

‘ALĪ B. AL-MADĪNĪ (161–234/778–849): A CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF HIS BIOGRAPHY AND EVALUATION OF HIS CONTRIBUTION TO ḤADĪTH CRITICISM

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Starting in the mid-ninth century, ḥadīth scholars have developed a rich literature on ḥadīth criticism, which features a sophisticated methodology used to assess the reliability of a tradition and its narrators in addition to a well-defined terminology to describe their credibility.¹ Yet, the maturity of ḥadīth science owes much to the scholarly efforts of earlier generations. Beginning with Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776),² technical terms such as *thiqa* (reliable), *ṣadūq* (trustworthy), and *ḍa‘īf* (weak), and a conceptual framework for evaluating a narrator’s reliability were already in use in the late eighth and early ninth centuries,³ as shown in the earliest extant biographical dictionaries of Ibn Sa‘d

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¹ For a detailed explanation of ḥadīth criticism terminology, see M. H. Kamali, *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification, and Criticism of Ḥadīth* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2nd imp., 2009), 55–65, 80–95. Ibn Abī Ḥātim (240–327/854–938) is considered the first ḥadīth scholar to have formulated this discipline systematically; see I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (ed. S. M. Stern, transl. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern; Albany, NJ: State University of New York Press, 2 vols, 1971), ii, 137–8; E. Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdim al-Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (240/854–327/938)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), x.

² G. H. A. Juynboll, art. ‘Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥadīdīdī’, *EI*².

³ However, it has to be noted that the terms, well defined by later ḥadīth scholars, were by no means unambiguously employed by critics in the eighth and ninth

(ca. 168–230/784–845) and Khalīfa b. Khayyāt (d. 240/854), as well as the lecture notes of Yahyā b. Maʿīn (158–233/775–847) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164–241/780–855).⁴

Considered an early authority in ḥadīth criticism, the opinions of ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar al-Madīnī (161–234/777–849), frequently cited by later ḥadīth scholars, such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim,⁵ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādī (392–463/1002–1071),⁶ and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348),⁷ strongly influenced the formation of ḥadīth criticism.⁸ Despite his centrality to the science of ḥadīth, no studies on him in the English literature are to be found nor does he have a biographical entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (any edition). Two monographs in Arabic, by Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-ʿAlī and Ikram Allāh Imdād al-Ḥaqq, present a detailed account of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's life. These studies examine his works and the quotations preserved in later compilations and present his views on ḥadīth transmitters and transmission, and so provide useful information for the appraisal of his intellectual output. However, in often simply accepting and repeating pre-modern biographers' reports on ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's actions during the *miḥna* and their evaluation of his scholarly achievements, the authors neglect to address the agendas underlying those reports, and fail

centuries; see J. A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: One World, 2009), 84.

⁴ The works of many early ḥadīth critics, including the last three mentioned here, were compiled by their students—they did not themselves publish these works as *syngammata*. Thus, 'lecture notes', as prepared by their students, in the sense of *hypomnēma*, seems a more fitting term for the works mentioned here. See G. Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (ed. J. E. Montgomery, transl. U. Vagelpohl; London: Routledge, 2006), 55.

⁵ Dickinson, *Development*, 21, 24.

⁶ In addition to his *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's views are cited by al-Khaṭīb in *Kitāb al-Kifāya fī ʿilm al-riwāya* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1938), 44, 62, 66, *et passim*.

⁷ al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-ʾitidāl fī naqd al-rijāl* (ed. ʿA. M. Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀ. A. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 7 vols., 1995), i. 110, 119. Al-Dhahabī in three of his works counts ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī as one of the past authorities of ḥadīth criticism: S. C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam: the Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Maʿīn, and Ibn Hanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 49–53, 58–60.

⁸ Ibid., 122–3. Other major ḥadīth critics who quote ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's views include Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī duʿafāʾ al-rijāl* (ed. ʿĀ. A. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿA. M. Muʿawwaḍ; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 9 vols., 1997 [repr. 2011]), i. 344–5, 349, *et passim*; al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Duʿafāʾ* (ed. H. ʿA. Ismāʿīl; Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣumayʿī, 2000), 40, 52, 103, *et passim*. For a summary of the dependants of his views and works, see I. M. al-ʿAlī, *al-Imām al-ḥāfiẓ ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī: shaykh al-Bukhārī wa-ʿālim al-ḥadīth fī zamānihi* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1994), 107.

to provide sufficient context for his contributions to the development of ḥadīth science.⁹

This article presents a critical reconstruction of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s life with regard to the controversy over his alleged ‘submission’ during the *miḥna* and its impact on how he was perceived by contemporary and subsequent scholars. As a result of conforming, perhaps even (according to some reports) cooperating with the chief qāḍī and prosecutor, Ibn Abī Du’ād (160–239/776–854), ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s image in the biographies is polarized. While the accounts hostile to him appear to have been first circulated among the early Ḥanbalī circle, it is beyond doubt that efforts to redeem his reputation began around the same time and, eventually, outweighed the earlier hostile representation of his response to the *miḥna*. This shift can be partly explained by the widespread circulation, by his students and the disciples of Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, of positive reports about him. The fact that many of them did not adopt an uncompromising stance on the issue of the createdness of the Qur’ān also mitigated the effect of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s submission to the official doctrine during the *miḥna*. Moreover, as this study argues, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s importance in *‘ilm al-rijāl* (the science of ḥadīth transmitters) and *‘ilal al-ḥadīth* (defects in ḥadīth) was acknowledged within the two generations after his, as shown in the extensive citations of Ibn Abī Hātim in his *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl*. It was even recognized by some of the Ḥanbalīs, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s son and cousin, Šāliḥ (d. 266/880) and Ḥanbal b. Ishāq (d. 273/886–7), both of whom are the main sources of the Ḥanbalī hagiographical account of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s resistance to the *miḥna*.¹⁰ Furthermore, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s conceptualization of ḥadīth transmission within the framework of *madār al-isnād* (the convergence of the chains of transmission¹¹) seems to have been the earliest endeavour to

⁹ al-‘Alī’s discussion of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s knowledge of the *‘ilal al-ḥadīth* and the Qur’ānic recitation and his submission during the *miḥna* more or less echoes the primary sources: al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 95–8, 103–4, 160–70. Imdād al-Ḥaqq, although more critical in subjecting certain reports to *isnād* criticism, follows the mainstream narrative of the primary texts: I. Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī wa-minhajuhu fī naqd al-rijāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1992), 100–18.

¹⁰ N. Hurvitz, ‘*Miḥna* as self-defense’, *Studia Islamica*, 92 (2001): 93–111, at 95.

¹¹ Juynboll equates the *madār* with the concept of common link: G. H. A. Juynboll, ‘(Re)appraisal of some technical terms in ḥadīth science’, *Islamic Law and Society*, 8/3 (2001): 303–49, at 342. He is less assertive regarding this equivalence in a later work: *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), xxv. However, the word *madār* has several meanings and may denote a transmitter in an *isnād*, an *isnād* itself, an early authority, or the text of a ḥadīth; see H. Ozkan, ‘The

present a systematic formulation of the history of ḥadīth criticism. It not only delineates the communal identity of *ahl al-ḥadīth* but also lays the foundation for the epistemological framework of *‘ilm al-ḥadīth*.

In what follows, we will first reconstruct ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s life through the early sources that appear to be less propagandistic or apologetic and thus, arguably, more or less free from the partisan embellishments found in later sources.¹² Then, the second section will present an analysis of the reports about ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, which can be divided into four categories: first, those which highlight ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s scholarly credentials; second, those which express misgivings about his credentials because of his submission during the *miḥna*; third, those which denounce him for his association with Ibn Abī Du‘ād; and, fourth, those which present an apology or defence for his submission during the *miḥna*. Examination of the geographical circulation of the reports of these categories evinces that the positive and apologetic reports about ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī were more widespread than the condemnatory ones and thus became the accepted position in the later biographical sources. Furthermore, acquiescence to the *miḥna* doctrine on the part of many ḥadīth transmitters, some of whom were also ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s associates or students, also facilitated his absolution from Ḥanbalī condemnation. The third section will explain ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s unshakeable standing as a ḥadīth authority on account of his centrality to the formation, realized within two generations of his death, of ḥadīth criticism as a discipline, namely *‘ilm al-rijāl* and *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*. To illustrate this early recognition, the main fields to which ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī contributed are discussed in combination with a detailed analysis of how Ibn Abī Ḥātim adduces ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s views and reports on his authority.

common link and its relation to the *Madār*’, *Islamic Law and Society*, 11/1 (2004): 42–77, at 51.

¹² The early sources used here for the description of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s life comprise the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa‘d; the *Ṭabaqāt* of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt; and the views of Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, as recorded by his student Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim Ibn Muḥriz; the *Kitāb al-Tārikh al-kabīr* and *al-Tārikh al-ṣaghīr* of al-Bukhārī (194–256/810–870); and the *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-tārikh* of al-Fasawī (d. ca. 277/890). Inevitably, later sources, such as al-Khaṭīb and al-Mizzī (654–742/1256–1341), are employed here to provide insights into his scholarly career and networks. Imdād al-Ḥaqq’s detailed study of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī and his approaches to ḥadīth criticism, though useful for this article, does not scrutinize the embellishments in later sources. Hence, it is only cited when the author references early sources. On the embellishments and apologia in later sources, see below n. 42. See also Cooperson’s analysis of the development of al-Ma’mūn’s image in biographical writings: M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma’mūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 67–9.

1. ‘ALĪ B. AL-MADĪNĪ: LIFE AND WORKS

Although ninth- and tenth-century sources do not make explicit reference to his birthplace, it is plausible that he was born in Basra, as suggested by secondary literature.¹³ His father, ‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far, despite the *nisba*, al-Madīnī, was based in Basra and considered a scholar of that city.¹⁴ Ibn Sa‘d places ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī in the eighth *ṭabaqa* of the Basran scholars and notes the following:

‘Alī b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far b. Najīh al-Madanī is given the agnomen, Abū al-Ḥasan. He died in the caliph’s camp (*askar*) in Samarra, on the 2nd Dhū al-Qa‘da, year 234.¹⁵

The death date and the Madinan connection are agreed on by ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s student, al-Bukhārī, who also notes his *mawla* status,¹⁶ but different dates are given by others. Al-Fasawī situates his death in the same year as that of Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba, in 235/849–50.¹⁷ The earliest reference to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s birth year, given as 162/778–9, is found in the *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* by Ibn Ḥibbān (270–354/883–965),¹⁸ but al-Khaṭīb’s dating, 161/777–8, is widely accepted.¹⁹

¹³ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām wa-akhbār muḥaddithihā wa-dhikr quṭṭānihā al-‘ulamā’ min ghayr ablihā wa-wāridihā* (ed. B. ‘A. Ma‘rūf; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 17 vols., 2001), xiii. 422; F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 9 vols. + indexes, 1967), i. 108; M. M. al-A‘zamī, ‘Tarjamat al-mu‘allif’ in ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *al-‘Ilal* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2nd edn., 1980), 4.

¹⁴ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* (ed. A. Ḍ. al-‘Umarī; Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-‘Anī, 1967), 224.

¹⁵ Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* (ed. ‘A. M. ‘Umar; Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 11 vols., 2001), ix. 310.

¹⁶ al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr* (ed. H. al-Nadawī; Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 4 vols. in 8, 1941–45), vi. 284. See also al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-ṣaḡhīr* (ed. M. I. Zāyid; Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 2 vols., 1986), ii. 333.

¹⁷ Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-tārīkh* (ed. A. Ḍ. al-‘Umarī; Madina: Maktabat al-Dār, 4 vols., 1990), i. 210. A later death date, given by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995), claims that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī died in Dhū al-Qa‘da, 258, at the age of 72. Yet, the dates would be irreconcilable with ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s transmission from the Basran teachers, such as Hammād b. Zayd (d. 179/795) and Yazīd b. Zuray‘ (d. 182/798–9), should he have been born in 186. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (ed. Riḍā Tajaddud; Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 3rd edn., 1988), 286. For the dates of Hammād b. Zayd and Yazīd b. Zuray‘, see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 287–8, 290.

¹⁸ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* (ed. M. ‘A. Khān; Hyderabad: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 9 vols. + appendix, 1973–83), viii. 496.

¹⁹ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 422. See also Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 43–4.

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was born to a scholarly family. His grandfather, Ja‘far b. Najīh (no dates found), was a ḥadīth narrator, transmitting from ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Qāsim (d. 126/743-4) and ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāh (d. ca. 114/732).²⁰ On his mother’s side, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was related to Abū al-‘Alā’ Jumhān, who narrated from ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (r. 23–35/644–656) and Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. between 50/670-1 and 58/677-8) and taught ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr (ca. 23–94/643–713).²¹ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s father, ‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far (d. 178/794), was also a ḥadīth narrator, but his credibility was impugned by Yahyā b. Ma‘īn and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī himself,²² whose refusal to transmit his father’s narrations was deemed unfilial, but demonstrated his commitment to accurate transmission.²³ It is noteworthy that a later source preserves the more favourable view, also attributed to Yahyā b. Ma‘īn and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, of ‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far’s reliability.²⁴

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī probably started to pursue his career as a *muḥaddith* alongside other Basran scholars. After his father, Hammād b. Zayd appears to have been his earliest source.²⁵ The leading Basran scholars ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī (135–198/752–813) and Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/814) also became close associates.²⁶

He then studied under shaykhs based in major Iraqi cities: al-Faḍl b. Dukayn (d. 219/834), Wakī‘ b. al-Jarrāh (d. 197/812), and Yahyā b.

²⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl* (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 9 vols., 1952–53), ii. 489–90, hereafter cited as *al-Jarḥ*; al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, ii. 202–3. These references were taken from Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 51–2. See also al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 24.

²¹ According to al-Bukhārī, Jumhān is ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s great-grandfather, while Ibn Abī Ḥātim identifies him as his great-great-grandfather (*jadd jadda*). See Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 52–3, where he cites: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, ii. 546; al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, ii. 250.

²² al-Jūzjānī, *al-Shajara fī aḥwāl al-rijāl* (ed. ‘A.‘A. al-Bastawī; Riyadh: Dār al-Taḥāwī, 2 vols., 1990), 186; al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, v. 62.

²³ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, v. 23.

²⁴ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 153–4, where he cites Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 12 vols. + appendix and indices, 1994), v. 175–6.

²⁵ For Hammād b. Zayd, see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 287–8.

²⁶ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 148. One can count among ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s Basran informants ‘Abdallāh b. Bakr al-Sahmī (d. 208/823), ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Thaqafī (d. 194/809–10), and ‘Abd al-Wārith b. Sa‘īd (d. 180/796); see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 297 (al-Sahmī), 290–1 (‘Abd al-Wahhāb), 290 (‘Abd al-Wārith). For a list of his teachers, see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl* (ed. B. ‘A. Ma‘rūf; Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 35 vols., 1980–92), xxi. 6–7.

Ādam (d. 203/818) in Kufa;²⁷ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ulayya (d. 193/809),²⁸ Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839),²⁹ and ‘Affān b. Muslim al-Ṣaffār (d. 220/835)³⁰ in Baghdad;³¹ and Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799), al-Faḍl b. ‘Anbasa (d. 197/812–13), and ‘Alī b. ‘Āsim (d. 201/816) in Wasit.³² ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī likely visited Makka several times, the first visit taking place at latest in 188/804, as he met Jarīr b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (d. 188/804) there.³³ It is also in Makka that he became a disciple of Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna (107–196/725–811).³⁴ It may be assumed that he also studied in Madina, although this is only indicated in later sources.³⁵ He also travelled to Yemen, probably before 200/815–16, with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn, to obtain ḥadīth from ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827) and other authorities,³⁶ in addition to Egyptian and Persian cities such as Rayy and Hamadhān.³⁷ It does not seem that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī ever studied in Greater Syria. Thus, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889) rightly observes that Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn was more knowledgeable than him in the *‘ilm al-rijāl*, because of his lack of information concerning Syrian transmitters.³⁸

²⁷ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, viii. 517 (Wakī‘), 523 (al-Faḍl b. Dukayn), 526 (Yaḥyā b. Ādam).

²⁸ Ibn ‘Ulayya was Kufan by origin, and he established his scholarly profile in Basra, before moving to Baghdad when appointed to the *maẓālim* court; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vii. 196–211; Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 327–8.

²⁹ Khurāsānī by origin, he became the *qāḍī* of Tarsus before settling in Baghdad; see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 358–9.

³⁰ ‘Affān b. Muslim, originally from Basra, died in Baghdad; see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 300.

³¹ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī came to Baghdad in 187/802–3 or 188/803–4; it is plausible that he visited the caliphal capital more than once. See Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 148–50.

³² Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 316 (Hushaym), 317 (al-Faḍl b. ‘Anbasa), 315 (‘Alī b. ‘Āsim).

³³ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 151–3.

³⁴ Originally a Kufan, Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna settled in Makka after travelling to Yemen and Baghdad; see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, viii. 59–60.

³⁵ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 153.

³⁶ Ibid, 153–4.

³⁷ Ibid, 154–6. It should be noted that, unlike his presence in Rayy, which is attested by al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, ii. 376, his visits to Hamadhān and Egypt are respectively recorded in al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vii. 491; al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Askarī, *Taṣḥīfāt al-muḥaddithīn* (ed. M. A. Mīra; Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadītha, 3 vols., 1982–83), i. 74.

³⁸ al-Ājurri, *Su‘ālāt Abī ‘Ubayd al-Ājurri li-l-imām Abī Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī fī ma‘rifat al-rijāl wa-jarḥihim wa-ta‘dīlihīm* (ed. M. ‘A. al-Azharī; Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Tibā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 2010), 296.

Examination of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s sources of ḥadīth reveals that he studied under scholars of both ‘Uthmānī and Shī‘ī tendencies,³⁹ as well as those of various other theological dispositions.⁴⁰ Thus, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s sectarian standing is elusive, as Yahyā b. Ma‘īn describes him as a Sunni in Baghdad but a Shī‘ī in Basra, probably indicating that he was not an ‘Uthmānī.⁴¹ In a similar vein, despite his transmission of the *masā’il* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) and his association with al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820),⁴² ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī does not seem to have identified with either school of law. That is, his legal opinions are arbitrated by the traditions which he considered reliable.⁴³

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was acknowledged by his contemporaries as an authority on ḥadīth,⁴⁴ often ranked alongside Yahyā b. Ma‘īn and Aḥmad

³⁹ His Shī‘ī teachers comprise Wakī‘, al-Faḍl b. Dukayn, ‘Ubaydallāh b. Mūsā (d. 213/829), and Ja‘far b. Sulaymān (d. 178/794–5); see al-Nāshī ‘al-Akbar, *Masā’il al-imāma: wa-muqṭaṭaṭāt min al-Kitāb al-awsaṭ fi al-maqālāt* = *Frühe mu‘tazilitische Häresiographie* (ed. Josef van Ess; Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1971), 65 (the first two); Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, viii. 522–3 (‘Ubaydallāh b. Mūsā); ix. 289 (Ja‘far b. Sulaymān). Those of ‘Uthmānī tendencies include Yazīd b. Zuray‘ and Bishr b. al-Mufaḍḍal (d. 186/802); see respectively Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 290, 291. See also T. S. Andersson, *Early Sunnī Historiography: A Study of the Tārīkh of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 83–7.

⁴⁰ Shabbāba b. Sawwār (d. 204–6/819–22) was a Murjī‘ī; see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 322. ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. ‘Abd al-A‘lā (d. 189/805) and ‘Abd al-Wārith are Qadarīs; see respectively ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *Su‘ālāt ‘Uthmān b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba* (ed. M. ‘A al-Azhari; Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 2006), 46 (the name as presented in the title is incorrect, see below n. 67); al-‘Uqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu‘afā’*, 812.

⁴¹ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 428. The quote is cited by al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’* (ed. Ḥ. ‘Abd al-Mannān; Beirut: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyya, 3 vols., 2004), 2800; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xxi. 17.

⁴² The reports on ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s connections with Mālik b. Anas and al-Shāfi‘ī are found in the late biographical dictionaries of the Mālikī and Shāfi‘ī jurists. It is questionable whether such accounts reflect a later attempt to magnify the role of the eponyms of the schools in question, rather than historical facts; see Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 62, 123.

⁴³ al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 45–52; Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 124–31. In this, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī is likened to Aḥmad b. Hanbal, both being listed by Ibn al-Nadīm among the *fuqahā’ aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*; see *al-Fihrist*, 281–9 (‘Alī b. al-Madīnī at 287). See also S. A. Spectorsky, ‘Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal’s *fiqh*’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 102/3 (1982): 461–5; C. Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 13–31; id., ‘Traditionist-jurists and the framing of Islamic law’, *Islamic Law and Society*, 8/3 (2001): 383–406.

⁴⁴ al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 129–32.

b. Ḥanbal as the leading ḥadīth scholars of their time.⁴⁵ His work *Tasmiyat man ruwiya* impressed Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,⁴⁶ who only referred to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī by his agnomen out of respect, according to Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (195–277/810–890).⁴⁷ However, the attitude of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and that of some of his protégés, towards ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī likely changed after his submission during the *miḥna*. ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was taken to trial in 220/835–6,⁴⁸ during the caliphate of al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 218–227/833–842). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal refused to identify ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī as his source when citing ḥadīth narrated from the latter.⁴⁹ Likewise, Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) left out his ḥadīth,⁵⁰ whereas Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba (159–235/775–849) described him as ‘the one who forfeits his hope (*al-khā’ib*)’.⁵¹ It is beyond question that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s stance in response to the *miḥna* was controversial among the *ahl al-ḥadīth* of his time. Yet, it is impossible to understand how exactly ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī responded at the trial—whether he only passively submitted to the official doctrine out of fear, without joining in the persecution of his traditionist peers, above all, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, or if he took an active part in the inquisition against them. The earliest reports to elaborate on the contemporary appraisal of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī and his involvement in the *miḥna* are found in *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*.⁵² However, these accounts are polarized. A more thorough appraisal of the reports concerning ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s scholarly achievements and involvement in the *miḥna* will be presented in the second section.

⁴⁵ For example, Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām holds that knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) came to four, Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, and Yahyā b. Ma‘īn; for this and other examples, see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 429–30; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, i. 293, 315.

⁴⁶ Al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 108, 124.

⁴⁷ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, vi. 194.

⁴⁸ al-Ājurri, *Su‘ālāt*, 135.

⁴⁹ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (attributed), *Kitāb al-‘Ilal wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl* (ed. W. M. Abbās; Riyadh: Dār al-Khānī, 2nd edn., 8 vols. in 4, 2001), iii. 70.

⁵⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, vi. 194.

⁵¹ Ibn Muḥriz, *Ma‘rifat al-rijāl ‘an Yahyā b. Ma‘īn* (ed. M. M. al-Ḥāfiz, G. Budayr, and M. K. al-Qaṣṣār; Damascus: Maṭbū‘āt Majma‘ al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya, 2 vols., 1985), ii. 215.

⁵² These accounts are used by later biographers of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2799–2804; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā* (ed. M. M. al-Ṭanāhī and ‘A. al-Hilw; Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 10 vols., 199–? [Cairo: ‘Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, 1964–76]), ii. 145–8; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xxi. 5–35; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, vii. 351–7; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a‘lām* (ed. B. ‘A. Ma‘rūf; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 17 vols., 2003), v. 887–92.

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī fathered three sons, Muḥammad, ‘Abdallāh, and Ja‘far. The first two were also ḥadīth transmitters. Muḥammad transmitted ḥadīth from his father, and was regarded as reliable.⁵³ ‘Abdallāh was the transmitter of his father’s *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*. Based in Basra, he visited Baghdad to spread his father’s ḥadīth and works, such as the *Kitāb al-Mudallisīn* and *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*.⁵⁴ Although al-Dāraqūṭnī (d. 385/995) claims that ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī did not narrate profusely from his father, al-Khaṭīb often cites ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s opinions or reports via his son.⁵⁵ Little is known of Ja‘far.⁵⁶

The earliest bibliographical record of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s works, by Ibn al-Nadīm, mentions seven works. This may well not have been an exhaustive list, but it is difficult to trust the attribution by al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) of 200 works to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī.⁵⁷ Whether or not he indeed compiled that many works, only a few survive today, as listed by Imdād al-Ḥaqq:

1. *‘Ilal al-ḥadīth wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl*. A manuscript is kept at the Library of Aḥmed III, Topkapı Palace, Istanbul.⁵⁸ The manuscript was copied in 728/1327-8 and has been edited and published.⁵⁹
2. *Tasmiyat man ruwiya ‘anhu min awlād al-‘ashara wa-ghayribim min aṣḥāb Rasūl Allāh*. Two manuscripts of this work are found in the Zāhiriyya Library, Damascus, respectively transmitted by Ḥanbal b. Ishāq and Muḥammad b. Hishām b. Abī al-Dumayk (d. 289/901-2), copied in 606/1209-10 and 609/1212-13.⁶⁰ In this work, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī first mentions Fāṭima and her children fathered by ‘Alī, as well as the Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid offspring. Then, he continues with the children of the rest of the Ten Companions, assured of paradise in a ḥadīth.⁶¹ The section ends with a

⁵³ al-Ājurri, *Su‘ālāt*, 174. This reference was taken from Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 54.

⁵⁴ al-Ājurri, *Su‘ālāt*, 174; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xi. 178. These references were taken from Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 54–6.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁶ al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 26–7.

⁵⁷ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 262.

⁵⁸ Sezgin, *Geschichte*, i. 108; Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 264.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 265.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 265–6.

⁶¹ This ḥadīth is attributed to the Companion, Sa‘īd b. Zayd, who witnessed the Prophet identifying the following Companions, besides himself, as the residents of heaven: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Alī, ‘Uthmān, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqās, and Abū ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ; see al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-kabīr* (ed. B. ‘A. Ma‘rūf; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 6 vols., 1996), no. 3747; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* (ed. M. ‘A. Aṭā; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 4th edn., 5 vols., 2009), no. 5858. Variants of this ḥadīth, which

remark on al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 32/653). Then, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī addresses the Companions of the shared names and follows with a section on Companions settling in different cities. Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī’s *Tasmiyat al-ikhwa min ahl al-amṣār* seems to have been modeled on this work, to which he had access via ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s son, ‘Abdallāh.⁶²

3. *Su’ālāt Ibn al-Madīnī li-Yahyā b. Sa’īd al-Qaṭṭān*. This work is preserved in a manuscript at the Library of Aḥmed III, Istanbul.⁶³ It is a typical *su’ālāt* work, in which ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī records the views of his teacher, al-Qaṭṭān, on ḥadīth narrators.
4. *al-Aḥādīth al-mu’allalāt*. This piece only survives in the form of a fragment one folio in length, and is located at the Zāhiriyya Library.⁶⁴
5. *Arā’uhu fī ‘ulamā’ al-Baṣra al-ladhīna waṣafahum Yahyā b. Ma’īn bi-l-qadar-iyya or Masā’il*.⁶⁵ The manuscripts of this work are kept at the Library of Aḥmed III, Istanbul, copied in 628/1230-1, and at the Zāhiriyya Library under the title *Masā’il*, finished in 520/1126-7. The work is also attributed to Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba (d. 297/909), who recorded discussions of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī and his responses to the questions of his students

identify different Companions, can be found in Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (eds. Sh. al-Arnā’ūt and M. K. Qara Balalī; Beirut: Dār al-Risāla al-‘Ālam-iyya, 7 vols., 2009), no. 4649; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf* (ed. U. I. Muḥammad; Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr, 15 vols., 2008), no. 32551; Ibn Māja, *al-Sunan* (ed. M. M. Naṣṣār; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009), no. 133; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* (ed. M. ‘A. ‘Atā; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 12 vols., 2008), nos. 1651, 1653, 1659, 1666. (For the ḥadīth collections, references are to the ḥadīth number, not volume and page number.)

⁶² Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 267.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 268.

⁶⁵ The longer title derives from the first paragraph, which presents a dialogue between Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī:

O Abū al-Ḥasan [the agnomen of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī], Yahyā b. Ma’īn mentioned to us that some Basran shaykhs were accused of Qadarī belief, but they do not promote it and do not engage with anything condemnable in their ḥadīth. These include Qatāda, Hishām, who is the trader (*ṣāhib*) of Dastawā’ī clothes, Sa’īd b. Abī ‘Arūba, Abū Hilāl [Muḥammad b. Sulaym], ‘Abd al-Wārith [b. Sa’īd], and Sallām [b. Miskīn]. They are reliable and their ḥadīth should be accepted. They died without renouncing their view.’ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī replied: ‘May God have mercy on him, Abū Zakariyyā [the agnomen of Yahyā b. Ma’īn] said this while he was with us, except that our people [*viz. ahl al-ḥadīth*] claimed that Hishām al-Dastawā’ī withdrew [his Qadarism] before his death, but that is not true in our view.’

See ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *Su’ālāt*, 31, and n. 67 below.

(including himself) regarding ḥadīth narrators' credibility, sectarian persuasion, and biographical information about them.⁶⁶ This work was published and edited by 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Qādir in 1984 as well as by al-Azhari in 2006.⁶⁷

Those works that are no longer available covered the following areas: first, ḥadīth collections, such as the *Kitāb al-Ashriba*;⁶⁸ second, Qur'ānic science, such as *Asbāb al-nuzūl*;⁶⁹ third, 'ilm al-rijāl, such as *al-Asmā' wal-kunā*, *al-Tārīkh*, *al-Du'afā'*, *al-Thiqāt*, *al-Asāmī al-shādhḥa*, *Man rawā 'an rajul lam yarahū*, *Man yu'raf bi-l-laqab*, and *Ma'rifat man nazala min al-ṣaḥāba sā'ir al-buldān*;⁷⁰ and, fourth, ḥadīth science, such as *Ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, *'Ulūm al-ḥadīth*, *Kitāb al-'Ilal* and *Tafsīr gharīb al-ḥadīth*.⁷¹ 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's literary production also reflects his expertise in different branches of religious learning, which was positively received by later scholars, especially compilers of encyclopaedias of ḥadīth science, above all, al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī (321–405/933–1014) and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (577–643/1181–1245), as we will elaborate in the third section.

2. 'ALĪ B. AL-MADĪNĪ'S IMAGE AND THE MIḤNA

There are four kinds of reports on 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's reputation and conduct during the *miḥna*: positive, prophetic, negative, and apologetic. In the following lists, these reports have been summarized with notes (in square brackets) on the geographical connections of their transmitters.

⁶⁶ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 268–9.

⁶⁷ Although al-Azhari gives a different catalogue number (21/624, whereas Imdād al-Ḥaqq gives 11/624) for the manuscript in the Library of Aḥmed III, it is clear that both he and Imdād al-Ḥaqq are referring to the same manuscript, given that it comprises the same page range, folios 220 to 226; see M. 'A al-Azhari, 'Muqaddimat al-taḥqīq' in *Su'ālāt*, 16. It should be noted that the edition by al-Azhari gives the wrong title, *Su'ālāt 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad*, whereas the edited text identifies the interlocutor of 'Alī b. al-Madīnī as Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān b. Abī Shayba; see 'Alī b. al-Madīnī, *Su'ālāt 'Uthmān*, 31.

⁶⁸ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 271; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 286.

⁶⁹ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 270.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 270–2, 276–9.

⁷¹ Ibid, 272, 275–6. For a list of 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's works, see al-Azhari, 'Muqaddimat', 9–10; Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 269–79.

Positive⁷²

- A. Ibrāhīm b. Bashshār (d. ca. 224/838-9) [Makka; Basra]⁷³ reports that Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna [Kufa; Makka]⁷⁴ stated: ‘You blame me for loving ‘Alī [b. al-Madīnī]. By God, I have learnt more from him than he has learnt from me’.
- B. Aḥmad b. Sinān (d. ca. 256/869-70) [Wasit]⁷⁵ and al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-‘Anbarī (d. ca. 236-7/850-2) [Basra; Baghdad]⁷⁶ stated that Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna used to call ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī ‘the snake of the wadi (*ḥayyat al-wādī*)’ and wished, whenever he was asked a question, that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī had been present. (The idiom ‘snake of the wadi’, understood to indicate the quality of ‘being incisive, stinging’, here expresses praise of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s acuity of mind and speech.)
- C. Muḥammad b. Qudāma al-Jawharī (d. 237/851-2) [al-Maṣṣīṣ; Baghdad]⁷⁷ reports that Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna stated: ‘Were it not for ‘Alī, I would not have come out to you [for ḥadīth transmission]’.
- D. Ibn Zanjala (d. 238/852-3) [Rayy; Baghdad]⁷⁸ reports that Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna approved of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s answer to a question.
- E. Ḥafṣ b. Maḥbūb al-Khuzā‘ī⁷⁹ reports that Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna said, when ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī left the assembly: ‘When the cavalry has left, one does not sit with the infantry (*idhā qāmat al-khayl lam yujlas ma’a al-rajjāla*).’
- F. al-‘Abbās al-‘Anbarī and Rawḥ b. ‘Abd al-Mu’min (d. ca. 233/847-8) [Basra]⁸⁰ report that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī [Basra] stated: ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī is the most learned man in Prophetic ḥadīth’.

⁷² The reports in this section derive from: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh* xiii: 422 (A, C); 423 (B); 423–424 (D); 424 (E, F, G); 425 (H, I, J); 426 (K); 427 (L); 427–428 (M).

⁷³ Ibrāhīm b. Bashshār is known as a companion (*ṣāhib*) of Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna. His credibility as a ḥadīth transmitter is, however, subject to question by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn. He died in Basra; see Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ix. 310; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 653; Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil*, i. 430.

⁷⁴ See above, n. 34.

⁷⁵ Aḥmad b. Sinān b. Asad was a Wasiti member of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, whose reliability is confirmed by Ibn Abī Ḥātim; see *al-Jarḥ*, ii. 53. For different death dates, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 789.

⁷⁶ ‘Abbās al-‘Anbarī was a Basran scholar, highly regarded by his townspeople; see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, vi. 216; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, xiv. 21.

⁷⁷ Muḥammad b. Qudāma al-Jawharī originated from al-Maṣṣīṣa and visited Baghdad. His credibility as a ḥadīth narrator was criticized; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, iv. 310; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xxvi. 311–12.

⁷⁸ Sahl b. Zanjala came from Rayy and taught in Baghdad after 230/844-5; according to Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, he was trustworthy; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, x. 169–70; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 1948.

⁷⁹ No information about Ḥafṣ was found.

⁸⁰ For his Basran affiliation, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, viii. 244; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, iii. 499.

- G. 'Ubaydallāh b. 'Umar al-Qawārīrī (d. 235/850) [Basra; Baghdad]⁸¹ reports that Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān [Basra] stated: 'People reproach me for sitting with 'Alī, but I learn from 'Alī more than he does from me'.
- H. al-'Abbās al-'Anbarī reports that Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān made an oath that he would stop transmitting ḥadīth for a month, but he made exception for 'Alī b. al-Madīnī, because he had learnt much from him.
- I. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Junayd (d. after 270/883) [Baghdad; Samarra]⁸² reports that Yahyā b. Ma'īn [Baghdad]⁸³ described 'Alī b. al-Madīnī as the most prolific narrator of the ḥadīth from Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān (*arwā al-nās 'an Yahyā b. Sa'īd*), who respected and befriended him (*yukrimuhu wa-yudnīhi*).
- J. 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Sayyār (d. ca. 300/912) [Nasā of Khurāsān; Damascus; Egypt]⁸⁴ reports that Abū Qudāma⁸⁵ heard 'Alī b. al-Madīnī say that he had grabbed Thurayyā (the Pleiades) in a dream. Abū Qudāma interpreted the dream as 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's unsurpassable mastery of ḥadīth.
- K. al-'Abbās al-'Anbarī said that 'Alī b. al-Madīnī would have been greater than al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21–110/642–728) if he were granted what was destined to him, as people used to record the words and conduct of 'Alī b. al-Madīnī (that is, see him as living *sunna*).
- L. Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Sarrāj (218–313/833–925) [Nishapur; Baghdad, etc.] reports that Abū Yahyā⁸⁶ said that when 'Alī b. al-Madīnī came to Baghdad, every scholar, including Yahyā b. Ma'īn and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, asked for his opinion when a dispute arose over ḥadīth.

⁸¹ al-Qawārīrī was a Basran scholar who settled and died in Baghdad; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, xii. 25–8.

⁸² Ibrāhīm b. al-Junayd was a Baghdadi and later settled in Samarra. He is one of Yahyā b. Ma'īn's students, who recorded his shaykh's opinions on the ḥadīth transmitters; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 671.

⁸³ Yahyā b. Ma'īn, born in Anbār, later settled and established himself in Baghdad; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, xvi. 265, 269.

⁸⁴ 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Sayyār al-Farhiyānī studied in Damascus, Egypt, and Khurāsān. He was the companion of al-Nasā'ī and an insightful ḥadīth critic; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2486; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. 'U. G. al-'Amrawī; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 80 vols., 1995–2000), xxxii. 195–6.

⁸⁵ No information about Abū Qudāma was found.

⁸⁶ Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Sarrāj travelled extensively, including to Baghdad, Kufa, Basra, Khurāsān, and Hijāz, in search of ḥadīth. He lived for a long time in Baghdad, before returning to his hometown, Nishapur. He authored several ḥadīth works, including *Musnad* and *Tārikh*, the latter of which was adduced by al-Bukhārī; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, ii. 56–9. No information about Abū Yahyā was found.

- M. Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Baḥīrī reports that al-A‘yan⁸⁷ said that he saw ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī reclining, with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, seated on his right and left sides respectively.

Prophetic⁸⁸

Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ar‘ara (d. 231/845) [Basra; Baghdad]⁸⁹ reports that Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān said the following to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī: ‘I do not think you shall die until you are tested (*lā aḥsibuka tamūt ḥattā tubtalā*).’

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sākin [Zanjān?]⁹⁰ reports that Azhar b. Jamīl al-Shaṭṭī (d. 251/865) [Basra]⁹¹ reports that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī saw in his dream that a group of the traditionists were humiliated (*nukisū*). ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī consoled his teacher by citing the Qur’ānic verse: ‘If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature: Will they not then understand?’ (Q. 36: 68), but ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī retorted that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was one of the traditionists he saw in his dream.

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sākin from Abū Bakr al-Athram (d. after 260/874) [Baghdad]⁹² reports that al-Aṣma‘ī said to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, ‘By God, O ‘Alī, you shall leave Islam behind your back!’

al-‘Abbās al-‘Anbarī reports that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī claimed to see in a dream that he had preached on the pulpit of David. The dream was a prophecy that he would be tested (*futina*) in his faith.

⁸⁷ No information about these two transmitters was found.

⁸⁸ The reports in this section derive from: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 430 (I); 430–1 (II), 431 (III, IV).

⁸⁹ Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ar‘ara was a Basran scholar who settled in Baghdad; his reliability was questioned by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, but, overall, recognised by Yahyā b. Ma‘īn and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vii. 76–8.

⁹⁰ The *nisba* given to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sākin, who narrated Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Masā’il* from Abū Bakr al-Athram, is not given in some manuscripts; see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, ii. 72.

⁹¹ Except for his attributives, Hāshimī by *walā’* and Basran, and his students and teachers, nothing is known about this traditionist; see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, ii. 320.

⁹² Abū Bakr al-Athram, a Baghdadi of Khurāsānī origin, was an ardent follower of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, whose *Masā’il* he transmitted; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vi. 295–9; Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, viii. 36.

Negative⁹³

- a. al-Husayn b. Muḥammad b. Fahm (211–89/826–902) [Baghdad]⁹⁴ from his father [Baghdad]⁹⁵ who said that Ibn Abī Duʿād bribed ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī to supply him with knowledge in ḥadīth so that he could defeat Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal during the inquisition.
- b. Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī (d. 275/888) [Khurāsān; Baghdad]⁹⁶ reports that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal accused ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī of lying by changing a word in a ḥadīth: from *kilūhu ilā ʿālimihi* (refer it [the Qurʾān] to its knower) to *kilūhu ilā khāliqihī* (refer it to its creator). The latter wording would be used to justify the createdness of the Qurʾān.
- c. Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī said that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal did not respond to ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's greeting.
- d. Abū al-ʿAynāʾ (d. 283/896) [Ahwāz; Basra; Baghdad]⁹⁷ related that ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī was lampooned for complying with the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān. Ibn Abī Duʿād later placated him with money.
- e. Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā al-Sājī (if al-Baṣrī, d. 307/919–20) [Basra or Baghdad?]⁹⁸ reports that ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī praised Ibn Abī Duʿād, he was reproved by Muḥammad b. Bashshār Bundār (d. 252/866).

⁹³ The reports in this section derive from: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 431–2 (a); 434–5 (b); 435 (c); 436 (d); 436–7 (e); 437 (f, g).

⁹⁴ al-Husayn b. Muḥammad b. Fahm lived in the eastern side of Baghdad; he learnt *ʿilm al-rijāl* from Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. Besides ḥadīth, he also narrated material about poetry, genealogy, and *akhbār*; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, viii. 657–8.

⁹⁵ A very brief biographical entry about him can be found in *ibid*, iii. 539.

⁹⁶ Originally from Khurāsān, Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī settled in Baghdad. He was a leading disciple of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, whose *masāʾil* he collected and transmitted; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vi. 104–6.

⁹⁷ Abū al-ʿAynāʾ Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Khallād, born in Ahwāz, grew up in Basra. He later moved to Baghdad. He was a narrator of reports and rare tales (*nawādir*), and was associated with the ʿAbbāsīd court, especially al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (d. 236/851) and the caliphs, al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861) and al-Muntaṣir (r. 247–248/861–862); see Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ* (ed. ʿA. A. Farrāj; Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 3rd edn., 1976), 414–15; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, iv. 284–5, 293–4.

⁹⁸ There are two scholars bearing this name: Abū Yaʿlā Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā b. Khallād was a Basran, who settled in Baghdad; Abū Yaḥyā Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā al-Sājī was a reliable Basran traditionist, authoring works on ḥadīth and *fiqh*. It is impossible to tell which Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā is referred to here. For the former, see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, ix. 474. For the latter, see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, iii. 601.

- f. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (198–285/814–99) [Baghdad]⁹⁹ refrained from narrating ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s traditions after learning of his association with Ibn Abī Du’ād.
- g. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī said that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, in order to please Ibn Abī Du’ād, removed Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s ḥadīth from his notebooks.

Apologetic¹⁰⁰

- i. Ibn ‘Ammār (d. 242/856–7) [Baghdad; Mosul]¹⁰¹ said that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī only complied with the Jahmī creed out of fear.
- ii. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Walīd¹⁰² reports that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was forced to comply with the Jahmī doctrine after eight months of imprisonment.
- iii. Musaddad b. Abī Yūsuf al-Qulūsī (d. 325/936) [Basra; Baghdad]¹⁰³ reports that Abū Yūsuf al-Qulūsī (d. 271/884) [Basra; Baghdad]¹⁰⁴ said that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī submitted to the *miḥna* out of fear for his life.
- iv. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Junayd reports that Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn defended ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī when others called him an apostate, emphasizing that he surrendered out of fear.
- v. Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba [Kufa; Baghdad]¹⁰⁵ mentioned that two months before his death, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī announced on the pulpit that whoever holds to the createdness of the Qur’ān is an infidel.

⁹⁹ Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Ḥarbī, Marwazī by origin, was a Baghdadi ascetic and ḥadīth scholar; he was associated with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vi. 522–4, 531–2; Ibn Hibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, viii. 89.

¹⁰⁰ The reports in this section derive from: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 438 (i, ii); 439 (iii, iv, v); 440 (vi).

¹⁰¹ Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Ammār was Baghdadi by origin; as a merchant and ḥadīth scholar, he later settled in Mosul, but visited Baghdad often. He also authored a book on *rijāl* and ḥadīth criticism, titled *Ma‘rifat al-rijāl wa-l-‘ilal*. He was revered by ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 3519; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, iii. 420.

¹⁰² No information about him was found.

¹⁰³ Musaddad b. Ya‘qūb was a Basran traditionist who narrated ḥadīth in Baghdad; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xv. 367.

¹⁰⁴ Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq was a Basran scholar who passed by Baghdad on his way to Nišībīn to take up a post as judge there; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xvi. 416–17.

¹⁰⁵ Derived from the Kufan scholarly clique, Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba was a prolific ḥadīth narrator and transmitter of his father’s *Musnad*. He was the transmitter of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s views on ḥadīth transmitters (see the first section). He authored a *Tārīkh*. However, his scholarly credentials were severely criticized. His tense relationship with Muṭayyan was the reason he left Kufa for Baghdad; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, iv. 68–75; Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil*, vii. 556–7.

- vi. ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-Dārimī (d. 280/894) [Iraq; Greater Syria; Jazīra; Hijāz; Egypt]¹⁰⁶ heard ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī denounce the Jahmī creed as infidelity.

There are 13 reports that present ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī in a positive light, mostly with emphasis on his revered status among the traditionists, especially his teachers Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī, and Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān. The chains of transmission of these views suggest their circulation in specific circles, predominantly among the scholars affiliated with Basra, Yahyā b. Ma‘īn’s students, and scholars from various regions associated with Baghdad. Reports B, F, H, and K derived from a well-respected Basran scholar, al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-‘Anbarī, who once visited Baghdad. ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Umar al-Qawārīrī of Report G was another Basran settled in Baghdad, while Ibrāhīm b. Bashshār of Report A, a Makkan, died in Basra. The transmitters of Reports C, D, L, originating from different regions, are all connected with Baghdad, while Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Junayd, one of the collectors of Yahyā b. Ma‘īn’s views on the *rijāl*, was mainly based there (see Report I).

Basrans were not unanimous in praising ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s integrity, as some also narrated Reports I, II, and IV, which foretell his lapse during the *miḥna*. However, the most fierce attack on his moral rectitude comes from the Ḥanbalī circle, Abū Bakr al-Athram (Report III), Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī (Reports b and c), and Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (Reports f and g), although Basrans are not absent among the reports unfavourable to ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī (see Reports d and, perhaps, e). These reports explicitly declare either ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s apostasy (Report III) or his being implicit in Ibn Abī Du‘ād’s persecution (Reports a, b, and g). Alternatively, Reports c and e accentuate the traditionists’ repudiation of him, such as that of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Nevertheless, the effort to redeem ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī for his surrender to the *miḥna*—by highlighting his fear for his life in the face of torture or by reiterating his denunciation of the Jahmī creed—was made by many Baghdadis, mainly his students (Reports i and v) and those of Yahyā b. Ma‘īn (Reports iv and vi).

As Basrans and Baghdadis straddle both negative and positive/apologetic reports and as, furthermore, the ḥadīth transmitters in the late

¹⁰⁶ Originally from Harāt, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-Dārimī travelled extensively to different parts of the Islamic world in search of ḥadīth; his traditions were spread among the traditionists of Harāt and Nishapur. Besides the science of ḥadīth, which he learnt from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, whose *Tārikh* he narrated, and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, he authored a *musnad* as well as several anti-Jahmī polemics; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2651–3; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarh*, vi. 153; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 75 (esp. n. 42).

eighth- and ninth-century Islamic world travelled extensively in pursuit of ḥadīth and often relocated to different regions, it would not be correct to link any of these kinds of reports to a particular geographical locale. That said, an overall trend observed from the lists above suggests that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s students, those of Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, and many Basrans, were responsible for circulating positive or apologetic accounts, while the Ḥanbalī circle disseminated those hostile to him. An examination of the travel history of the transmitters suggests that the condemnatory reports were circulated in Marw, Basra, and Baghdad, whereas those positive and apologetic found their way across a wider area: Iraq (Basra, Kufa, Baghdad, Mosul, Wasit, and Samarra), Makka, al-Maṣṣīṣ, Egypt, Syria, and eastern provinces (Rayy, Nasā, and Nishapur). Compared with the positive or apologetic reports, the negative ones seem to have been limited to the Ḥanbalī circle and were more geographically circumscribed.

In the later biographical sources, it seems that positive/apologetic reports came to overtake the condemnatory ones and that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s authority in ḥadīth was acknowledged. The earliest biographer defending his authority and integrity is al-Khaṭīb, who transmitted the reports from all of the categories above, but refuted one that claims ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī helped Ibn Abī Du‘ād in the latter’s persecution of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.¹⁰⁷ Both al-Subkī (683–756/1284–1355) and al-Dhahabī sought to reconcile the earlier contradictory reports by highlighting that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s submission was prompted by fear, or by noting his repentance after the *miḥna*.¹⁰⁸ Al-Dhahabī vigorously criticizes al-‘Uqaylī (d. 322/934) for including ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī in his *al-Ḍu‘afā*:¹⁰⁹

He [‘Alī b. al-Madīnī] made a mistake and then repented. This Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Bukhārī—he should suffice you [in making a judgment] (*wa-nāḥika bihi*)—filled his *Ṣaḥīḥ* with ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s ḥadīth and said: ‘I never consider myself [in knowledge and understanding of ḥadīth] less in front of anyone except for ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī.’ Had he left out ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s ḥadīth and

¹⁰⁷ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xiii. 431–4.

¹⁰⁸ al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* (ed. the Bureau from the Meccan Library; Hyderabad: Osmania University, 3rd edn., 4 vols. in 2, 1956–8), 428–9; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, ii. 147. See other examples: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2803; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahaba* (eds. ‘A. al-Arnā’ūt and M. al-Arnā’ūt; Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 10 vols., 1986–93), iii. 159.

¹⁰⁹ al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, v. 168. Al-‘Uqaylī is the only biographer who follows the early Ḥanbalī line of the narrative. Yet, al-‘Uqaylī still holds his transmission as sound, despite his tendencies towards the Jahmīs and Ibn Abī Du‘ād, and adduces his views on ḥadīth narrators; see al-‘Uqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍu‘afā*, 962–3. For ‘Alī’s views being cited by al-‘Uqaylī, see above, n. 8.

those of his companions, Muḥammad, and his teachers, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, ‘Uthmān b. Abī Shayba, Ibrāhīm b. Sa’d [...], we would have closed the door, the speech would have been cut (*inqaṭa’a al-khiṭāb*), then legacies effaced (*la-mātat al-āthār*), the heretics would have reigned, and the False Messiah (*al-Dajjāl*) would have emerged. O ‘Uqaylī, you have no brain (*‘aql*)!¹¹⁰

More telling than al-Dhahabī’s refutation embellished with a play on al-‘Uqaylī’s name is how the Ḥanbalī biographer Ibn Abī Ya’lā (451–526/1059–1131) represents ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī. The views of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s disciples, two Abū Bakrs, and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s merits are omitted. Instead, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was presented by Ibn Abī Ya’lā as a mouthpiece for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī reveres Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal as his master and refused to transmit a ḥadīth without a book, following Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s order and exhortation.¹¹¹ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī compares Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal to Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–634), the first caliph, through whom God glorifies the religion, because the former endured the *miḥna*, while the latter was victorious in the Apostasy War.¹¹²

The image of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was redeemed in later biographies, and not only because of the wider spread of reports highlighting his accomplishments and repentance, as discussed above. The transmitters who restated ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s merits and transmitted apologia were perhaps less affronted by his submission during the *miḥna* since other ḥadīth masters, such as Yahyā b. Ma’in, had also bowed to the inquisition.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ al-Dhahabī, *Mizān*, v. 169.

¹¹¹ Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila* (ed. M. Ḥ. al-Fiḳī; Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 2 vols., 1952), i. 226.

¹¹² Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 227. For other praise of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal by ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, see *ibid.*, 227–8.

¹¹³ al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm; Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 2nd edn., 10 vols., 1967–72), viii. 634. A similar process of redemption can be seen in a close examination of the biographical reports about Yahyā b. Ma’in. The reports, which highlight Yahyā b. Ma’in’s rejection of the createdness of the Qur’ān, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s reverence for him, are transmitted by Yahyā’s student, al-‘Abbās al-Dūrī (d. 271/884), and Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Shayba, whereas the report suggesting Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s refusal to narrate ḥadīth on Yahyā b. Ma’in’s authority comes from Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī, who also omitted ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s ḥadīth after the *miḥna* (see above, n. 50). Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī’s report is found in al-Mizzī, *Tabdhīb*, xxxi. 563–4. Al-Dūrī’s reports are found in *ibid.* 556, and al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xvi. 267–8; Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Shayba’s in al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xvi. 269–70. It is noteworthy that Abū Hātim al-Rāzī, who asserts ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s status, also describes Yahyā as an imam and states that anyone who loves him is an adherent of the *sunna* (*ṣāḥib sunna*); see al-

Indeed, few ḥadīth scholars were entirely in line with the Ḥanbalīs’ uncompromising objection to the createdness of the Qur’ān, which allowed little leeway for those who held the position called ‘lafẓiyya’, or those who refrained from choosing a position.¹¹⁴ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s stellar student, al-Bukhārī, would be a case in point. His *lafẓī* position brought about antagonism from Nishapuri scholars, headed by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Dhuhlī (d. 258/872), resulting in his exile to Khartank, near Samarqand, where he passed away.¹¹⁵ That Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (202–261/817–875) fell out with al-Dhuhlī in defence of al-Bukhārī over the *lafẓ* question suggests an array of theological convictions prevalent among ḥadīth scholars in the eastern provinces.¹¹⁶ Thus, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s fall was treated leniently by the traditionists outside the Ḥanbalī circle since there was simply no agreement over the subtle aspects of the nature of the Qur’ān.

In addition to the extent of the circulation of the positive reports concerning ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī and the early Sunni scholars’ differences on the question of the Qur’ān’s nature, the redemption narrative became mainstream in later biographical accounts of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s life, because his centrality to ḥadīth criticism was soon realized by his students and their students.

Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xvi. 272; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm, *al-Jarḥ*, ix. 192. Another parallel in the representation of Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn and ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī in the biographical sources is found in the Ḥanbalī hagiography, where Ibn Abī Ya‘lā also uses the musing of Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn as a mouthpiece for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s virtues; see *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, i. 403, 406.

¹¹⁴ The Ḥanbalī circle allowed no compromise on the question of the (un)createdness of the Qur’ān when they assigned the Lafẓīs and the Wāqifa to the same category as the Jahmīs. The former held that the Qur’ān is uncreated but the sound of one’s recitation of the Qur’ān is created, while the latter responded to the issue with the statement, ‘the Qur’ān is words of God’, and fell silent afterwards; see Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Masā’il al-Imām Aḥmad* (ed. T. ‘A. Ibn Muḥammad; Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1999), 353–6; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunna* (ed. ‘A. al-Zahrānī; Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 7 vols. in 4, 1989–99), v. 125–7; al-Ṭabarī, *Ṣarīḥ al-sunna* (ed. B. b. ‘A al-Ma‘tūq; Kuwait: Maktabat Ahl al-Athar, 2nd edn., 2005), 37–8; ‘Abdullāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Sunna* (ed. M. S. S. al-Qaḥṭānī; Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 1986), 104–6, 120–3.

¹¹⁵ al-Khaṭīb’s account, which presents al-Bukhārī’s theological stance in an apologetic tenor and denies any Lafẓī association, seems suspicious; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, ii. 352–7. Compare with al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 3339.

¹¹⁶ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, xv. 125; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 3839.

III. 'ALĪ B. AL-MADĪNĪ'S CONTRIBUTION TO ḤADĪTH CRITICISM

'Alī b. al-Madīnī's authority and expertise in ḥadīth studies, especially *'ilal al-ḥadīth*, were recognized in his time and by subsequent generations. Both Yahyā b. Ma'īn and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī considered him a reliable narrator.¹¹⁷ Al-Bukhārī included 239 traditions narrated on his authority in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, while adducing his critiques on ḥadīth transmitters in his *al-Tārikh al-kabīr* and *al-Tārikh al-ṣaghīr*.¹¹⁸ Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī showed high regard for him in holding 'Alī b. al-Madīnī to be '10,000 times greater' than al-Shādhakūnī (d. 234/848-9).¹¹⁹ He also held that 'Alī b. al-Madīnī was more knowledgeable in *ikhtilāl al-ḥadīth* than Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.¹²⁰ Al-'Ijlī (181–261/797–875), al-Fasawī, and Ya'qūb b. Shayba (182–262/798–875) all relied on him for *rijāl* criticism.¹²¹ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, praising him highly, often cited his views, as recorded in Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *al-Jarḥ*.¹²² Abū Zur'ā al-Rāzī, though rejecting his ḥadīth because of the *miḥna*, never questioned his honesty.¹²³ When enumerating the scholars of *fiqh al-ḥadīth*, al-Ḥākim gave each a brief biographical account to underscore their merits, but for 'Alī b. al-Madīnī exclusively, he provides an exhaustive list of his works.¹²⁴ This unusual treatment seems to evince al-Ḥākim's admiration for his intellectual contributions.

'Alī b. al-Madīnī was accepted as a source by his students and their students, many of whom took an active part in the development of ḥadīth criticism and enriched its literature. By relaying 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's views on ḥadīth and their transmitters, his students and theirs in turn, in one way or another, (re-)affirmed his authority and

¹¹⁷ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, vi. 193–4.

¹¹⁸ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 232; al-'Alī, *'Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 231.

¹¹⁹ al-Ājurri, *Su'ālāt*, 202. Al-Shādhakūnī is often compared with 'Alī b. al-Madīnī and Yahyā b. Ma'īn, but he was reproved for different reasons: his inaccurate transmission of ḥadīth because of his dependence on memory instead of books, drinking, homosexuality (*al-liwāṭa*), and ḥadīth forgery; see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārikh*, x. 56, 60–3.

¹²⁰ al-Ājurri, *Su'ālāt*, 293.

¹²¹ al-'Ijlī, *Tārikh al-thiqāt* (ed. 'A. Qal'ajī; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1984), 209; Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 241.

¹²² Ibid, 319. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī also supported 'Alī b. al-Madīnī's credentials by suggesting that he renounced his view on the createdness of the Qur'ān: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, vi. 194.

¹²³ Ibid, i. 320.

¹²⁴ al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma'rifat 'ulūm al-ḥadīth wa-kammiyyat ajnāsīhi* (ed. A. b. F. al-Sallūm; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2003): 246–87 at 261–2.

perpetuated his influence on the science of ḥadīth. The early recognition of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s status stems from his contribution to ḥadīth criticism, which can be assessed through three inter-related aspects: his erudite knowledge of ḥadīth transmitters, his mastery of *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*, and his theorization of the major ḥadīth transmissions through the framework of *madār al-isnād*.

As Imdād al-Ḥaqq has already comprehensively documented ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s statements and views as found in his extant works in addition to citations by later scholars from his lost works, it suffices here to summarize his detailed monograph in order to illustrate the aspects of *‘ilm al-rijāl* in which ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī excels, without expatiating with numerous examples. Those aspects of the science comprise knowledge of the Companions and Successors, the interrelationships between ḥadīth transmitters, and ḥadīth transmitters’ full names and genealogies.

The Companions are considered a crucial link between the Prophet and posterity. The definition of Companionship and the privileged status of the Companions and Successors took shape in the course of the ninth century, as reflected in the doctrinal writings and ḥadīth collections of *ahl al-ḥadīth*.¹²⁵ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī also took part in the formation of *ahl al-ḥadīth*’s stance on the role of the first Muslim generations in the transmission of knowledge of, and in the preservation of, the Prophetic *sunna*. He was concerned with accurate identification of the Companions and Successors and documentation of their biographical data.¹²⁶ The ability to distinguish between a Companion and a Successor has bearing on the continuity of an *isnād* and is essential for one to determine whether it is *muttaṣil* (continuous), *mursal* (broken at the level of Companion because a Successor narrates directly from the Prophet), or *muḍḍal* (broken because two transmitters in the chain are missing).¹²⁷

Another specialized branch of *rijāl* science for which ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī is renowned addresses the blood relationships among ḥadīth narrators, especially brothers or sisters; for example, Muṣ‘ab, ‘Āmir, Ibrāhīm,

¹²⁵ A. Osman, “*Adālat al-Ṣaḥāba*: the construction of a religious doctrine”, *Arabica*, 60 (2013): 272–305; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 221–37; B. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 54–7.

¹²⁶ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 297–301; Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Ma‘rifat anwā’ ‘ilm al-ḥadīth* (eds. ‘A. al-Hamīm and M. Y. al-Fahl; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2002), 404; al-Ḥākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 205–6; he also mentions a work by ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī on the weak Successors at 664.

¹²⁷ The connotation of the technical terms varies per scholars’ opinions and time; see the definition of *mursal*: Brown, *Hadith*, 279, as well as the discussion below.

ʿUmar, Yahyā, and Muḥammad are brothers, all sons of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ.¹²⁸ Both of his works, the *Tasmiyat man ruwiya* and *Kitāb al-Ikhwa wa-l-akhawāt*, touch upon this subject, and the latter is considered one of the *loci classici* of the genre.¹²⁹

ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's expertise also subsumed in-depth onomastic knowledge of ḥadīth transmitters, including their names, patronyms, genealogies, agnomens (*kunā*), and sobriquets (*alqāb*).¹³⁰ His works are also counted among representative books on *maʿrifat al-asmāʾ wa-l-kunā* ('knowledge of names and agnomens').¹³¹ This further demonstrates his command of *al-muttafaq wa-l-muftaraq*, the ability to differentiate transmitters who share two or more of the following onomastic components: personal name, patronym, *kunya*, or *nasab*.¹³² To know, and even to memorize, the minutiae of ḥadīth narrators is not a trivial matter, as it is one of the desiderata for venturing into *ʿilal al-ḥadīth*.

The *ʿilal al-ḥadīth* are considered advanced study for students of ḥadīth, as defects are embedded both in seemingly reliable *isnāds*, whether intentional or unintentional, such as *irsāl*¹³³ or *waqf* ('halting')¹³⁴, or in *matns* associated with impeccable *isnāds*.¹³⁵ As *jarḥ* ('impugning of transmitters') plays no role in this,¹³⁶ the ability to discover an *illa* requires perceptiveness together with a tenacious memory and broad understanding and knowledge (*al-ḥifẓ wa-l-fahm wa-l-maʿrifa*), accumulated over years of ḥadīth study.¹³⁷ The following three examples will highlight the requisites for proficiency in *ʿilal al-ḥadīth*. The first example, given by al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, illustrates a defect in an *isnād*:

Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb narrated from Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Ṣaḡhānī from Ḥajjāj b. Muḥammad from Ibn Jurayj from Mūsā b. ʿUqba from Suhayl from Abū Ṣāliḥ from Abū Hurayra from the Prophet, who said: 'Whoever attended an assembly in which he spoke very noisily and said before rising up [to leave]: "Glory to You, O Allah, and with my praise for You—no

¹²⁸ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 301–11 (the example at 302), 346–9.

¹²⁹ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Maʿrifat anwāʿ*, 415.

¹³⁰ Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 319–46.

¹³¹ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Maʿrifat anwāʿ*, 435.

¹³² Imdād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 312–18.

¹³³ *Irsāl* is the verbal noun of the verb *arsala*, from which the term *mursal* is derived; that is, a Successor quotes directly from the Prophet.

¹³⁴ A report about the Companions' deeds or words, instead of those of the Prophet: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Maʿrifat anwāʿ*, 117.

¹³⁵ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Maʿrifat anwāʿ*, 188; al-Ḥākim, *Maʿrifat ʿulūm*, 359–60.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 359.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 360.

god but You—I seek Your pardon and I repent to You” will be forgiven for what he said or did in the assembly (*man jalasa majlisān kathura fīhi laghaṭuhu fa-qāla qabla an yaqūma: subḥānaka allāhumma wa-bi-ḥamdika lā ilāha illā anta astaghfiruka wa-atūbu ilayka illā ghufira lahu mā kāna fī majlisibi dhālika*).’ Al-Ḥākim said: ‘Whoever examines this ḥadīth will not doubt that it [the *isnād*] meets the condition of being reliable (*ṣaḥīḥ*) but there is a serious flaw (*‘illa fāḥisha*).’¹³⁸

Then, al-Ḥākim proceeds to cite a dialogue between Muslim and al-Bukhārī, with the latter revealing that Mūsā b. ‘Uqba (55–141/675–758) did not in fact narrate from Suhayl (who died during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr, r. 136–158/754–775) as is stated in the *isnād*.¹³⁹

As all of the transmitters are considered reliable in this example, only by scrutinizing the continuity of the *isnād*, certitude about which entails knowledge of whether a *thiqa* really does narrate from a reputed source, can the ‘serious flaw’ be found.

The second example, given by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, also addresses an ‘illa in an *isnād*, but the defect comes from a reliable transmitter’s confusion between the names of transmitters:

The ḥadīth which the reliable transmitter Ya‘lā b. ‘Ubayd related from Sufyān al-Thawrī from ‘Amr b. Dīnār from Ibn ‘Umar from the Prophet (Peace be upon him), ‘Both of the parties in a sale have the option of refusal...’ is an example of a ḥadīth containing a defect in its *isnād* which does not impugn the soundness of the text. This is an *isnād* uninterrupted through the relation of one upright transmitter from another, yet it is defective and unsound. The text is in any case sound. The defect in the transmission is in Ya‘lā b. ‘Ubayd saying, ‘from ‘Amr b. Dīnār’. In fact, the ḥadīth is from ‘Abd Allāh b. Dīnār from Ibn ‘Umar. The authoritative students of Sufyān al-Thawrī related it this way from him. Ya‘lā b. ‘Ubayd made a mistake, saying “‘Amr b. Dīnār’ instead of “‘Abd Allāh b. Dīnār’, both of whom are reliable.’¹⁴⁰

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ notes that Ya‘lā b. ‘Ubayd (d. 209/825) erred due to the similarity of the names of Ibn ‘Umar’s students—‘Abdallāh b. Dīnār (d. 127/744–5) and ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743–4). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s analysis evinces the importance of knowledge about a transmitter’s students; the ability to distinguish easily confused names; and the access to multiple or ‘authoritative’ *riwāyas* of a *muḥaddith* in the domain of *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 361–2.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 362–4.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Ma‘rifat anwā’*, 189. The translation is Dickinson’s: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth (Kitāb Ma‘rifat anwā’ ‘ilm al-ḥadīth)* (transl. E. Dickinson; Reading: Garnet, 2006), 68.

One such *‘illa* in a *matn* can be illustrated in the case of a ḥadīth narrated by Abū Qilāb (d. 104/722-3), who transmits from Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712), in which the Prophet identifies Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 18/639) as the guardian of the community: ‘Indeed, for each community there is a guardian, and the guardian of this community is Abū ‘Ubayda (*inna li-kull umma amīnan wa-inna amīn hādhihi al-umma Abū ‘Ubayda*).’ However, when practising *irsāl*, Abū Qilāb narrates the ḥadīth as follows:

The most merciful of my community is Abū Bakr, the most strict (*ashadd*) in the religion of God is ‘Umar; the most sincerely modest (*aṣḍaḥūhum ḥayā’ān*) is ‘Uthmān; the best reciter is Ubayy b. Ka’b; the most learned in the prohibited and permitted matters (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*) is Mu‘adh b. Jabal; and, indeed, for each community there is a guardian, and the guardian of this community is Abū ‘Ubayda.¹⁴¹

As in the second example, having multiple narrations of a ḥadīth from one transmitter—in this case, from Abū Qilāb—facilitates discovery of a flaw in the *matn*.

From these examples, it is clear that access to different *ṭuruq* (lines of transmission) of a ḥadīth and precise knowledge of reliable ḥadīth transmitters and their transmissions—which includes whether and how many ḥadīth a transmitter actually narrated from their reputed source, and the identity of a transmitter (full name, genealogy, death and birth years, area of settlement and activity, etc.)¹⁴²—are essential to identify an *‘illa* in an *isnād* or *matn*. The difficulty of this discipline is demonstrated by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī’s comment that he prefers finding an *‘illa* only to writing twenty ḥadīth that he had not heard before.¹⁴³ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī himself also remarked that often he could only identify a defect in a ḥadīth after forty years of study.¹⁴⁴ Because of its demanding requirements, *‘ilal al-ḥadīth* is ‘one of the most exalted, precise and noble of the sciences of ḥadīth. Only those possessing retention, experience and penetrating intelligence can become proficient in it’.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ al-Hākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 365–6. For another example, see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifat anwā’*, 190.

¹⁴² See ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s views on these subjects in Imadād al-Ḥaqq, *al-Imām*, 371–375 (on the most reliable transmitter of a shaykh’s ḥadīth), 388–404 (on who met or did not meet a given source), 417–24 (on how many ḥadīth one transmits from a given source), and 442–55 (on the birth and death dates of transmitters).

¹⁴³ al-Hākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 359.

¹⁴⁴ al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifat anwā’*, 187. The translation is Dickinson’s: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *An Introduction*, 67. A similar idea is expressed by al-Hākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 374.

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī was considered to be the most learned person in his time in *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*, according to Ibn Ḥibbān,¹⁴⁶ and his *Kitāb al-‘Ilal* was later deemed as one of the best on the topic.¹⁴⁷ His expertise can be partly attributed to his erudition in *‘ilm al-rijāl* and partly to the Basran scholarly traditions in which he was immersed. Although he was not the first expert in *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*, many of his predecessors were Basran: Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj, al-Qaṭṭān, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī, the last two being his teachers.¹⁴⁸ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī came to this discipline through them, as their views were often transmitted on his authority.¹⁴⁹ In addition to documenting the opinions of the precursors to the study of *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s approach to finding *‘ilal*—‘if all the lines of transmission of a ḥadīth are not collected, its flaw will not be discovered (*al-bāb idhā lam tujma‘ ṭuruquhu lam yatabayyan khaṭa’uhu*)’—was adduced by later scholars to elucidate the importance of gathering different lines of transmissions¹⁵⁰ or came to be interpreted as a guide to the discipline of the *‘ilal*.¹⁵¹

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s fastidiousness about defects in ḥadīth runs in parallel to his attention to ḥadīth terminology and discussions concerning the continuity of *isnāds*, which has exerted a tremendous influence on works about the science of ḥadīth.¹⁵² His definition of the term *mu‘dal*—referring to the generations after the Successors who narrated ḥadīth without specifying the intermediaries at the Successor or Companion level, with emphasis on its distinction from *mursal*, which he viewed as applicable only to the Successors—is adopted by al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī.¹⁵³ He also limited the application of the ambiguous preposition *‘an* to cases describing the transmission of two narrators who actually met and conversed.¹⁵⁴ Later ḥadīth scholars, including Ibn ‘Abd

¹⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, viii. 469–70

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bā‘ith al-ḥathīth: sharḥ ikhtīṣār ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth* (ed. A. M. Shākir; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 61.

¹⁴⁸ al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 177–8; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 121–2.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī narrates Shu‘ba’s judgments on the *mursal* ḥadīth and transmitters who practised *irsāl*: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, i. 129–32. In addition to *Su‘ālāt Ibn al-Madīnī li-Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān*, al-Qaṭṭān and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī’s views on the *‘ilal* and *mursal* ḥadīth are mostly reported on his authority; see respectively Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, i. 235–48 and 258–61; see also al-Ḥākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 132, 255, 256, 352.

¹⁵⁰ al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jāmi‘ li-akhḥār al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘* (ed. M. al-Ṭaḥḥān; Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 2 vols., 1983), ii. 212.

¹⁵¹ Ibn al-Ṣalāh. *Ma‘rifat anwā‘*, 188.

¹⁵² al-‘Alī, *‘Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 204.

¹⁵³ al-Ḥākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 193.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Ma‘rifat anwā‘*, 145.

al-Barr (d. 463/1071) and Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (371–444/981–1053), formed a consensus around this definition.¹⁵⁵ His discussion of *tadlīs* (narrating the *isnād* in an ambiguous manner) and the most reliable *isnāds* is also included in al-Ḥākim’s monumental ḥadīth compendium.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, his caution against low *isnāds*, as recapitulated by his maxim, ‘the low *isnād* is ominous (*al-nuzūl shu’m*)’, is adduced by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ in his chapter on the same subject.¹⁵⁷

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s scrupulousness about the accuracy of transmission is also reflected in his instruction that a student of ḥadīth should ask their fellow attendants when uncertain about the ḥadīth they had heard,¹⁵⁸ and in his encouragement of writing down ḥadīth.¹⁵⁹ It seems that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī upheld a stringent standard of clarity as to how a ḥadīth is passed down. When transmitters cannot recall if they had heard a ḥadīth alone from their shaykh or with others, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī demanded the phrase *ḥaddathanā* (‘he narrated to us’) be used instead of *ḥaddathanī* (‘he narrated to me’), as the latter is considered more reflective of accurate transmission.¹⁶⁰ That is, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī would rather undermine a potentially reliable chain of transmission than compromise his standard.

‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s approach to ḥadīth criticism was not only meticulous but also methodically and methodologically original, for it identifies the most important chains of transmissions and conceptualizes them in the framework of *madār al-isnād* in his *Kitāb al-Ilal*. According to this, the *isnād* centres on six scholars:

- For Madinans: Ibn Shihāb (d. 124/742)
- For Makkans: ‘Amr b. Dīnār
- For Basrans: Qatāda b. Di‘āma (d. 117/735)
- Yahyā b. Abī Kathīr (d. ca. 132/749–50)
- For Kufans: Abū Ishāq (d. 129/746–7)

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 139–40; see the translation (Dickinson’s) in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *An Introduction*, 46.

¹⁵⁶ al-Ḥākim, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm*, 340, 343–349 (*tadlīs*); 227–8 (*ajwad al-asānīd*). Ibn Khaldūn’s praise for al-Ḥākim’s work: *al-Muqaddima* (ed. ‘A. M. al-Darwīsh; Damascus: Dār Ya‘rub, 2004), ii. 180.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifat anwā‘*, 369.

¹⁵⁸ al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāya*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 67; al-Khaṭīb, *Taqyīd al-‘ilm* (ed. M. ‘U. Bāzmūl; Cairo: Dār al-Istiqāma, 2008), 101, 145–6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma‘rifat anwā‘*, 259.

Sulaymān b. Mihrān (d. 148/765)¹⁶¹

Their knowledge of ḥadīth then came to those who collected and compiled works:

- For Madinans: Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795)
Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. ca. 152/769)
- For Makkans: ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150/768)
Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna, who took ḥadīth from Ibn Shihāb, ‘Amr b. Dīnār, Abū Ishāq, and al-A‘mash
- For Basrans: Sa‘īd b. Abī ‘Arūba (d. between 155/771 and 159/776)
Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783–4)
Abū ‘Awāna (d. 176/792)
Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (85–160/704–76)
Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (96–153/714–770), who narrated from Ibn Shihāb, ‘Amr b. Dīnār, Qatāda, Yahyā b. Abī Kathīr, and Abū Ishāq
- For Kufans: Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778)
- For Syrians: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Amr al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/ 774)
- For Wasitis: Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799)¹⁶²

Then, the ḥadīth of these twelve scholars converged on six:

- Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭān
- Yahyā b. Zakariyyā (d. 182/798–9)
- Wakī‘ b. al-Jarrāh
- ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797)
- ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī
- Yahyā b. Ādam (d. 203/818)¹⁶³

Although ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī is not the first to coin the term *madār*,¹⁶⁴ he seems to have made the earliest attempt to theorize ḥadīth transmission

¹⁶¹ ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*, 36–7.

¹⁶² Ibid, 37–9.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 40.

¹⁶⁴ His teacher, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī, is the first, according to Juynboll, ‘(Re)appraisal’, 309.

through a *madār* structure,¹⁶⁵ raising to prominence the most eminent disciples of the ḥadīth authorities and providing a useful tool for investigating ‘*ilal*. As shown in the second and third examples, knowledge of the most reliable versions of a ḥadīth, viz. the one narrated by the most reliable students, is required to discover defects in the *matn* of a ḥadīth. That is, ḥadīth critics can consult ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār* structure when comparing different narrations of a ḥadīth.

In addition to being a useful guide for the analysis of ‘*ilal al-ḥadīth*, his approach to the history of ḥadīth transmission also informs the disciplinary epistemology of ḥadīth science *par excellence*, ḥadīth criticism. By charting the transmission of the ‘*ilm* from the important Successors to their inheritors, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī also identified the leading authorities who came before him. In doing so he participated in the history making of *ahl al-ḥadīth* as a self-defined group. The importance of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s contribution can be best illustrated by how Ibn Abī Ḥātim adduces *madār* structure and narrations in his presentation of the history of ḥadīth criticism in the *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl*.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim accessed ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s narrations and opinions mainly via Šālih b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Barā’ (d. 291/904; henceforth Ibn al-Barā’).¹⁶⁶ Šālih, the son of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, was the qāḍī of Isfahan, where Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrated from him, and one of the transmitters of his father’s *masā’il*.¹⁶⁷ Ibn al-Barā’, a reliable ḥadīth scholar based in Baghdad, is the transmitter of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *Kitāb al-‘Ilal*.¹⁶⁸ As shown below, Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār* structure through Ibn al-Barā’.¹⁶⁹

Ibn Abī Ḥātim lists the most prominent critics (*al-‘ulamā’ al-jahābidha al-nuqqād*) and classifies them into four generations (*ṭabaqāt*). In each section on these critics, he includes the reports on one or more of the following themes: the subject’s ‘*ilm* in ḥadīth, *sunna*, *qirā’a*, *tafsīr*, or *fiqh*; his virtues,

¹⁶⁵ Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 114.

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s other intermediaries comprise: *al-Jarḥ*, i. 12 (‘Abd al-Malik b. Abī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān); 167 (‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Junayd); 40, 247, 253 (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī); 41, 230 (Ismā‘īl b. Abī al-Ḥārith); 42 (Aḥmad b. Maṣṣūr al-Ramādī); 246 (Ibn Bundār al-Jurjānī); 251 (Aḥmad b. Sinān al-Wāsiṭī); 252 (Muḥammad b. Abī Šafwān); 295 (al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Rāzī).

¹⁶⁷ al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, x. 433; S. Al Sarhan, ‘The responsa of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the formation of Ḥanbalism’, *Islamic Law and Society*, 22/1–2 (2015): 1–44, at 15–16. See also al-‘Alī, ‘*Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 251–2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 255; ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *al-‘Ilal*, 36. Although given the *nisba* ‘al-qāḍī’, al-Khaṭīb does not specify where and when he held that office: see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, ii. 104.

¹⁶⁹ It is through him that al-Khaṭīb cites ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s views on the *rijāl*: al-‘Alī, ‘*Alī b. al-Madīnī*, 255.

such as piety, humility, etiquette, chastity, asceticism, generosity, or practice of *al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong); his contribution to ḥadīth criticism (his views on ḥadīth transmitters, his discussion of technical issues, e.g. *marāsīl*, and his approaches); his epistles and moral advice for others;¹⁷⁰ contemporary evaluation of his scholarship; and, less often, poems dedicated to him (as in the cases of Sufyān al-Thawrī and Ibn al-Mubārak).¹⁷¹ For the subjects in the first two *ṭabaqas*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim often relies on ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s views to accentuate the critics’ scholarly standing or for relevant biographical information, as illustrated in the table below. The left column presents Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s great ḥadīth critics; the middle, his quotation of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār al-isnād* through Ibn al-Barā’; and the right, his citation of the biographical reports about the critic in question from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī via Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad.

Table 1: Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s quotations from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī

	Ibn al-Barā’ (<i>madār al-isnād</i>)	Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad
<i>The 1st ṭabaqa</i> ¹⁷²		
Mālik b. Anas	1/17	1/14–15, 22–3, 30
Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna	1/34	1/37–40, 42, 44, 46–52, 54
Sufyān al-Thawrī	1/59–60	1/57, 61, 63, 65–6, 68–72, 74–7, 79–84, 96–7, 101
Shu’ba b. al-Ḥajjāj	1/129	1/127–133, 135–136, 139, 141, 144–147, 153, 156–62, 165–166, 169, 171–3, 175
Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 179/795)	x	1/179
al-Awzā’ī	1/187	1/217

continued

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, extensive quotation of al-Awzā’ī’s letters: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, i. 187–202.

¹⁷¹ See, respectively: *ibid*, 122–4, 275.

¹⁷² All are identified by Ibn Abī Ḥātim in *al-Jarḥ*, i. 10.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, i. 219.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 251.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 262.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 281.

<i>The 2nd ṭabaqa</i>		
Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ ¹⁷³	1/220	x
al-Qaṭṭān ¹⁷⁴	1/234, 1/233, 235–45, 247–8	
ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī ¹⁷⁵	1/252, 1/253, 256–61	
ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak ¹⁷⁶	1/264–5, 1/272, 275	
Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī (d. ca. 188/803–4) ¹⁷⁷	x	x
Abū Mushir (d. 218/833) ¹⁷⁸	x	x
<i>The 3rd ṭabaqa</i>		
Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal ¹⁷⁹	x	1/299
Yahyā b. Maʿīn ¹⁸⁰	x	x
ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī ¹⁸¹	x	x
Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Numayr (d. 234/849) ¹⁸²	x	x
<i>The 4th ṭabaqa</i>		
Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī ¹⁸³	x	x
Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī ¹⁸⁴	x	x

The above table shows how ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's *madār* framework informs Ibn Abī Ḥātim's construction of ḥadīth criticism as a discipline. All but Ḥammād b. Zayd in the first *ṭabaqa* are noted in ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's *madār*. Even though Ḥammād b. Zayd is absent from the *madār* structure, ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī still transmits his clarification regarding the narration of Ḥafṣ b. Sulaymān (d. 130/747–8) of a ḥadīth from Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn (d. after 100/718–19), and this intimates ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's recognition of Ḥammād b. Zayd (who was also the former's

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 286.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 292. ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's high regard for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was reported by al-ʿusayn b. al-ʿasan al-Rāzī: see above, n. 166.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 314.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 319.

¹⁸² Ibid, 320.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 328.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 349.

shaykh) as a ḥadīth critic. Those in the second *ṭabaqa*, with the exception of Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī and Abū Mushir, all feature in ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār* framework, while their views on ḥadīth and their narrators are also reported on his authority, as shown in Ṣāliḥ’s column. ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s reticence about the two subjects can be explained by his unfamiliarity with Syrian *rijāl*, as pointed out by Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī.

Although ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār al-isnād* was not exclusively about ḥadīth critics,¹⁸⁵ the overlap between his major transmitters and Ibn Abī Hātim’s leading ḥadīth critics tellingly indicates the impact of the former’s *madār* framework. Indeed, Ibn Abī Hātim was not the only beneficiary of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s genius. Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Manda (310–395/922–1005), the most eminent scholar of the Manda family in Isfahan,¹⁸⁶ used his *madār* structure as a template to formulate his own chart of the ḥadīth authorities, with the addition of 224 eighth- and ninth-century ḥadīth transmitters and critics.¹⁸⁷ Later on, al-Dhahabī also borrowed it to create his own list of the founding figures of ḥadīth criticism.¹⁸⁸ More than half of the transmitters in ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār* framework came to be ranked among the leading ḥadīth critics by later compilers of ḥadīth science.¹⁸⁹ It can be argued that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s *madār* structure laid the foundation for subsequent ḥadīth scholars to approach and organize the history of ḥadīth criticism. His influence can be attributed to his ground-breaking theorization on major ḥadīth transmission.

CONCLUSION

As Lucas points out, the contributions of ḥadīth scholars during the heyday of ḥadīth collection and compilation are largely ignored in today’s scholarship.¹⁹⁰ This article first presented a reconstruction of ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s life and works, which hitherto have not received much discussion in scholarship in English. It then addressed in detail the accounts that appraise ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s scholarly status with regard to his involvement in the *miḥna*. The existence of opposing reports prevents us from reaching a firm conclusion as to what exactly ‘Alī b.

¹⁸⁵ Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 116.

¹⁸⁶ P. Pavlovitch, ‘The Manda family: a dynasty of Isfahani scholars’, *Arabica*, 65/5–6 (2018): 646–53.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 650–1.

¹⁸⁸ Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 115.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 122–5.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

al-Madīnī did during the inquisition—whether he passively complied or actively cooperated with Ibn Abī Duʿād. Yet, the analysis of the transmission of biographical reports suggests that the reports presenting ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī in a negative light were circulated mainly in Baghdad, especially among the Ḥanbalīs. Those favourable to him, disseminated by Yahyā b. Maʿīn’s circle in Baghdad, Basrans, and scholars who travelled extensively, ultimately overshadowed the hostile portrayals of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī.

The redemption of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī in later biographical works can be partly explained by the extent to which favourable reports were spread and the existence of divergent views over the intricate issue of the createdness of the Qurʾān. More importantly, it can be attributed to his centrality to the edifice of ḥadīth science and the identity-making of *ahl al-ḥadīth*, which is manifest in his erudite knowledge of ḥadīth transmitters, his proficiency in *ʿilal al-ḥadīth*, and his formulation of the framework of *madār al-isnād*. ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī’s scholarly achievements were recognized by his contemporaries and by the succeeding generations, who also significantly progressed the disciplinary development of ḥadīth criticism as a field of religious studies.

Given ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī’s centrality, it would have been too grave a loss for *ahl al-ḥadīth* to exclude him and his works simply because of his surrender to the *miḥna*. Compromise for the sake of the preservation of the Prophetic legacy was also recognized by early Ḥanbalīs, viz. Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad and Abū Bakr al-Athram, who transmitted defamatory reports about ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī but also included his views in his recension of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *masāʾil*.¹⁹¹ Seen in this light, it is less surprising that the historical recollection that confirms his merits and downplays the reports casting doubt on his integrity eventually came to dominate his later biographical representation. By describing and evaluating his intellectual accomplishments, this article has tried to explain how the historical memory of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī took shape. It has also outlined the ways in which ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī, as one of the pioneers of ḥadīth criticism, influenced subsequent ḥadīth critics in their reconstruction of the discipline’s history. Further examination of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī’s role in the science of ḥadīth will provide new insights not only into the development of ḥadīth criticism in its formative period but also into the significant moment when ḥadīth collection, compilation, and critique were rigorously systematized.

¹⁹¹ Al Sarhan, ‘The responsa’, 14.

Abstract

Considered precursors of ḥadīth criticism, the opinions of ‘Alī b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far al-Madīnī (161–234/778–849), extensively cited by later ḥadīth scholars, have given considerable weight to the credibility of a ḥadīth and its transmitters. Despite his centrality to the science of ḥadīth, there is not a single monograph dedicated to him and his intellectual output in the scholarly literature in English. This article presents a critical reconstruction of his life. Although the biographical sources on ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī are copious, the earliest details, especially on evaluation of his scholarly accomplishment, are often tendentious and contradictory. There is also a controversy related to his submission to the *miḥna*. Analysis of these biographical reports intimates that the questioning voices mainly came from the early Ḥanbalī circle, while other scholars, comprising Yahyā b. Ma‘īn’s disciples and non-Baghdadis, especially of Basran and Khurasani origins, tended to defend ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī. This paper argues that ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s unfaltering status as a leading ḥadīth critic can be attributed to the geographical outreach of his supporters, whose overall attitude towards the createdness of the Qur’ān is more tolerant compared with that of the Ḥanbalīs. More importantly, ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī’s contribution to the formation of ḥadīth criticism as a discipline was realized from early on, which is manifest in his knowledge of *‘ilm al-rijāl* and mastery of *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*. His theorization of ḥadīth transmission through the framework of the *madār al-isnād* also laid the epistemological foundation for the following ḥadīth critics in their formulation of the disciplinary history.