

A Critical Analysis of Imam Al-Tirmidhi's Hadith Methodology in Sunan Al-Tirmidhi

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Abstract

This study critically examines the hadith methodology employed by Imam al-Tirmidhi in his monumental work, Sunan al-Tirmidhi. The analysis addresses al-Tirmidhi's biography, his socio-cultural milieu, the compilation process of his collection, and the distinctive features of his approach to classifying and evaluating hadith. Employing a qualitative library-research design, the study draws on primary sources—Sunan al-Tirmidhi and al-'Ilal al-Saghir—alongside secondary literature in classical and contemporary hadith scholarship. The findings show that al-Tirmidhi's methodology is distinguished by its integration of hadith criticism with fiqh, its systematic use of critical terminology such as hasan, and its inclusion of scholarly commentary on juristic practice. At the same time, the study identifies notable weaknesses: terminological inconsistency—most visibly in the compound grading hasan sahih—a tendency toward tasahul (leniency) in accepting hadith, and limited depth in isnad criticism. The study concludes that al-Tirmidhi's methodology occupies a moderate position within the discipline of hadith criticism, bridging the authority of transmitted reports with the practical demands of Islamic law

Keywords: *al-Tirmidhi; hasan hadith; sanad criticism; hadith methodology; Sunan al-Tirmidhi*

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1. Introduction

As the second source of Islamic law, hadith scholarship underwent significant methodological development between the second and third centuries of the Hijra. This period, known as the era of codification ('asr al-tadwin), saw oral transmission systematically converted into written form (Azami, 1992; Brown, 2009). The shift was not merely technological but epistemological: scholarly attention moved from transmission alone toward the criticism, verification, and scientific classification of the Prophetic reports (Juynboll, 1983; Motzki, 2001). This shift was driven by the expanding geography of the Muslim world and increasing socio-political complexity, both of which created urgent pressure to establish standards of authenticity (Hallaq, 1997).

Hadith scholars of this period responded to the challenge in different ways. Some adopted a rigorist approach with very strict standards of selection, as reflected in works such as Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 2001; Ibn al-Salah, 1986). Others were more accommodating of the practical needs of the Muslim community, particularly in matters of fiqh, as seen in the Sunan literature (Kamali, 2005). This methodological diversity indicates that hadith criticism was never monolithic; rather, it evolved dialectically in response to the intellectual and social needs of the Muslim community at the time (Brown, 2009).

Within this diverse methodological landscape, Imam al-Tirmidhi occupies a unique and strategic position. Through Sunan al-Tirmidhi, he functioned not only as a compiler of hadith but also as an analyst and interpreter who evaluated the quality of narrations and related them to the legal practice of jurists (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). This distinctiveness is evident in his habit of appending evaluative remarks such as hadith hasan sahih and gharib, as well as the formula wa 'alayhi al-'amal 'inda ahl al-'ilm ("and this is what is practiced among the people of knowledge") (Ibn Rajab, 1987). Sunan al-Tirmidhi therefore functions not merely as a kitab riwayat (a book of transmission) but as a text of dirayah, carrying hermeneutical and normative dimensions (Lucas, 2008).

Unlike Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which tend to present hadith with minimal explicit commentary, al-Tirmidhi offers an evaluative narrative that bridges the text of the hadith with the realities of legal practice (Brown, 2009). This reflects an integration between the dimensions of riwayat (the transmission of isnad and matn) and dirayah (analysis, interpretation, and contextualization) (Ibn al-Salah, 1986). Within the epistemology of hadith, this integration can be understood as an attempt to harmonize textual authority with practical necessity, so that hadith are treated not only as historical data but also as normative sources embedded in a living scholarly tradition (Hallaq, 1997).

This integrative approach, however, is not free of methodological difficulty. Several critical questions arise concerning the consistency of terminology, the standards used to evaluate hadith quality, and the potential for fiqh-related bias in the assessment of narrations (Lucas, 2008; Dickinson, 2001). Al-Tirmidhi's use of the terms hasan and hasan sahih, for instance, has long been debated among scholars, since these terms do not always carry a clear and consistent definition (Ibn Rajab, 1987). Furthermore, his tendency to link the validity of a hadith to established juristic practice opens the possibility that madhhab-based authority intruded into the process of hadith criticism (Kamali, 2005).

Al-Tirmidhi's methodology, therefore, cannot simply be read as a continuation of strict isnad criticism. It is better understood as a complex epistemic construction situated between two poles: the scientific objectivity of isnad verification and the pragmatic demands of applying Islamic law (Brown, 2009; Lucas, 2008). It is precisely here that the significance of studying al-Tirmidhi's methodology lies—in understanding how a hadith scholar managed the tension between the authority of transmission and the practical needs of the community.

This study critically examines the hadith methodology of Sunan al-Tirmidhi, with attention to its structure, characteristics, and epistemological implications. The analysis focuses on three main aspects: (1) the construction of al-Tirmidhi's methodology in classifying and evaluating hadith; (2) the integration between hadith and fiqh; and (3) the consistency and terminological problems in his assessment of hadith quality. The study further situates al-Tirmidhi's methodology within the broader development of classical hadith scholarship and evaluates its relevance to contemporary hadith studies (Motzki, 2001).

This study carries academic value on three levels. Historically, it contributes to understanding the dynamics of hadith methodology during the era of codification (Azami, 1992). Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on hadith epistemology, particularly regarding the relationship between riwayat and dirayah (Hallaq, 1997). Practically, it offers a critical perspective that can inform the development of a more contextual and integrative methodology for hadith studies in the modern era (Brown, 2009).

In this light, the analysis of al-Tirmidhi's methodology is valuable not only for its historical content but also for its broader methodological implications for the continued development of hadith science as an academic discipline.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library-research design. Data sources are classified into primary sources—Sunan al-Tirmidhi and al-'Ilal al-Saghir—and secondary sources, principally Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi and Ibn al-Salah's Muqaddimah (Ibn al-Salah, 1986; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). Materials were gathered through documentary analysis of these texts together with relevant classical and contemporary secondary literature in hadith studies, and were analyzed thematically according to the three focal aspects outlined above: methodological construction, hadith–fiqh integration, and terminological consistency

3. Results and Discussion

Biography of Imam al-Tirmidhi

Imam al-Tirmidhi's full name was Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn 'Isa ibn Sawrah al-Tirmidhi. He was born in 209 AH in the city of Tirmidh, in the region of Transoxiana (present-day Central Asia), and died in 279 AH. He lived during what historians have called the "golden age" of hadith scholarship the third century of the Hijra when the codification and systematization of hadith reached its peak (al-Dhahabi, 2003; Brown, 2009).

Genealogically and geographically, al-Tirmidhi came from a non-Arab, Persian-Transoxianan background, a region that was at the time one of the most productive intellectual centers of the Islamic world. This is worth noting because it shows that the development of hadith scholarship was not confined to the Hijaz but flourished equally in Khurasan and its surrounding regions, which produced towering figures such as Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim (Hodgson, 1974; Azami, 1992).

Following the established tradition of hadith scholars, al-Tirmidhi undertook a rihlah fi talab al-hadith (a scholarly journey in search of hadith) across major centers of Islamic learning, including Khurasan, Iraq, and the Hijaz. During these travels he studied under a number of eminent scholars, among them Imam al-Bukhari, Imam Muslim, Abu Dawud, Qutaybah ibn Sa'id, and Ishaq ibn Rahawayh (Ibn Hajar, 1995; al-Dhahabi, 2003).

Among his teachers, the most decisive influence came from Imam al-Bukhari. This teacher–student relationship involved not only the transmission of narrations but also the transfer of a methodology of hadith criticism. Nevertheless, al-Tirmidhi did not simply replicate his teacher's method; he developed a more flexible and communicative approach of his own (Lucas, 2008; Brown, 2009). In this sense, al-Tirmidhi can be positioned as part of a "second generation" of hadith scholars—one that not only inherited earlier methodology but also adapted and innovated upon it according to the needs of the age (Motzki, 2001).

Classical scholarship recognizes al-Tirmidhi as one of the great imams of hadith. Scholars such as al-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar rank him among the huffaz al-hadith, the elite memorizers of hadith, noting his exceptional powers of memory and precision in transmission (al-Dhahabi, 2003; Ibn Hajar, 1995). He was also recognized for his strong analytical capacity (dirayah), particularly in assessing hadith quality and understanding its legal implications—a trait that distinguished him from scholars who focused solely on transmission (Lucas, 2008).

It should be noted, however, that al-Tirmidhi's authority is not usually placed on equal footing with that of al-Bukhari and Muslim with respect to the strictness of his selection criteria. A number of scholars have observed a tendency toward tasahul (leniency) in his acceptance of hadith, particularly within the hasan category. This very criticism, however, provides an

important entry point for understanding the distinctive character of his methodology in greater depth (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Dickinson, 2001).

Al-Tirmidhi's principal work is *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, also known as *al-Jami'*. Counted among the *al-Kutub al-Sittah* (the Six Books), it has a character distinct from other hadith collections in that it combines the transmission of hadith with quality assessment and juristic commentary (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). He also authored two other significant works: *al-'Ilal al-Saghir*, which examines hidden defects ('*ilal*') in hadith, and *al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah*, a thematic description of the Prophet's character and life (Ibn Rajab, 1987). Together, these works show that al-Tirmidhi's contribution extended beyond the compilation of hadith into the development of the science of hadith criticism ('*ilm al-'ilal*') and thematic studies of the Prophet's biography (Brown, 2009).

One of the most striking features of al-Tirmidhi's intellectual biography is his integrative orientation. He did not treat hadith as a self-contained text but as a legal source to be understood within the context of scholarly practice. This is reflected in his habit of citing juristic opinions after presenting a hadith, noting whether the hadith was acted upon, and linking the quality of a hadith to its reception among scholars (Lucas, 2008). This approach shows al-Tirmidhi moving from the role of transmitter toward that of interpreter: he did not merely relay hadith but actively guided readers toward their legal understanding and application (Brown, 2009).

From the standpoint of hadith epistemology, however, this same approach opens space for critique. The integration of hadith and *fiqh* risks blurring the boundary between scientific description and normative prescription; in other words, it is possible that assessments of hadith quality were shaped by particular juristic preferences (Hallaq, 1997).

Read more closely, al-Tirmidhi's biography offers not merely historical information but also reflects his epistemological position within the hadith tradition. He stood at the intersection of two major currents: the rigorous *isnad* criticism represented by al-Bukhari, and the applied demands of *fiqh* represented by the jurists of the *madhhabs* (Motzki, 2001; Lucas, 2008). This position made al-Tirmidhi a figure of "epistemic mediation," striving to preserve the authority of transmission while ensuring its relevance to legal practice (Brown, 2009). His biography, in short, cannot be separated from his methodology: his intellectual background, his network of teachers, and his social context directly shaped the way he approached hadith.

The Socio-Cultural Context of al-Tirmidhi

Imam al-Tirmidhi lived in a highly dynamic intellectual environment during the third century of the Hijra, a period often described as the phase of consolidation and systematization in hadith scholarship. This era was marked by the emergence of the major *fiqh* schools (from the second to the fourth century AH), intensified activity in hadith codification, and a growing demand for rigorous verification of transmitted reports (Hallaq, 1997; Brown, 2009). These conditions shaped not only the intellectual framework of hadith scholars but also the overall direction of methodological development in hadith studies.

The third century AH marked the transition from an oral to a literate tradition of hadith transmission. Whereas earlier centuries relied primarily on memorization and oral chains of transmission, this period witnessed large-scale codification (*tadwin*) that demanded methodological standardization (Azami, 1992; Motzki, 2001), driven by the expanding territory of the Islamic world, the emergence of fabricated hadith (*mawdu'*), and the increasingly complex needs of *fiqh* as Muslim societies grew (Juynboll, 1983; Brown, 2009).

In this context, *isnad* verification became the principal instrument for establishing the authenticity of hadith. Subsequent developments, however, showed that *isnad* criticism alone was not always sufficient, creating the need for supplementary approaches that also considered the *matn* (text) and the practice of scholars (Motzki, 2001; Lucas, 2008).

Al-Tirmidhi's socio-intellectual context was also shaped by the dialectic between two major currents of classical Islamic thought: the *Ahl al-Hadith*, who emphasized the literal authority of transmitted reports, and the *Ahl al-Ra'y*, who placed greater weight on rational reasoning and juristic effort (*ijtihad*) (Hallaq, 1997; Kamali, 2005). This tension did not always produce conflict; it also generated methodological synthesis. Al-Tirmidhi appears to occupy a

middle position: he upheld the authority of *isnad* as the basis of *hadith* validity while remaining attentive to rational considerations and juristic practice (Lucas, 2008), indicating that his methodology did not emerge in a vacuum but was the product of a long process of intellectual dialectic (Brown, 2009).

By al-Tirmidhi's time, the major schools of *fiqh*—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—had begun to take shape, each with its own approach to using *hadith* as a source of law (Hallaq, 1997). *Hadith* were thus evaluated not only for their authenticity but also for their acceptability in legal practice, creating a need to relate *hadith* to the opinions of jurists, the practice of the Muslim community, and scholarly consensus (*ijma'*) (Kamali, 2005).

Al-Tirmidhi responded to this environment by incorporating remarks such as *wa 'alayhi al-'amal 'inda ahl al-'ilm* (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). This formula shows that he was concerned not only with the textual validity of a *hadith* but also with its practical validity—he recognized that the authority of a *hadith* was not entirely self-standing but was also shaped by its reception within the scholarly community (Lucas, 2008).

One important implication of this socio-cultural context was a paradigmatic shift in *hadith* studies. Where earlier scholarship focused primarily on the soundness of the *isnad* (*sahih*—*da'if*), al-Tirmidhi's period saw growing attention to the function of *hadith* in establishing law, its degree of acceptance in practice, and its conformity with the general principles of the *Shari'a* (Brown, 2009; Hallaq, 1997). Al-Tirmidhi's methodology can thus be understood as an effort to develop a more functional approach to *hadith*—one concerned not only with "is this *hadith* authentic?" but also with "how is this *hadith* applied in the life of the community?" (Lucas, 2008). This orientation made *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* not merely a repository of *hadith* but a practical reference work for jurists (al-Mubarakfuri, 1963).

This context had direct implications for the construction of al-Tirmidhi's methodology, most notably in three respects: first, the emergence of a moderate (*wasatiyyah*) approach, neither extremely strict in *isnad* selection nor lax without standards (Ibn Rajab, 1987); second, the integration of *riwayah* and *dirayah*, treating *hadith* not merely as historical data but as normative sources requiring interpretation (Ibn al-Salah, 1986; Lucas, 2008); and third, a relativization of *isnad* authority, whereby the validity of a *hadith* was determined not solely by its chain of transmission but also by scholarly acceptance and legal practice (Hallaq, 1997). These same implications, however, open the methodology to critique: the integration of *hadith* and *fiqh* carries the risk of bias, particularly where the assessment of a *hadith* is shaped by the preferences of a particular *madhhab*. Al-Tirmidhi's methodology thus reflects, simultaneously, the strengths and the limitations of a contextual approach to *hadith* studies (Dickinson, 2001; Brown, 2009).

The Compilation Process of *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*

In compiling *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, al-Tirmidhi adopted a thematic arrangement based on *abwab fihiyyah* (legal chapters), reflecting the work's practical orientation as a reference for legal reasoning (*istinbat*). Unlike the *musnad* model, which is organized by narrator, this thematic structure allowed readers—jurists in particular—to access *hadith* directly according to specific legal needs. The structure itself confirms that *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* was conceived not merely as a documentary work but as an applied and normative text (Brown, 2009; Hallaq, 1997).

Each chapter of *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* typically contains three core elements: the *hadith* transmitted with its full *isnad*, establishing its textual authority (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; Ibn al-Salah, 1986); an assessment of *hadith* quality—*sahih*, *hasan*, *gharib*, or combinations thereof (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Dickinson, 2001); and commentary relating the *hadith* to scholarly practice, connecting the text to the realities of *fiqh* (Lucas, 2008; Kamali, 2005). This tripartite structure reflects the integration of *riwayah* and *dirayah* and shows that al-Tirmidhi consciously built a methodology oriented not only toward transmission but also toward interpretation and application (Lucas, 2008; Brown, 2009).

A closer reading of the compilation process suggests several methodological stages. First, al-Tirmidhi gathered *hadith* from the many teachers and chains of transmission he encountered during his scholarly travels, but he did not include every report he knew; rather,

he applied a process of selection. In his introduction, he affirms that the hadith included in his collection were the product of careful scholarly deliberation (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). Unlike al-Bukhari, who applied extremely strict criteria—such as the requirement of documented contact (liqa') between successive narrators—al-Tirmidhi appears more inclusive in accepting narrations, particularly within the hasan category, indicating that his selection process considered factors beyond rigid isnad criteria alone (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Brown, 2009).

Second, following selection, hadith were arranged into fiqh chapters such as tahara (purification), salah (prayer), and zakah (almsgiving). This classification was not merely technical but reflected the underlying juristic framework of the work (Hallaq, 1997; Kamali, 2005). The structure of Sunan al-Tirmidhi thus implicitly represents a "map of Islamic law" built on a foundation of hadith, showing that al-Tirmidhi was not a neutral compiler but actively constructed meaning through thematic organization (Brown, 2009).

Third, one of the most distinctive features of al-Tirmidhi's methodology is his habitual grading of hadith quality, using terms such as sahih, hasan, gharib, and hasan sahih (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Dickinson, 2001). This practice shows that al-Tirmidhi did not simply present data but engaged in critical evaluation. As discussed above, however, his use of this terminology was not always consistent, which has generated ongoing scholarly debate (Lucas, 2008; Brown, 2009).

Fourth, and most distinctive among the classical hadith collections, is al-Tirmidhi's inclusion of commentary linking hadith to scholarly practice. He frequently records juristic opinions, differences among the madhhabs, and the degree to which a given hadith was acted upon in practice (Kamali, 2005; Lucas, 2008). Statements such as wa 'alayhi al-'amal 'inda ahl al-'ilm serve as key indicators that he evaluated hadith not only by isnad but also by their practical reception (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963).

Al-Tirmidhi himself states that his collection was compiled through a rigorous process of selection, while remaining attentive to the practical needs of the community. This statement contains two seemingly contradictory dimensions: an ideal dimension (methodological rigor) and a pragmatic dimension (accommodation of fiqh needs) (Brown, 2009; Hallaq, 1997). The tension between these two dimensions is key to understanding al-Tirmidhi's methodology: on one hand, he sought to maintain scientific rigor in hadith criticism; on the other, he wanted to ensure that the hadith he presented carried practical value for legal application. From a critical standpoint, this can be read as a form of "methodological compromise" (Lucas, 2008).

The structure of Sunan al-Tirmidhi is thus not merely a mode of presentation but a representation of al-Tirmidhi's way of thinking about hadith. Each element carries an epistemological function: the isnad guarantees the authority of transmission, the quality assessment provides epistemic classification, and the scholarly commentary connects text to practice (Ibn al-Salah, 1986; Lucas, 2008). The work can therefore be understood as a multi-layered text, in which each layer contributes to the reader's understanding of the hadith (Brown, 2009).

The compilation process carries several important implications: an expansion of the function of hadith collections, from documentation to instruments of legal analysis and application (Brown, 2009); a strengthening of the integrative approach, combining riwayat, dirayah, and fiqh (Hallaq, 1997; Kamali, 2005); the emergence of methodological subjectivity, particularly in the assessment of hadith quality (Dickinson, 2001); and a contribution to the development of hadith science, particularly in the classification of hadith through the concept of hasan (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Lucas, 2008). At the same time, these implications open space for critique, especially regarding the potential for bias in the selection and evaluation of hadith. In other words, the strength of al-Tirmidhi's methodology is simultaneously its point of vulnerability (Brown, 2009; Dickinson, 2001).

Case Study: The Hadith on Intention (Niyah)

One hadith frequently used to illustrate al-Tirmidhi's methodology is the hadith on intention:

عَنْ عُمَرَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّةِ وَلِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهَاجَرْتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَتَرَوُّجُهَا فَهَاجَرْتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ

"On the authority of 'Umar, that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'Actions are but by intentions, and every person shall have only that which he intended. Whoever emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger, his emigration is for Allah and His Messenger; and whoever emigrates for worldly gain or a woman he wishes to marry, his emigration is for that to which he emigrated.'" (Narrated by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and the four remaining compilers of the Six Books)

This hadith is regarded as one of the most fundamental in Islam; some scholars consider it among the foundational principles of the religion (*usul al-din*) (al-Nawawi, 1995; Ibn Rajab, 1987). In Sunan al-Tirmidhi, this hadith is graded *hasan sahih* (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.; al-Mubarakfuri, 1963). This grading, methodologically, opens an important avenue of analysis, as it reflects both the distinctive character and the epistemological difficulties inherent in al-Tirmidhi's approach (Lucas, 2008; Brown, 2009).

The hadith is transmitted through an especially strong chain: 'Umar ibn al-Khattab → 'Alqamah ibn Waqqas → Muhammad ibn Ibrahim → Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari. In the tradition of hadith criticism, this chain is recognized as one of the soundest of all *isnads* (*min asahh al-asanid*) (Ibn al-Salah, 1986; al-Nawawi, 1995). Accordingly, in many other hadith collections—including Sahih al-Bukhari—this hadith is classified unambiguously as *sahih* (al-Bukhari, n.d.; Brown, 2009). Al-Tirmidhi, however, does not describe it simply as *sahih*; he uses the compound term *hasan sahih*. Herein lies both the distinctiveness and the methodological problem of his grading system (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Dickinson, 2001).

Al-Tirmidhi's use of the term *hasan sahih* raises several epistemological questions. The first concerns categorical ambiguity: *sahih* and *hasan* are, in principle, two distinct categories within the hierarchy of hadith quality. A *sahih* hadith has a strong chain, trustworthy (*thiqah*) narrators, and is free of hidden defects (*'illah*) (Ibn al-Salah, 1986), whereas a *hasan* hadith has a reasonably strong chain but ranks below the level of *sahih* (Ibn Rajab, 1987). Combining the two terms therefore creates ambiguity as to whether the hadith belongs to the highest grade (*sahih*) or an intermediate grade (*hasan*) (Dickinson, 2001; Lucas, 2008).

The second concerns scholarly interpretation. Scholars have offered several explanations of this compound term: a dual-chain interpretation, suggesting the hadith has two transmission paths, one *sahih* and one *hasan* (Ibn Rajab, 1987); an intensifying interpretation, in which the term is used to reinforce a hadith's high status (al-Mubarakfuri, 1963); and a terminological-inconsistency interpretation, which treats the compound grading as evidence that the classification system had not yet fully matured (Dickinson, 2001; Brown, 2009). No single consensus exists regarding the meaning of this term, which points to a genuine conceptual problem within al-Tirmidhi's methodology (Lucas, 2008).

Beyond the question of *isnad*, al-Tirmidhi also evaluated this hadith in terms of its function within Islamic law. The hadith on intention carries broad implications across worship (prayer, fasting, almsgiving), transactions, ethics, and spirituality, and is frequently invoked as a basis for determining the validity of religious acts (al-Nawawi, 1995; Kamali, 2005). Al-Tirmidhi's assessment of this hadith was thus grounded not only in the strength of its *isnad* but also in its normative significance (Lucas, 2008)—evidence that his methodology was not purely "neutral-descriptive" but also "normative-applied" (Brown, 2009).

The grading of *hasan sahih* reflects the flexibility of al-Tirmidhi's methodology: he was not bound by rigid categorization but allowed room for nuance in hadith evaluation (Ibn Rajab, 1987; Lucas, 2008). This flexibility, however, has two sides. As a strength, it produces a more adaptive assessment (Brown, 2009), accommodates the complexity of *isnad* configurations (Lucas, 2008), and leaves interpretive space for the reader. As a weakness, it can blur scientific categorical boundaries (Dickinson, 2001), complicate methodological standardization, and open space for subjectivity. From the standpoint of modern epistemology, this approach can be criticized for falling short of the principles of consistency and definitional clarity (Brown, 2009).

Analysis of this case reveals several important features of al-Tirmidhi's broader methodology: classification is not always rigid but is flexible and context-sensitive (Lucas, 2008); *isnad* and function are integrated, so that transmission is evaluated alongside usefulness (Kamali, 2005); scholars play an active interpretive role in relation to hadith (Brown,

2009); and al-Tirmidhi's overall tendency is moderate—neither as strict as al-Bukhari nor excessively lenient (Ibn Rajab, 1987). Critically, the use of the term *hasan sahih* in this hadith can be read in two ways simultaneously: as a sign of methodological innovation, introducing a flexible evaluative category; and as a sign of epistemological difficulty, reflecting the absence of a rigid and consistent definition (Dickinson, 2001; Lucas, 2008). This case therefore stands as a microcosm of al-Tirmidhi's methodology as a whole: innovative and integrative, yet not without conceptual ambiguity (Brown, 2009).

Critical Synthesis

Taken together, the findings above point to several defining features of al-Tirmidhi's methodology: a practical and communicative orientation, evidenced by his systematic use of the term *hasan*, his integration of hadith with *fiqh*, his inclusion of scholarly commentary, and his consistent grading of hadith by quality. At the same time, terms such as *hasan sahih* generate scholarly debate precisely because they lack a single agreed-upon definition, and a number of scholars judge al-Tirmidhi to have been more lenient than al-Bukhari in accepting hadith. Not every grading in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* is accompanied by detailed *isnad* analysis, leaving room for divergent interpretation. Even so, the principal strength of his methodology lies in its capacity to integrate hadith with juristic practice—a quality rarely matched in other classical hadith collections. On balance, al-Tirmidhi's methodology can best be categorized as a moderate (*wasatiyyah*) approach, situated between the strict standards of al-Bukhari and the greater flexibility found among other scholars—a positioning that continues to make his work relevant to the practical study of hadith.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The hadith methodology of Imam al-Tirmidhi, as embodied in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, displays a distinctive character that combines hadith criticism with *fiqh* analysis. His contribution to the development of hadith classification—particularly the concept of *hasan* hadith—is substantial. Critically, however, the methodology retains notable weaknesses, especially in terminological consistency and in the depth of its *isnad* criticism. The study of al-Tirmidhi's methodology therefore remains relevant, both for understanding the historical development of hadith scholarship and for informing the continued advancement of contemporary hadith studies.

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