

## The Salafis and the Preservation of *Isnād* Tradition

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**Published online:** 20 October 2020

**To cite this article:** Umar Muhammad Noor and Mohd Nizam Sahad. 2020. The Salafis and the preservation of *isnād* tradition. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 27(2): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2020.27.2.1>

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**Abstract.** Transmitting Hadith with full *isnād* (chain of transmitters) connecting back to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has been considered as an exclusive privilege for Muslims and one of the significant traditions of past *Ahl al-Hadith* (scholars of Hadith). In modern times, when *isnād* are no longer examined to determine the authenticity of Hadiths, the tradition is still preserved by the scholars with Sufi inclination whose credentials and works have been widely renowned. On the other hand, an indifference shown by some of modern Salafis has been used by their opponents to question their qualification and expertise in Hadith criticism. This article aims to examine how Salafis assess the importance of *isnād* tradition in modern times. This research is qualitative in nature. The data was mainly collected from modern and pre-modern biographical dictionaries. The research finds that pre-modern Salafis showed equal interest in preserving the living *isnād* tradition to their Sufi peers albeit a minority of them did ignore its importance. A more careful examination suggests that this minority opinion was not a total rejection of *isnād* tradition, instead, it should be seen as contention over excessive remarks regarding the importance of *isnād*, as well as a prevention from endorsing Sufism.

**Keywords and phrases:** Salafi, Sufi, *thabat*, *ijāza*, *isnād*

### Introduction

The science of Hadith is divided into two separate yet equally important parts: *dirāyah* (Hadith examination) and *riwāyah* (Hadith narration). The first focuses on general principles by which Hadiths should be examined to verify its authenticity and meaning. The latter, also known as *ilm al-isnād* (the science of transmission), relates to all aspects pertaining to how the Hadith is passed down from one scholar to another. Even though there is debate about the definite meaning of *riwāyah*, the

*Ahl al-Ṣun‘ah* (the specialists in Hadith) eventually reached a consensus that the term refers to transmission activities that include *ḍabt* (Hadith preservation), as well as *tahrīr* (its narration), *ḥifẓ* (memorisation) and *taṣnīf* (compilation) (Shawat 2015).

For Hadith scholars, both *al-riwāyah* and *al-dirāyah* are inseparable and each of them should complete one other (Tuan Mohd Sapuan et al. 2004). Therefore, during the formative periods, Hadith scholars gave absolute attention to all matters related to both of them. In the field of *riwāyah*, Hadith sessions conducted by renowned scholars were always flocked by thousands of students. *Riḥla* (travel in pursuit of Hadith) was widely practised by almost every student of Hadith after completing his study under local *sheikh* (authoritative teachers). He would travel from one city to another in order to meet as many authorities as he could and collect as many *riwāyah* (Hadith transmissions) as he could find. This explains why a number of scholars acquired hundreds or even thousands of *sheikh* from whom they attained authority to transmit Hadiths to the next generation. On the other hand, their attentions to the aspect of *dirāyah* were clearly reflected in the voluminous compilations which contained valuable insights on Hadiths legal contents and criticism.

However, the passion for Hadiths collection began to decline between 300 AH to 600 AH or between AD 900 to AD 1200 (Khalīfah 2010). After the canonisation of Hadith compilations, *isnād* had lost its significance as the determinant of authenticity and has since been perceived as a mere tradition with minimum value. Nevertheless, some scholars remain devoted to *isnād* tradition with their exceptional efforts to obtain *isnād* from living scholars through *samā‘* (formal audition) or *ijāza* (authorisation). They are also fond of treasuring *thabat* (books displaying the scholarship of Hadith transmitters) and obliged to the strict requirements in transmitting *musalsalāt* (Mamdūḥ 2009). In modern times, the tradition to preserve *isnād* seems to be dominated by Hadith scholars with a strong inclination to Sufism. Some of them have been acknowledged as renowned *musnid* with international reputation. Their Salafī counterparts, on the other hand, are often perceived as having a lack of interest in the aspect of *riwāyah* and have made no contribution to preserve the *isnād* tradition. Their alleged act of indifference toward *isnād* tradition has stirred a number of accusations that doubt their authority in Hadith criticism in general. In his criticism of Salafī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Al-A‘zamī (1984, 9), an Indian Sufī scholar, stated that “whoever knew al-Albānī and studied his biography would know that he did not obtain his knowledge through the mouth of the *sheikh* and he did not bend his knees before them to acquire knowledge”. Similar remarks were also made by other Sufī intellectuals such as al-Ghumārī (2004), al-Hararī (2001; 2007), Mamdūḥ (2009) and ‘Abdullah (2009), to name a

few. The significance of *talaqqī* (direct study under authorities) becomes one of the repeated messages in modern Sufi scholar's discourse. 'Awwāmah (2013) and Maḥmūd (2017) even stated that one of the main causes of today's decadence in Islamic scholarship is the absence of *talaqqī* among intellectuals.

The current study aims to uncover and examine Salafi's stance regarding living *isnād* tradition in modern times. Is there any truth in the claim that they have discarded the *isnād* tradition? It tries to provide clear answers based on a thorough investigation and careful analysis directed at opinions expressed by Salafi key figures. Most of the data were acquired from classic and modern biographies (*tarājum al-rijāl*). The study found that, unlike common perception, the proto-Salafis had shown ardent interests in preserving the *isnād* tradition and had equally contributed to the preservation of '*ilm al-riwāyah* as their Sufi peers. Undeniably, there are a few later Salafis who downplayed the post-classical *isnād* and perceived it as a mere formality with no scientific value. However, the said opinion must be seen as a reaction against overstatements made by some people about the importance of *isnād*, as well as prevention from falling into Sufi influence. It is not, in any case, a refusal of the *isnād* tradition as a whole.

If we place this study in a wider context, we can see how it problematises assumption which established a wide gap between the Salafis and Sufis (see Knysh 2007; Geaves 2005). The study indirectly supports the more recent findings which affirmed proximities between them. Contending the popular claim that Salafi ideology promotes actions that contradict with Egyptian religious practices and tradition, Gauvain (2010) argued that the Salafis are not entirely disparate from the Egyptian culture. In fact, they deserve to be considered as "defenders of Egyptian Muslim tradition" when it comes to discussion on matters of family and gender relations. In his article on Syrian Salafi Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, Sirry (2011) criticised the general assumption among Muslim and Western scholars on the inherent anti-Sufism tendencies among Salafis. After an extensive discussion on al-Qasimi's positive views on Sufi's *waḥdat al-wujūd* theory, he concluded that the Salafis in actual fact took a more nuanced position on Sufism than they were expected to.

### **A Brief History of *Isnād***

*Isnād*, according to Arabic lexicography, is the element or factor which others rely on. Since the beginning of its formative periods, Hadith scholars have been using this word as a technical term that refers to the source of the Hadith text (*ṭarīq matn al-ḥadīth*). Its inherent meaning clearly illustrates the significance of *isnād* as a tool upon which the scholars of Hadith scrutinise the authenticity of

Hadith. Sometimes, the term *ṭarīq* and *wajh* are used carrying the same meaning. Azami (1978) notes that *isnād* has been used as a reliable instrument in knowledge transmission in multiple pre-Islamic works of literature. However, it was in Hadith literature that its importance culminated and became an indispensable part of the religion.

An *isnād* mainly consists of two components: (1) names of transmitters and (2) terms describing how the Hadith is being transmitted (*ṣīghat al-taḥammul wa al-adā'*). The authenticity of Hadith mainly relies upon the quality of its individual transmitter as well as the continuity of the transmission chain. A reliable transmitter must yield a distinct level of virtuous character (*'adālah*) and intellectual rigour (*dabt*). Unless he is an expert in the Arabic language, he is under compulsion to narrate the Hadith verbatim. *Tadlīs*, namely citing an *isnād* he had never heard in a way that implies as if he had heard directly from the teacher, is totally unacceptable. The Hadith has to be transmitted via oral transmission either *samā'* (hearing Hadith recitation directly from a teacher) or *'arḍ* (reading it out loud before the teacher). There is a debate among early Hadith scholars regarding the validity of *ijāza* (authorisation to transmit without *samā'* or *'arḍ*); most Hadith scholars disregard it. However, transmitting through *wijādah* (a manuscript owned by a deceased person) is unanimously unaccepted (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ 2002). There is no other reason behind the establishment of these high standards of quality but to safeguard the authenticity of narration, as well as to prevent the smallest chance of forgery that will affect the pureness of the Hadith.

The significance of *isnād*, however, started to weaken after the canonisation of major Hadith compilations has reached its peak between the 3rd and 4th century AH or 9th and 10th century AD. As the *Six Books* (*al-Kutub al-Sittah*) had become so well-known and left no chance of possible alteration and forgery, *isnād* started to lose its role as the determinant of authenticity. As Dickinson (2002) brilliantly explained that the abstract mechanism of collective acumen replaced the reliability of individual transmitters as the guarantor of the authenticity of Hadith texts. As such, the quality of *isnād* began to deteriorate during the 4th century or 10th century AH and eventually turned into a form of a prophetic relic that is preserved only for historical and spiritual purposes. The circulation of *isnād* among Hadith scholars and Muslim scholars in general, at that time was primarily for providing a connection to the Prophet's authority as well as to establish a person as part of the Muslim scholarly class. One's proximity to the connection with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him [PBUH]) through fewer chains in that connection is highly valued (Brown 2014).

The shift in the function of *isnād* has caused a serious decline in the set of requirements and criteria that should be fulfilled by a transmitter. Referring to the degrading state of Hadith scholarship at his time, the Damascene *muhaddith* Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (2002) noted that high requirements set by previous Hadith scholars are no longer practical and were therefore mostly abandoned. It becomes sufficient at this time if the transmitter is a Muslim, reached puberty (*bāliḡh*), has a sound mind, does not portray evil-deeds or is ill-mannered. With regards to his *dabt*, it suffices if his name is stated in the *samāʿ* (list of attendants in Hadith reciting sessions) and his copy of Hadith compilation is identical to the one in his teacher's property. By such low criteria, anyone can be accepted to conduct Hadith recitation sessions although he has no proper background in Islamic studies. It is then not surprising if we find that a Hadith session conducted by an illiterate Abū al-ʿAbbās Ahmad bin Abī Ṭālib al-Ḥajjār al-Ṣāliḥī was crowded by hundreds of students who were attracted to his elevated *isnād*. Prominent Hadith scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Mufliḥ, al-Mizzī, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Jābir Wādiyasyī, al-ʿAlāʾī, al-Birzālī and Ibn al-Turkmānī were among the attendees (al-ʿUbayd 2006).

In the post-canon era, *ijāza* reception is no longer disputed. In fact, most scholars have agreed to accept *ijāza* as one of the valid tools in Hadith transmission (al-Ghāmīdī 1428 AH). This acceptance enables Hadith students to reduce the duration of their learning period. They did not have to endure a long and exhausting period of learning to accomplish the reading of voluminous Hadith compilations before obtaining authorisation to transmit. Instead, it can be easily granted to them after reading any part of the book or even without reading it at all. This new development has caused some scholars to re-evaluate the established notion which states the superiority of *samāʿ* over *ijāza*. Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī argued that if the *muhaddithūn* (Hadith scholars) can accept Hadith transmission from a laity (*ʿamī*), who has no mastery in what he is transmitting especially after he turns elderly, the differentiation between *samāʿ* and *ijāza* is therefore no longer relevant. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that receiving transmission via *samāʿ* is preferable if the teacher who conducted the session was an expert (*ḥādhiq*) in Hadith sciences. The preference, however, is not because of the superiority of *samāʿ* but due to the valuable insights and explanations, the students might obtain during the recitation (al-Zarkashī 1998).

### ***Isnād* Preservation in Modern Times**

Despite its shift in function and quality, *isnād* remained attractive for some scholars who devoted their efforts for its preservation. They conducted *rihla* (travels) from city to city to take from authorities then compile books of *thabat* in which they listed their *isnād* collections. According to Brown (2004), the *thabat* functioned

as the *curriculum vitae* for a Hadith scholar displaying his scholarship in the field of Hadith transmission. It contains various types of *isnād* connecting them to the Prophet (PBUH) as well as to prominent scholars of the past and their respected collections. The composition of the book would usually be arranged according to the order of names of teachers or according to the branches of knowledge. Beginning from the 5th century or 11th century AD up to the present day, every prominent scholar had authored at least one *thabat*. As for some, they even published more, such as, al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH/AD 1497) who penned 57 *thabat* and al-Birzālī 739 AH/AD 1339 who authored 44 *thabat*. The famous historian al-Ṣafādī (d. 764 AH/AD 1363) said that it was impossible to enumerate the exact number of *thabat* that circulated in Islamic society. In *Mu'jam al-Ma'ājim*, al-Mar'ashlī (2002) tried to list all the *thabat* he could find and reached a staggering number of 3,081 titles.

Since the period of the 11th century AH or 7th century AD up to the current day, the *thabat* books had been circulated in various forms to ensure the sustainability of the *isnād* tradition (al-Mar'ashlī 2002). The movement was championed by Sufi scholars whose reputations as *musnid* (someone who has a large number of *isnad* collection) were internationally recognised. One of them was a Moroccan Muhammad 'Abd al-Ḥay al-Kattānī (d. 1382 AH/AD 1962) who was fond of collecting *ijāza* and *thabat* since a young age. Before reaching the age of 40, he had published over 130 books in *thabat* studies and its manuscripts. His work *Fahras al-Fahāris* contains more than 1,200 *thabat* and is one of the most-cited works in the field (Mamdūh 2009). Another Sufi scholar who was well-known for his efforts in *isnād* preservation in modern times is Muhammad Yāsīn al-Fādānī (d. 1410 AH/AD 1990), Indonesian-Meccan scholar who obtained countless *ijāza* from more than 400 teachers and had authored over 50 titles of *thabat*. His students and fellow scholars perceived him as “the greatest *musnid* in modern times, *Musnid al-‘Aṣr*” (Mamdūh 1434 AH; al-Mar'ashlī 2002).

This attraction to *isnād* was mostly derived from the Sufi's high appreciation to *isnad*. Relying on the sayings of previous scholars, both al-Kattānī (2013) and al-Fādānī (2016) asserted that *isnād* is a distinguished privilege for Muslims which no other religions or civilisations have ever had. *Isnād* grant a person high status since his name would be associated with the name of the Prophet (PBUH). *Isnād* is also one's genealogy (*nasab*) that connects him to past Hadith collections. Mahfūz al-Termasī in *Kifāyah al-Mustaḥḍir* said that *isnād* is one of the necessities (*min al-muhimmāt al-maṭlūbāt*) that people of knowledge must acquire and their ignorance about it is considered a severe defect. It is because “one's teacher is his spiritual father and his intercessor between him and the God of the universe” (al-Fādānī 2014).

The mentioned opinions, however, do not imply that *isnād* is so important in the Sufi's intellectual tradition that it should be placed in the highest rank of priority. On the contrary, a number of Sufi scholars, such as the Moroccan 'Abd Allah and his brother, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ghumārī, frequently reminded *isnād* seekers not to over-occupy themselves in collecting *ijāza* and *thabat*. Instead, they should give more attention to aspects of content comprehension and authenticity. They also pointed out the mistakes made by some scholars who were so occupied in collecting *ijāza* and *thabat* that they were less attentive to the more significant aspects in the Hadith sciences. Such was the case of Egyptian *musnid*, Ahmad Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who devoted 10 years of his precious time to author his *thabat* entitled *al-Mas'ā al-Ḥamīd fi Bayān Tahṛīr al-Asānīd* but had no expertise in Hadith criticism (Mamdūh 2009).

When reading the contents of *thabat* belonging to modern authors, one will be exposed to various types of *isnād* connecting the authors to the classical Hadith compilations. This, however, does not necessarily suggest that the authors had received all of the compilations through *samā'*. It is clear that most of the time, they received the compilations through *ijāza*. Some of the compilations that were mentioned in the *thabat* had gone missing over the past centuries while none of the manuscripts survived. Therefore, the fact that a particular book is mentioned in *thabat* does not guarantee its existence in the present day. Similarly, the *isnād* mentioned in those *thabat* may not necessarily be sound. Some of them were reasonably weak or even false, for example, *musalsal* with the practice of giving food and drink (*al-iṭ'ām wa al-isqā'*) and *musalsal* with the practice of feeding (*talqīm*). Both Hadiths along with their entire *isnads* have been convicted as fabricated by al-Qāwuqjī (n.d.). It is a mistake therefore, to think that the authors of the *thabat* believed in the authenticity of the said *isnād* or Hadiths for the purpose of mentioning it. It was probably only for the sake of *barakah*, elevation and preserving the *isnād* tradition. Nevertheless, the majority of modern Hadith scholars from the Salafīs and Sufīs unanimously prohibited the circulation of these fabricated *isnād* (Rashīd 1999; al-'Ubayd 2006).

### ***Isnād* Tradition from Salafi's Perspective**

Linguistically, the term Salafism originates from the Arabic word *salaf*, which literally means "the past generation". Currently, the term is widely used to refer to a specific religious movement that seeks to restore Islamic faith and practice in the way they existed at the time of *al-Salaf al-Salih* (the pious ancestors) who lived during the first three generations of Islam. In short, the Salafīs sought to preserve or re-establish visions of Islam believed to have been practised by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions (Woodward et al. 2013). Debates

about when this movement emerged for the first time were bitterly contested (for example, ‘Imārah 2007; Zahrah 1996; al-Būṭī 2008; Lauziere 2010). However, all the studies agreed to link the root of modern Salafism to the thoughts of medieval Hanbalite theologian and jurist, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH/AD 1328), alongside Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1206 AH/AD 1792). Their views continued to be seen as definitive in a wide variety of modern Salafī (Gauvain 2010). Studies conducted by Wiktorowicz (2006) and Sirry (2011) had convincingly provided insights that modern Salafism is not monolithic. Instead, it has many varieties based on their approach to issues related to theology and Sufism.

Modern Salafism started as a reform movement led by Medinan scholars in the 12th century AH/18th century AD who actively criticised heretic teachings that came from excessive Sufism and uncovered fabricated Hadiths which were then spreading among the Islamic community. They propagated the need to refer directly to Qur’an and Sunnah, to discard the *taqlid* (blind adherence) and to criticise baseless rulings. Despite facing strong retaliations from the Sufis and traditionalists, they managed to uphold Medina as the capital city of Salafism (Bayūmī 2007). Under the influence of Medinan scholars, Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab was inspired to initiate purification movements and became the first Salafī to have the opportunity to establish his theological views in the form of socio-political reality. His alliance with Muhammad Ibn Sa‘ud (d. 1765), the Emir of Dar‘iyyah in North-eastern Arabia, led to the establishment of a Wahhabi theocracy in which the coercive power of the state was used to enforce Salafī norms (Woodward et al. 2013). Salafi-like reforms can also be seen in various Islamic countries outside the Hijaz region. Zirkili’s claim that these movements were inspired by Ibn Wahhab’s reforms, however, was not left uncontested (Sālim, 2016). In Baghdad, Salafism initiated by Abu al-Thanā al-Alūsī (d. 1854), who secretly tried to revive Ibn Taymiyya’s intellectual legacy, was continued by his son, Nu‘mān al-Alūsī, from whom a Damascene Salafī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, evidently received reformistic thoughts (Sirry 2011). Together with his colleagues, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Bayṭār and Ṭāhir al-Jazā’irī, al-Qāsimī then founded what is now seen as a more traditional branch of Salafiyya in Damascus. When these Damascene reformists visited Egypt and had the chance to meet Egyptian reformist, Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323 AH/AD 1905), the latter became aware of the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and then redirected his attention from Afghani’s radical political reform to long-range internal reform based on proper education (Weismann 2001). However, it was ‘Abduh’s disciple, Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354 AH/AD 1935), who shifted ‘Abduh’s reformism in the direction of Hanbali fundamentalism. He eventually became the promoter of modern Salafism through his famous *al-Manar* publication and indirectly contributed to the birth of the greatest icon of modern *Ahl al-Hadith* movement, Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 AH).



It seemed that modern Salafis have shown indifference toward living *isnād* and activities related to *ijāza* collecting. This stand has been ascribed to major Salafis such as ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sa‘dī, Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz, Ibn ‘Uthaimīn and ‘Abd Allah al-Jibrīn (al-Tuklah 2008; al-Shamrānī 1422 AH). Rationalising this standpoint, al-Shamrānī (1422 AH, 17) stated that “*isnād* and *ijāza* do not make one more knowledgeable. It is common to see a person who has hundreds of *ijāza* but arrogantly rejected what Allah had decreed in His Holy Scripture and the Messenger of Allah had stated in his prophetic tradition”. Arguments supporting this notion could also be found in *Fatawa Ḥādīthiyya* of Saudian Sa‘ad bin ‘Abd Allah Āl Ḥumayd. In his response to a question about the necessity of having *isnād* in modern times, he expressed doubt in the existence of real *isnād* in the modern day. He said that the *isnād* that are in circulation today are nothing more than formality (*ṣūrah al-sanad*) without substance. Additionally, the *isnād* circulated among scholars in later generations (*muta’akhhirīn*) always contained vagueness, especially after the spread of forgeries due to “the spreading of the Sufi *tareqah*”. Many individuals whose names were mentioned in the chain of *isnād*, especially after the 9th century AH/15th century AD, could hardly be identified. He then concluded “I do not see any benefits in these *isnād* although some of fellow scholars think that the tradition offers contribution to preserve the past honor of the *ummah* of Muhammad. It is their *ijtihād* (personal opinion) which I do not agree” (Ḥumayd 1999, 187).

This stand, however, does not reflect the opinion of the majority of Salafī. In fact, it is quite safe to assume that the Salafī scholars in pre and postmodern periods had paid equal attention in preserving the *isnād* tradition similar to their Sufi peers. They contributed to the tradition by collecting and transmitting *isnād* through *qirā’ah*, *arḍ* or *ijāza*. It has been said that Ibn Taymiyya, the most cited Salafī, attained *isnād* from over two hundred authorities and he did not hesitate to grant *ijāza* upon request. According to al-Kattānī (2013), Ibn Taymiyya had written 10 pages of *ijāza* for the Governor of Sabtah, listing off all of his *isnād* from his memory without referring to any books. Other *ijāza* were also sent to the people of Granada, Isfahan and Tibriz.

*Isnād* preservation efforts can also be seen in the biography of Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the second most important Salafī figures after Ibn Taymiyya. He reportedly received the oral transmission of *Musalsal bi al-Awwaliyyah* (the very first Hadith traditionally transmitted by a teacher to his pupils) from ‘Abd Allah bin Ibrahim bin Sayf al-Shamarī. He also acquired an *ijāza* that authorises him to transmit selected Hadith compilations from *Musnid* of Hijaz Muhammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (Bassām 1419 AH). Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb then transmitted his *isnād* to his students through both reading (*qirāah*) and *ijāza*. Among those who sincerely

preserved Ibn Wahhab's *isnad* and passed it down to the next generation was his grandson, 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ḥasan bin Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Besides his family *isnād*, 'Abd al-Rahman has also attained formal *ijāza* from prominent Egyptian scholars such as Ḥasan al-Quwaynī, 'Abd Allah bin Suwaydān, Yūsuf al-Ṣāwī, al-Bājūrī and Muhammad al-Damanhūrī. He was also granted the *ijāza* to transmit *Musalsal bi al-Awwaliyyah* among other essential *isnād* from 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabartī dan Muhammad bin Maḥmūd al-Jazā'irī. The tradition of *isnād* seeking in Ibn Wahhāb's family was subsequently preserved by 'Abd al-Latīf bin 'Abd al-Rahman (d. 1293 AH). After acquiring *isnād* from his father, uncle and grandfather, he studied in al-Azhar University and was granted *ijāza* by several Egyptian scholars like Ibrahim al-Bājūrī, Muṣṭafā al-Azharī, Ahmad al-Ṣa'īdī and Muhammad Maḥmūd al-Jazā'irī. In his endowment of *ijāza* to Ahmad bin 'Īsā, he proudly passed what he proclaimed as "the most elevated *isnād* in the world" in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī's transmission. The *isnād* consists of only 12 mediators between him and al-Bukhārī (al-'Ajami 2001).

Salafī's contribution to the *Ilm al-Riwāyah* can also be observed through various *thabat* published by their scholars. Elaborating on the importance of *thabat* compilations, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1961) noted that the books give inspiration to readers to refer to the primary Hadīth collections, as well as to preserve them from being forsaken and to provide a reflection on how early scholars preserved and spread knowledge. Citing Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Qāsimī emphasised that the main objective of oral Hadīth transmission in later centuries was *isnād* preservation, not authentication. He also pointed out, as he cited from al-Shāṭibī, that preserving *isnād* tradition is not considered as part of the essentials in Hadīth science, but just part of its accessories (*mulaḥ al-'ilm*). This moderate notion suggests that the leader of the Damascene Salafis had seen *isnād* as something that should be preserved and to reject *isnād* tradition was an unwise option.

Al-Qāsimī's notion reflected the stand chosen by the majority of premodern Salafis. Reading through al-Mar'ashlī's *Mu'jam al-Ma'ājim*, one can easily find many Salafis whose *isnād* were preserved in various titles of *thabat*. It includes Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Ṣan'ānī, Muḥammad bin 'Ali al-Shawkānī, Ṣiddīq Khān al-Qinnawjī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and many more. The number of their books increased between the 14th and 15th century AH or 20th and 21st century AD after more Salafis acknowledged the importance of *isnād* preservation in modern times. They began to notice that belittling the *isnād* will only result in negative impacts. In his study on the position and function of *ijāza*, al-Ghāmīdī (1428 AH) said that one could not deny that *isnād* preservation is part of the tradition of past Hadīth scholars. Disregarding it will only give advantage to heretics like Ash'arites, Sufis and the people of *tareqah* to associate themselves to the

primary Hadith compilations. Hence, when a Salafī wanted to have a connection to these compilations, he has no choice but to confer them and establish association with past Hadith scholars via their *isnād*. This argument was supported by Khālīd bin Marghūb (2009) who criticised Salafīs who showed exceptionally apathy to *ijāza* or impose strict criteria upon granting it to the students. He then suggested to grant *ijāza* its proper position and that it should not be ignored and neither should it be seen as substitution for direct learning from authoritative scholars.

This appealing perspective influenced some Salafī scholars to correct their stance from ignoring the *isnād* into adopting it. One of them is Sheykh al-Ḥanābila (The Grand Master of the Hanbalites) ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-‘Aqīl (d. 1432 AH/AD 2011) who withdrew his negative opinion about *isnād* tradition. Like his master, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sa‘dī, al-‘Aqīl once saw no benefits in this tradition. However, he altered his opinion after being convinced of the importance of *isnād* by his teacher, al-Maṭrūdī (al-Tuklah 2008). Some of the modern Salafīs like Ḥammūd al-Tuwayjirī, Sulaymān al-Ṣanī‘, Muhammad Bū Khubzah, Muhammad al-‘Atyūbī and ‘Abdullah al-‘Ubayd began to compile their *isnād* collections on their own. Others had their students write for them, such as Ḥammād al-Anṣārī, Ismā‘īl bin Muhammad al-Anṣārī, ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Aqīl al-Ḥanbalī, Ṣubḥī al-Samarrā‘ī and ‘Abd Allah al-Sa‘ad.

A thorough examination, however, leads us to conclude that Salafīs who seemed to ignore the *isnād* tradition did not totally reject it. In fact, they acknowledged the importance of the *isnād* tradition and accepted certain forms of *ijāza* from selected scholars. It can be observed, for instance, in the opinion of Nasir al-Din al-Albānī. Despite his explicit rejection of the widespread practice of *ijāza* in modern times, he accepted a written *ijāza* from the historian and *musnid* of Aleppo Muhammad Rāghib al-Ṭabbākh (d. 1370 H/1951 AD) after which al-Albānī frequently mentioned him as “my teacher through *ijāza* (*syekhunā fi al-ijāza*)” (Ḥalabī 2011). It is said that he has granted *munāwalah* (authorisation to transmit by handing certain books) for Moroccan scholar Muhammad Bū Khubzah (al-Ṭanjī 2007). This fact suggests that al-Albānī and perhaps other Salafīs who seemed to give little attention to the *isnād* tradition, did not totally reject the *isnād* tradition. What they refused to support is the overstatement on the significance of *isnād* mentioned by some scholars who prohibited to cite from Hadith compilations unless one has an unbroken *isnād* connecting him to its authors. Al-Qāsimī (1961) refutes this opinion and asserted that *isnād* is not a prerequisite for one to be able to utilise Hadith collections provided he obtained sound copies of the said collections.

Another reason why these modern Salafis seemed to downplay the *isnād* tradition may also be related to their take on Sufism. Ḥumayd (1999) alluded that *isnād* has been part of the Sufi and *tareqah*'s tradition. It is supported by Voll's (2002) findings that established the linkage between Hadith studies and Sufi tariqahs affiliation in the mid-17th century. Therefore, Salafis with strong anti-Sufism tendencies refuse to take part in preserving the *isnād* tradition because it may be considered as recognising Sufi's innovations. On the other hand, the Salafis who have a certain degree of tolerance to Sufism have no objection to participate in the *isnād* tradition with a reminder not to over-emphasise the significance of *isnād* nor view it as more important than Hadith comprehension studies. In an introduction session of his *al-Luma'ah fi Isnād al-Kutub al-Tis'ah*, a Salafi *isnād* collector, al-Tuklah (2010, 6) said, "I remind myself and the readers that the highest in *riwāyah* (Hadith transmission) is audition and understanding (*al-dirāyah*), it is definitely higher than *ijāza*; and that the purpose of Hadith study is for application and guidance and not only for the sake of collection and *barakah* purposes".

## Conclusion

Despite its shifted value and function, the *isnād* in modern times is still preserved as a living tradition and a means of elevation. *Isnād* will continue to weigh its significance in establishing an academic credential for Hadith scholars. Similar to their Sufi counterparts, the Salafi scholars from their formative time have been contributing to the preservation of the *isnād* tradition. They agreed upon the importance of *talaqqī*, as well as conducted *rihla* in pursuit of *riwāyah* and produce many *thabat* compilations. It is undeniable that there are differing opinions among the Salafis who see no benefits in *isnād* preservation in the post-canonical periods. After thorough investigation, it is clear that this opinion must be seen as a rejection on the extreme views of the importance of *isnād* and as a precaution against the Sufi's influence instead of a total rejection of the *isnād* tradition.

The findings demonstrate the proximity between the Salafi and Sufi in thoughts and tradition. Despite the undeniable gap separating them, both Sunni school of thoughts shared considerable similarities. Anyone who carefully compares the two books of *thabat* belonging to the Sufis and Salafis will find that their scholarship can be traced back to the same networks and religious figures.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable reviews of an earlier draft of this article. However, all mistakes and shortcomings are our own. This study is partly funded by the Research University

Grant (1001/PHUMANITI/816290) of Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

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