

Strictness and Laxity in Ḥadīth Criticism

by GF Haddad – Shawwāl 1425

Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī – Allāh have mercy on him! – showed in his “Major Dictionary of Ḥadīth Forgeries” known under the two titles of *al-Mawḍū‘āt al-Kubrā* and *al-Asrār al-Marfū‘a fīl-Akḥbār al-Mawḍū‘a* that many of the reports supposed by some of the authorities to be false are not forgeries at all. This is an important corrective for today’s semi-educated censors that condemn many true reports as false on the false assumption that “stricter is better.” They forgot that **as long as the proof of forgery is unestablished beyond reasonable doubt and short of compelling assumption regarding a weak report, it becomes a lie to cry forgery and bar people from the benefit of belief in it!** This holds true even if its chain of transmission falls short of the rank of “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*). **Godfearing precaution toward the Prophet ﷺ goes both ways: not only with respect to steering clear from attributing to him what he never said or did, but also with respect to steering clear from belying what he might have said or done.**

Allāh Most High said,

﴿For the best provision is godfearing. So fear you Me, men possessed of minds!﴾ (2:197);

and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said in one of the wordings of the most famous mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) ḥadīth,

“Whoever attributes a lie to me or rejects something I have ordered, let him take possession of a house in Gehenna.”

When the *Muḥaddith* of Irāq Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī al-Qazwīnī (d. 750) declared eighteen of the ḥadīths of al-Tibrīzī’s *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* forged, the peerless *Ḥāfiẓ* Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī replied with his *Ajwiba ‘alā Risālat al-Qazwīnī*, in which he graded five to seven of the eighteen supposed forgeries “weak” (*ḍa‘īf*), nine to eleven of them “fair” (*ḥasan*), two “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*), and none of them forged! This anecdote is a shining illustration of the difference between half-baked ḥadīth science and the real thing.

Yet, al-Qazwīnī was a *Muḥaddith* in the best sense of the word. What excuse can pseudo-scholars give? The reader may have seen them at work. They make speeches and publish censorious articles, webpages, and books on “ḥadīth forgeries” and “innovations” that resemble fiction more than *ilm*. Nor do their manners and ethics resemble those of Muslims, let alone the small pupils of the Ulema. Rather, they are unscrupulous, unwelcome proselytes working under the glossy cover of moneyed propaganda. They clang ever so loud in ostentatious defense of the Sunna from deviation when they themselves are of dubious doctrine and unqualified even to be students of this noble art. Worst of all, they have no qualms about trying to alter the Prophetic legacy of ḥadīth and persuade the *Umma* that the Prophet ﷺ said and did other than what 1,400 years of Scholarship of the Sunna has led you to believe.

As incompetent strictness is rejected, so is ignorant laxity which consists in attributing anything and everything to the Prophet ﷺ, his Companions, the Imāms of the Law, those of the Prophetic Household, or the rest of the *Awliyā’* without any standard of honesty and accuracy in reporting.

Among the worst offenders are those that sit to preach without having paid their learning dues at the feet of the Ulema because they cannot wait for others to sit at their own feet. What matters for them is to appear to quote from authority so as to assume authority and reap its benefits. Unscrupulosity or misconceived piety among the followers of such admonishers has them drink up what they hear unconditionally as spiritual directives (*irshād*) even if it should be baseless, foolish, incoherent, even irreligious. Ignorance has reached the point where one that rightly sues for authenticity is branded as a fastidious ignoramus by the ignoramus who has no idea whether a report is in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* or in *Kalīla wa-Dimna* nor cares to check!

The above-mentioned types stand at odds with the Sunna from two opposite extremes and can be called the Laxists and the Strictists:

1- The Laxists have no idea who spoke what but insist on attributing it without the least scruple of authenticity, in the manner of story-tellers, even after it is made clear to them that they perpetuate untruths or have no proof for their discourse other than self-perpetuating tradition or unverified hearsay. As Ibn al-Mubārak رحمته said, “The chain of transmission is part and parcel of the Religion, and were it not for the chain of transmission, anyone could say anything.” Examples of this type are the anthropomorphists, modernists, the Shī‘īs, some of the Sufis, and many of the general public known as the *‘awāmm* including preachers that are neither full-fledged *‘awāmm* nor Ulema.

2- The Strictists think it a light matter to cry lies at some of what the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ might have said, pretexting forgery in blind mimicry of what they think is strictness even after they have been shown that their proofs of forgery are themselves sickly and controverted to begin with. Examples of this type are the Wahhābīs and “Salafīs” in all their varieties.

Among the latter type are those that cling to blind imitation and continue to cry forgery at the ḥadīth “***My Companions are like the stars,***” claiming that it is “*ḍa‘īf* or *mawḍū‘*” as stated by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Bazzār and many others”¹ – as if *ḍa‘īf* and *mawḍū‘* were synonyms, if only those references were not a half-lie in the first place! In reality, **this ḥadīth is not forged but admissible** as shown in a separate article, and from Allāh comes all success.

¹<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/scienceofhadith/aape.html> (§ 15), http://www.allaahuakbar.net/ahaadeeth/weak_fabricated_and_baatil_ahaadeeth.htm – an incoherent “Salafi” website – (both as of April, 2004) and the thoroughly irresponsible booklet titled *100 Fabricated Hadith* by an Abdullah Faisal.