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Biographies of the Famous Hadeeth Scholars & an Introduction to Their Collections

In *Hadeeth* terminology, one may hear a term, *al-Ummuhaar as-Sitt* (الأمهات الست) which is used to describe the six main collections of *Hadeeth*. They are (in order of overall authenticity):

1. "Saheeh al-Bukhaaree"
2. "Saheeh Muslim"
3. "Sunan an-Nasaaee"
4. "Sunan Abu Daawood"
5. "Sunan at-Tirmitheeh"
6. "Sunan Ibn Maajah"

1. "Saheeh al-Bukhaaree"

This book was given the title: "*al'Jaami' as-Saheeh*" by its author. In it, he recorded six hundred thousand *Hadeeth* and he exerted great effort in revising them, editing them, and scrutinizing them to determine their authenticity. He was so concerned that he would not place any *Hadeeth* within his collection without first washing and praying to units of prayer seeking Allaah's guidance in the decision to include it. He did not include any report or narration unless it was authentically reported from the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) with a clear, connected chain of narrators, all known for their trustworthiness and preciseness.

He completed his work over a span of sixteen years. After which, he presented it to *Imaam* Ahmad, Yahyaa Ibn Ma'een, 'Alee Ibn al-Madeeneeh, and others. They admired it and approved of it and attested to its authenticity.

Since then, scholars of every time period have accepted this collection of *Hadeeth*. al-Haafith ath-Thahabee said, "It is the best and most significant book in Islaam after the Book of Allaah (ﷻ)."

This collection consists of seven thousand, three-hundred ninety-seven (7,397) *Hadeeth* including the ones that are repeated, yet placed in different chapters. Excluding the repeated *Hadeeth*, there are two thousand, six hundred two (2,602) individual *Hadeeth* as al-Haafith Ibn Hajar pointed out.

al-Bukhaaree

He is Abu ‘Abdullaah Muhammad Ibn Ismaa’eel Ibn Ibraaheem Ibn al-Mugheerah Ibn Bardizbah¹ al-Ja’fee, originally of Persian origin.

He was born in Bukhaaraa (in present-day Uzbekistan) in the month of *Shawwaal* (the 10th month of the Islaamic calendar) in the year 194 *Hijrah*. He was raised as an orphan (without his father) in the care of his mother. He began traveling throughout different lands, seeking out *Hadeeth* in the year 210. He resided for six years in various lands including ash-Shaam (the lands of Palestine, Syria, Jordan, etc.), Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Basra, Koofah, and Baghdad (all three in Iraaq). He was very proficient in memorizing and it was even said that he was able to memorize a book after seeing it only once. He was one who abstained from useless worldly things. He was pious and did not mix much with the kings, princes, or leaders. Yet, he was brave and generous. Scholars of his time and thereafter have praised him. *Imaam* Ahmad said of him, “No one even close to him has ever come from (the land of) Khuraasaan.” Ibn Khuzaymah said, “There is no one under the sky more knowledgeable of *Hadeeth* of Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ), nor one having memorized more than Muhammad Ibn Ismaa’eel al-Bukhaaree.” He was also diligent in deducing rulings and had an amazing ability to derive rulings and benefits from *Hadeeth* as can be witnessed from the manner in which he organized his authentic collection.

He died in a place known as Khartank near Samarqand (in Uzbekistan) on the night of *‘Eed al-Fitr* (the Islaamic holiday to conclude fasting in the month of *Ramadhaan*) in the year 256 *Hijrah*. He was thirteen days away from the age of sixty-two years old. He left an enormous amount of knowledge behind in his writings. May Allaah have mercy upon him and reward him on behalf of his contribution to the Muslims.

2. “Saheeh Muslim”

This is the famous book written by Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaaj. He collected narrations that he felt were authentically reported from Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ). an-Nawawee said about him, “He kept to many rigorous principles (regarding his *Hadeeth*) in caution, precision, piety, and understanding. Very few people throughout the times had kept to these (strict principles).”

He gathered together all appropriate *Hadeeth* in one place and mentioned the various narrations and different wordings in a very well-organized manner, in chapters. However, he did not mention corresponding explanations out of fear of the book becoming too large, or for other reasons.

Many scholars have explained his collection of *Hadeeth*, and one of the best explanations is that of Imaam an-Nawawee.

¹ Bardizbah: A Persian word meaning cultivator or someone who grows crops.

“*Saheeh Muslim*” consists of seven thousand, two hundred seventy-five (7,275) total Hadeeth, including those that may have been repeated in more than one chapter. Excluding the repeated *Hadeeth*, there are four thousand (4,000).

All of the scholars, or the vast majority, have all agreed that it is at the second level of authenticity, after “*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*”. It has been said (in poetry form), comparing the two collections:

People have disputed before me regarding al-Bukhaaree and Muslim, asking “Which one is to be given preference?” So I said, “al-Bukhaaree has excelled regarding authenticity just as Muslim has excelled in organization (of his *Hadeeth*).”

Muslim

He is Abu al-Husayn Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaaj Ibn Muslim al-Qushayree an-Naysaabooree. He was born in a place known as Naysaabooree in the year 204 *Hijrah*. He journeyed to many lands seeking the knowledge of *Hadeeth* including ash-Shaam, Iraq, and Egypt. When al-Bukhaaree visited Naysaabooree, Muslim remained in his company and took from his knowledge, following his example.

Many scholars of *Hadeeth* as well as other Islaamic sciences spoken highly of Muslim.

He died in Naysaabooree in the year 261 *Hijrah* when he was fifty-seven years old.

He also left behind a vast amount of knowledge in his writings. May Allaah reward him on behalf of the Muslims.

Two Points of Interest Regarding “Saheeh al-Bukhaaree” & “Saheeh Muslim”

The First Point:

It should not be understood that “*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*” encompass every authentically reported statement of Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ). Rather, there are many authentic *Hadeeth* collected by other scholars that neither one of them (al-Bukhaaree & Muslim) recorded in their collections. an-Nawawee said:

“The intent of both al-Bukhaaree and Muslim was only to collect a large number of authentic *Hadeeth* just as a book of *Fiqh*² may collect texts pertaining to many different issues, not encompass every possible issue. However, if there is a *Hadeeth* having an

² *Fiqh*: The knowledge of practical legislated Islaamic rulings by their related detailed proofs. - Shaykh Ibn al-Uthaymeen, “*al-Usool min ‘Ilm al-Usool*” pg. 7. - T.N.

authentic chain of narration that one of them may have left out, or even both of them, then they would have had a reason to do so or they may have recorded a similar *Hadeeth* in its place. From what is well-known from them, it may be assumed that perhaps they felt it better not to record it, or perhaps they even forgot. They also may have left certain *Hadeeth* out in order not to make their collections even longer than they are, or they felt what they have recorded was sufficient pertaining to a certain topic. They may have had other reasons as well.”

The Second Point:

Scholars unanimously agree and consider “*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*” to be the most authentic written works of *Hadeeth*. Regarding this, the famous scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, said, “There is no *Hadeeth* they both agree to be authentic except that it is undoubtedly authentic.” He also said, “The vast majority of their narrations, the scholars of *Hadeeth* know with certainty that the Prophet (ﷺ) actually said them.”

3. “Sunan an-Nasaaee”

an-Nasaaee authored a collection which he titled: “*as-Sunan al-Kubraa*” in which he gathered authentic *Hadeeth* as well as those with defects in their chains. He then summarized his collection which is known as “*as-Sunan as-Sughraa*” although he actually called it “*al-Mujtabaa*”. In this summarized collection, he gathered only those *Hadeeth* which he considered to be authentic; it is this collection that is referred to when a *Hadeeth* is generally attributed to an-Nasaaee.

“*al-Mujtabaa*” has the least number of weak *Hadeeth* out of the other four collections (excluding “*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*”). It also contains the least amount of chains including narrators that have been criticized (regarding their *Hadeeth* narrating). It occupies a status right after “*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*”. From the point of only relying upon narrators that are completely void of any criticism, this collection exceeds “*Sunan Abu Daawood*” and “*Sunan at-Tirmitheeh*” due to an-Nasaaee’s severe scrutiny of narrators within his writings. al-Haafith Ibn Hajar said, “How numerous are the narrators that Abu Daawood and at-Tirmitheeh relied on, yet an-Nasaaee shunned recording their *Hadeeth*. He even avoided recording *Hadeeth* from some of the narrators relied upon in the two authentic collections (“*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*”).”

In summary, the conditions of an-Nasaaee in “*al-Mujtabaa*” are the strongest after the two authentic collections.

an-Nasaaee

He is ‘Abdur-Rahmaan Ahmad Ibn Shu’ayb Ibn ‘Alee an-Nasaaee, and it is said his name is an-Naswee, referring to Nasa, a famous place in Khuraasaan.

He was born in 215 *Hijrah* in Nasa. He then traveled in search of Hadeeth, eventually hearing from and studying from the people of the Hijaaz (lands such as Syria, Palestine, etc.), Khuraasaan, ash-Shaam, the Arabian Peninsula and other lands. He resided for a long time in Egypt and his writings spread throughout there. Later he journeyed to Damascus where he met with trials and tribulations. He died in 303 *Hijrah* in Ramlah, Palestine when he was eighty-three years old.

He left behind him many great works of *Hadeeth* and the study of their defects. May Allaah have mercy on him and reward him on behalf of his contribution to the Muslims.

4. “Sunan Abee Daawood”

This book reached four thousand eight hundred (4,800) *Hadeeth* which the author carefully selected out of five hundred thousand (500,000). He limited his selection to those *Hadeeth* pertaining to the rulings of religious acts. He (Abu Daawood) said:

“I mentioned in it (my book) the authentic and those *Hadeeth* that are close to it. And whatever there is within this book of mine something containing a severe weakness, I have pointed it out and clarified it. There are no *Hadeeth* within it narrated by men whose reports are known to be rejected. Any report that I have not mentioned an issue with it, it is authentic, some stronger than others. And most of the *Hadeeth* that I have put into the book, “*as-Sunan*” are well-known.”

as-Suyootee said, “It is likely that by authentic he meant authentic in meaning but perhaps it also includes some weak narrations. However, it is reported that Ibn Katheer said, ‘Whatever he remained silent about, then it is good (*Hasan*). If it were actually authentic, then there is still no problem.’” Ibn as-Salaah said, “Based upon this, whatever we find mentioned in his book that is not in either of the two authentic collections (“*Saheeh al-Bukhaaree*” and “*Saheeh Muslim*”) and no one before has spoken as to its authenticity, then we know that it is considered to be good (*Hasan*) by Abu Daawood.” Ibn Mundah said, “Abu Daawood used to record narrations of weak chains when he didn’t find anything else relating to a particular topic because this is stronger, by his judgment, than the mere opinion of men.”

“*Sunan Abee Daawood*” became popular with the scholars of *Fiqh* (the deduction of religious rulings) because it was a comprehensive collection of *Hadeeth* pertaining to religious rulings. The author (Abu Daawood) mentioned that he presented it to *Imaam* Ahmad Ibn Hanbal after which he approved of it, considering it good. Ibn al-Qayyim also spoke very favorably of it in the introduction to his “*at-Tahtheeb*”.

Abu Daawood

He is Sulaymaan Ibn al-Ash'ath Ibn Ishaq al-Azadee as-Sijistaanee and he was born in Sijistaan in the year 202 *Hijrah*. He traveled seeking Hadeeth and took from the people of Iraq, ash-Shaam, Egypt, and Khuraasaan. He also studied from Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and other than him from the scholars of al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.

The scholars have praised him, describing him with a complete, strong memorization, an acute understanding, and piety.

He died in Basra, Iraq in 275 *Hijrah* when he was seventy-three years old.

He also left behind him a wealth of knowledge. May Allaah reward him on behalf of all the Muslims.

5. "Sunan at-Tirmitheeh"

This book also became famous by another name: "*Jaami' at-Tirmitheeh*" which was authored by at-Tirmitheeh organized according to chapters of *Fiqh*. He included in it authentic *Hadeeth*, along with good (*Hasan*) and weak ones. However, he would clarify the level of every *Hadeeth* after recording it along with an explanation of its weakness. He was concerned with those who took from the people of knowledge among the Companions and others. He also included at the end of his collection a work on the studies of *Hadeeth* defects in which he gathered some very important points.

Many beneficial points of *Fiqh* and *Hadeeth* studies are included in this book which perhaps are not found anywhere else. The scholars of the Hijaj, Iraq, and Khuraasaan all approved and recommended it when the author offered it to them.

Ibn Rajab said:

"Know that at-Tirmitheeh recorded in his book authentic Hadeeth, good (*Hasan*), and strange, unknown ones. As for the strange ones that he recorded, there are among them some that are rejected (*Munkar*³), especially in the chapter pertaining to the virtues of actions (*Kitaab al-Fadhaail*). Despite this, most of the time he clarifies this. I don't know that he has recorded any *Hadeeth* from someone who has been accused of lying - someone against whom the scholars unanimously agreed to this accusation; such a person's *Hadeeth* are not acceptable when he alone narrates them. Yes, at-Tirmitheeh

³ Shaykh Ibn al-'Uthaymeen said about the definition of a *Munkar Hadeeth*, "The *Hadeeth* scholars differed with regards to the definition of a *Munkar Hadeeth*. It is said it is a narration that has been reported from a weak narrator who contradicts a reliable narrator (of the same or similar *Hadeeth*). For example, a reliable narrator reports the *Hadeeth* in one way and a weak narrator reports it in a different way. They could even both be students of the same scholar. Other scholars give the definition of *Munkar* to be any narration reported by a single person and that person is not accepted if he alone is the sole narrator (his is the only chain of narration)." See "*Sharh al-Manthoomah al-Bayqooniyyah*" pg. 118. - T.N.

may have recorded narrations from some people of bad memory that made mistakes in their *Hadeeth*, but he usually clarifies this; he does not just remain silent about such weaknesses.”

at-Tirmitheeh

He is Abu 'Eesaa Muhammad Ibn 'Eesaa Ibn Suwrah as-Sulamee at-Tirmitheeh. He was born in Tirmath in the year 209 Hijrah. He traveled to various lands studying from the people of al-Hijaz, Iraq, and Khuraasaan.

The scholars agreed to his authority and excellence in *Hadeeth* so much that even al-Bukhaaree used to depend upon him even though he, *Imaam* al-Bukhaaree, was one of his teachers.

He died in Tirmath in 279 Hijrah at the age of seventy. He authored significant works in *Hadeeth* studies and other subjects. May Allaah have mercy on him and reward him for his contribution to the Muslims.

6. Sunan Ibn Maajah

This book was put together by its author, well-organized into chapters and reaching around four thousand three hundred forty-one (4,341) *Hadeeth*. It is well-known among many latter scholars that it is considered as the sixth of *al-Ummuhaar as-Sitt*, the six fundamental books of *Hadeeth*. Although it is actually at a lower level than the *Sunan* - “*Sunan an-Nasaaee*”, “*Sunan Abu Daawood*”, and “*Sunan at-Tirmitheeh*”. It is also recognized that whenever he alone records a *Hadeeth*, it is often weak. Yet, al-Haafith Ibn Ibn Hajar said, “That is not always the case based upon my deductions. Although in general, there are many rejected (*Munkar*) *Hadeeth* in it and it is Allaah from Whom we seek help.” ath-Thahabee said, “There are *Munkar Hadeeth* in it and a few fabricated narrations as well.” as-Suyootee said about Ibn Maajah, “He alone recorded *Hadeeth* by way of narrators that have been accused of lying, and some of those *Hadeeth* are not known except by those chains.”

Despite all of this, most *Hadeeth* in “*Sunan Ibn Maajah*” have also been recorded by the other scholars of the six major collections, or at least some of them. Still, there are one thousand three hundred thirty-nine (1,339) *Hadeeth* that he alone recorded as has been confirmed by the professor of *Hadeeth*, Muhammad Fuaad 'Abdul-Baaqee, may Allaah have mercy upon him.

Ibn Maajah

He is Abu 'Abdullaah Muhammad Ibn Yazeed Ibn 'Abdullaah Ibn Maajah.

He was born in Qazwayn (in Iraq) in 209 *Hijrah* and he traveled to many places in search of *Hadeeth* including Basra, Koofah (in Iraq), Baghdad, ash-Shaam, Egypt, and Hijaz.

He died in 273 *Hijrah* when he was sixty-four years old.

He has numerous other beneficial works, may Allaah reward him on behalf of all the Muslims.