifetime, as was done in respect of the Qur'ān. He further asserted that unlike was the case with the Qur'ān, the Prophet never appointed scribes to record his *Sunnah* but rather he forbade his Companions from documenting them. Furthermore, quoting Goldziher, he copiously posited that most of the *Aḥādīth* in circulation are spurious and a product of large scale forgery and hence should be rejected.²¹

Azami²² has, however, argued quite reasonably that one of the major reasons for the erroneous conclusion by *ḥadīth* critics on the issue of recording of *ḥadīth* is their misconception of the implications of such terminologies as *Tadwīn*, *Taṣnīf* and *Kitābah*, all of which were understood in the sense of recording. He maintained that there are records of literary activities going on in the Arabian Peninsula both before and during the early stages of the advent of Islām.²³ In addition, available records have also shown that some of the *Ṣaḥābah* had scrolls in which they recorded a large number of *ḥadīth* which they heard from the Prophet. For instance, ‘Abdullāh bn ‘Amr bn al-‘Ās had a scroll which is popularly known as *Aṣ-Ṣaḥīfah aṣ-Ṣādiqah* which was later incorporated into the larger collection of *ḥadīth* by Ahmad bn Hanbal.²⁴ Ibn Sa‘d²⁵ narrated in his *Ṭabaqāt* from Mujāhid who said, "I saw a manuscript with ‘Abdullāh bn ‘Amr so I asked about it. He said, "This is *aṣ-Ṣādiqah* and in it is what I personally heard from Allāh's Apostle." Similarly, Anas bn Mālik, ‘Alī bn Abī Ṭālib, Jābir bn ‘Abdillāh and Abū Hurayrah all have documents containing the prophetic *ḥadīth*.²⁶

From the foregoing, it is clearly established that the Companions of the Prophet engaged in recording and transmitting his *ḥadīth* on a large scale during his lifetime. It is also established that prior to its official compilation on the order of Caliph ‘Umar bn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, individual compilation by the *Ṣaḥābah* and their students predated this official exercise.

ASSESSMENT OF ABŪ RAYYAH'S VIEWS

Abū Rayyah argued that no record of the Ḥadīth existed before the second century of Hijrah, based on several narrations, one of which is examined below:

1. Aḥmad, Muslim, Ad-Dārimī, Tirmidhī, and an-Nasā‘ī narrated on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī that the Prophet ﷺ said:

27. لَا تَكْتُبُوا عَنِّي شَيْئًا سِوَى الْقُرْآنِ، فَمَنْ كَتَبَ عَنِّي غَيْرَ الْقُرْآنِ فَلْيَمْحُهِ.²⁷

Do not write down anything from me except the Qur'ān, and whoever has written anything other than the Qur'ān should efface it.

Examination on the Report

Al-Baghdādī mentioned nine different chains of this Ḥadīth, all on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī. Aḥmad²⁸ narrated the report from Zayd ibn Aslam through ‘Aṭā' ibn Yasār on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, while Al-Ḥākim²⁹ narrated it from Hammām ibn Yaḥyā from Zayd ibn Aslam and authenticated it. This report is found in Dhakhīrat al- *Huffāz*³⁰ with the same wording quoted by Abū Rayyah, but was declared weak (Ḍa‘īf) due to the presence of a weak narrator, ‘Amr ibn an-Nu‘mān. Al-Bazzār³¹ and Al-Haythamī³² recorded two other versions from Abū Hurayrah, both deemed weak because of the presence of ‘Abdurrahmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam, a weak narrator.

Specialists in Ḥadīth literature have significantly differed on the status of this report, debating whether it is marfū' (attributed directly to the Prophet) or mawqūf (a statement of a Companion).³³ Ibn Ḥajar said:

ومنها من أعلّ حديث أبي سعيد وقال الصواب وقفه على أبي سعيد قاله البخاري وغيره³⁴

Some experts in Ḥadīth, including Al-Bukhārī, consider this report to be a statement by Abū Sa'īd.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī supported this conclusion, noting that: "Only Hammām ibn Yaḥyā attributed this statement to the Prophet."

Given the evidence, the source of this report is controversial. It could be argued that, considering the numerous Ḥadīth permitting the recording of Ḥadīth, this prohibition may have been an early directive later revoked. Both Ibn Qutaybah³⁵ and Al-Mubārakfūrī³⁶ support this view.

This argument gains clarity when considering that most Arabs were illiterate and struggled to differentiate between the Qur'ān and other texts, necessitating caution to prevent interpolation and distortion of the divine text.³⁷

2. The second report cited by Abū Rayyah is as follows:

عن أبي سعيد كذلك: أنهم استأذنوا النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في أن يكتبوا عنه فلم يأذن لهم. ورواية الترمذي عن عطاء بن يسار عن أبي سعيد قال: استأذنا النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في الكتابة فلم يأذن لنا

"Abū Sa'īd said, "We sought the Prophet's permission to write down his Ḥadīth, but he declined." In the narration by at-Tirmidhī, 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār reported from Abū Sa'īd, "We asked the Prophet to permit us to write down his Ḥadīth, but he did not allow us."

Examination on the Report

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī mentioned three different versions of this report with varying chains of transmission (Isnād) and slightly different texts. Ad-Dārimī³⁸ added a fourth link through Abū Macmar from Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah from Zayd ibn Aslam, differing from most narrations that go through 'Abdurrahmān ibn Zayd from Zayd. At-Tirmidhī³⁹ included a fifth link from Sufyān ibn Wakī' from Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah from Zayd ibn Aslam.

This report is doubtful due to the involvement of 'Abdurrahmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam, whose narrations are widely rejected by consensus.⁴⁰ Therefore, these narrations cannot be accepted as valid proof of the prohibition of recording Ḥadīth, contrary to Abū Rayyah's assertion.

3. The third major narration on which Abū Rayyah based his assumption is the following report, which claims that after the Prophet's demise, Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, forbade the recording of Ḥadīth:

(ومن مراسيل ابن أبي مليكة) أَنَّ الصَّدِيقَ جَمَعَ النَّاسَ بَعْدَ وَفَاةِ نَبِيِّهِمْ فَقَالَ: إِنَّكُمْ تَحْدِثُونَ عَنِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَحَادِيثَ تَخْتَلِفُونَ فِيهَا، وَالنَّاسُ بَعْدَكُمْ أَشَدَّ اخْتِلَافًا، فَلَا تَحْدِثُوا عَنِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا، فَمَنْ سَأَلَكُمْ فَقُولُوا: بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ فَاسْتَحْلُوا حَالَهُ وَحَرِّمُوا حَرَامَهُ⁴¹

From the marāsīl of Ibn Abī Mulaikah, it is reported that Abū Bakr gathered the people after the Prophet's death and said, "You relate different Ḥadīth from the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, and you disagree among yourselves. Those who come after you will face even greater disagreements. Therefore, do not relate anything from the Messenger of Allāh. If anyone asks, say: 'The Book of Allāh is sufficient for us. Take what it permits and avoid what it forbids.'"

Examination on the Report

Adh-Dhahabī⁴² mentioned this report without any Isnād (chain of transmission), making it difficult to assess the reliability of its narrators. Several points can be raised regarding its authenticity and implications.

This narration falls under the category of mursal Ḥadīth, meaning it was narrated by a Tābi'ī (successor of the Companions) directly from the Prophet without specifying the intermediary authority.⁴³ This lack of a connected chain (ittiṣāl as-Sanad) renders the report weak according to most Ḥadīth scholars.⁴⁴

Ibn Ṣalāh⁴⁵ stated that mursal reports are generally not used as legal proofs and are considered weak by the majority of Ḥadīth scholars. This position is supported by scholars such as ʿAbdullāh bn Mubārak,⁴⁶ Muslim⁴⁷, Ḥākim⁴⁸, Tirmidhī,⁴⁹ Ibn Abī Ḥātim⁵⁰, Al-Albānī,⁵¹ and Ibn Bāz.⁵²

Given this consensus, the report cited by Abū Rayyah cannot be used to establish the prohibition of recording Ḥadīth. Even if the report were deemed authentic by those who accept mursal as proof,⁵³ the narrator Ibn Abī Mulaikah⁵⁴ is a respected Tābi'ī, and his narrations are generally accepted after thorough scrutiny.

Assuming the report is authentic, it likely reflects a precautionary measure by Abū Bakr to prevent excessive and potentially conflicting narrations of Ḥadīth, rather than a blanket prohibition. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī⁵⁵ supports this interpretation, noting that Abū Bakr's aim was to ensure accuracy and scrutiny in Ḥadīth reports. For instance, when faced with the issue of inheritance shares for a grandmother, Abū Bakr sought guidance from the Sunnah and required corroboration before accepting the ruling.

The report does not support Abū Rayyah's position on the prohibition of writing Ḥadīth. The text conflicts with numerous other reliable reports concerning the necessity of the Sunnah alongside the Qur'ān. Therefore, the report cited by Abū

Rayyah is at best classified as *shādh* (a narration by a reliable reporter that contradicts stronger reports), which is a category of weak Ḥadīth.

4. Abū Rayyah wrote:

وروى حافظ المغرب ابن عبد البرّ والبيهقي في المدخل عن عروة- أن عمر أراد أن يكتب السنن فاستفتى أصحاب رسول الله في ذلك- ورواية البيهقي- فاستشار، فأشاروا عليه أن يكتبها فطفق عمر يستشير الله شهرا، ثم أصبح يوما وقد عزم الله له، فقال إني كنت أريد أن أكتب السنن، وإني ذكرت قوما كانوا قبلكم كتبوا كتباً فأكتبوا عليها وتركوا كتاب الله وإني والله لا أشوب كتاب الله بشيء أبدا. ورواية البيهقي (لا ألبس كتاب الله بشيء أبدا) وعن يحيى بن جعدة أن عمر أراد أن يكتب السنة ثم بدا له أن لا يكتبها ثم كتب في الأمصار من كان عنده شيء فليمحه⁵⁶

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr of Morocco and Al-Bayhaqī in Al-Madkhal narrated on the authority of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb intended to write down the Sunan. According to Al-Bayhaqī's version, he consulted the Companions of Allāh's Messenger, and they advised him to do so. 'Umar spent a month seeking Allāh's guidance. One day, after Allāh had determined his decision, he said, "I had intended to write down the Sunan, but then I remembered that some people before you had written books, devoting themselves to them and disregarding the Book of Allāh. By Allāh, I will never mingle anything with the Book of Allāh." In Al-Bayhaqī's version, he said, "I will never obscure the Book of Allāh with anything."

Yahya ibn Ja'dah reports that 'Umar once intended to write the Sunnah but changed his mind and sent a circular to all provinces instructing anyone who had written down any Ḥadīth to efface it.

Examination on the Report

The report is attributed to 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr narrating directly from 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. However, this chain is problematic because it suffers from *Inqitā'* (brokenness). 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr was not a contemporary of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, on whose authority he claims to be reporting.⁵⁷ Both Abū Ḥātim and Abū Zur'ah classified 'Urwah's reports from Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Alī as *mursal*, which further discredits them.⁵⁸ Similarly, the other sole link mentioned by Abū Khaythamah through Yahya ibn Ja'dah is also *munqati'* (broken) and declared weak because the narrator was not a contemporary of 'Umar.⁵⁹

This report is not reliable and cannot be used to establish the prohibition of writing Ḥadīth. Ibn Kathīr,⁶⁰ after examining all the various reports from 'Umar concerning writing Ḥadīth, concluded that 'Umar's actions stemmed from a fear of the Sunnah being mixed with the Qur'ān or that people might abandon the Qur'ān

for the Sunnah, as did the People of the Book. Aḥmad Sa'īd⁶¹ agrees, adding that 'Umar feared the Ummah might face the same fate as the People of the Book, citing Q. 2:79 to support this point.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis has demonstrated that the recording and transmission of Ḥadīth were widespread activities among the Companions of the Prophet throughout the first century of Islam. Extensive evidence in major works of Ḥadīth literature attests to large-scale documentation by the Ṣaḥābah, some of whom had scrolls later incorporated into the existing corpus of Ḥadīth. It has also been revealed that the Prophet's prohibition against recording Ḥadīth was either temporary or specific to certain individuals, aimed at preventing its confusion with the Qur'ān, especially among a largely unlettered community. This explains the numerous other narrations that permit the recording of Ḥadīth. Furthermore, our study has shown that most of the reports relied upon by Abū Rayyah have been discredited by experts in Ḥadīth literature and thus cannot substantiate any valid point. The few authentic reports cited were taken out of context to serve the critic's agenda.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ The Khawārij (sing. Khārījī) are dissidents who rebelled against Caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, branding him illegitimate after he agreed to arbitration with Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Ṣufyān following the Battle of Ṣiffin in 657.

² The Shīcāh (sing. Shīcī, also known as Shīcat 'Alī) believe that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his descendants are the rightful Caliphs of the Muslim Ummah. Originally a political movement, they evolved into a religious faction with extreme ideologies. Today, Shīcāh are the second-largest Islamic group, spread across the Middle East and Africa.

³ The Mu'tazilites, meaning "those who withdraw," were founded in Basrah by Wāṣil ibn 'Atā' (d. 748) in the early 2nd century Hijrah. They flourished in the early 3rd century Hijrah when adopted as state theology in the 'Abbāsīd empire.

⁴ The Mutakallimūn, also known as Ahl al-Kalām (including Jahmiyyah, Ash'ariyyah, Māturidiyyah, Karamiyyah, and Rāfiḍah Mujassimah), are Muslim sects emphasizing rational discourse alongside revelation. They advocate for 'ilm al-Kalām, a discipline that uses reasoned arguments to elucidate and defend religious beliefs.

⁵ The term Mutawātir has two meanings in different Islamic sciences. In legal methodology and theology, it denotes the epistemological certainty of a report. In Ḥadīth criticism, it refers to a well-known and widespread report, but not necessarily one that yields certain knowledge.

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¹⁵ A.A. Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Jāmi' li akhlāq ar-Rāwī wa Ādāb as-Sāmi'*, 1, (Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risālah, 1996), 263-264

¹⁶ Ahmad bn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, 11, (Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risālah, 2001), 406

¹⁷ Al-Bukhārī and Abū Dāwūd reported that on the day of the Conquest of Makkah, the Prophet delivered a sermon. A man from Yemen called Abū Shāh requested from the Prophet to have that sermon written for him so the Prophet ordered that a copy of that sermon be written for Abū Shāh. M.I. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Cairo: Al-Maktabat as-Salafiyyah, 1400AH), ḥadīth no. 2434 and S.A. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1389AH), ḥadīth no.2017

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²¹ Ibid 80-89

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