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## THE HISTORICAL-EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE HASAN HADITH: Al-Tirmidhi's Methodological Innovation

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### Abstract

This study examines the historical context and intellectual rationale behind Imam al-Tirmidhi's formulation of the *hasan* hadith category, a significant methodological innovation that emerged in response to the limitations of the prevailing *sahih–da'if* dichotomy in the formative period of Hadith scholarship. The research focuses on the dynamics of hadith transmission during the second and third centuries AH, a period characterized by the expansion of transmission networks, varying levels of narrator reliability, and the circulation of numerous reports that could not be adequately classified as either fully authentic or entirely weak. Employing a historical and comparative approach through an extensive review of primary and secondary sources, this study investigates the disciplinary needs that motivated al-Tirmidhi's conceptualization of the *hasan* category and explores its role in organizing the increasingly heterogeneous body of

hadith literature. The findings demonstrate that the emergence of the *hasan* category constituted a methodological response to the intellectual realities of the Abbasid era, providing an intermediate classification for narrations that occupied a position between acceptance and rejection. This innovation clarified evaluative boundaries, facilitated a more systematic management of the expanding hadith corpus, and contributed to the refinement of hadith criticism. The academic contribution of this study lies in its reinterpretation of the *hasan* category not merely as a technical classification but as an adaptive epistemological framework shaped by historical necessity, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the relationship between socio-intellectual developments and the evolution of *‘ilm mustalah al-hadith*.

**Keywords:** Hadith Historicity, Hadith Classification, Hadith Methodology, *Hasan* Hadith, Imam al-Tirmidzi.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji konteks historis dan rasionalitas intelektual di balik perumusan kategori hadis *hasan* oleh Imam al-Tirmidzi, yang merupakan salah satu inovasi metodologis penting dalam perkembangan ilmu hadis. Kategori ini muncul sebagai respons terhadap keterbatasan dikotomi *sahih–da‘if* yang mendominasi fase awal kajian hadis. Fokus penelitian diarahkan pada dinamika transmisi hadis pada abad ke-2 dan ke-3 H, suatu periode yang ditandai oleh meluasnya jaringan periwayatan, beragamnya tingkat kredibilitas para perawi, serta beredarnya banyak riwayat yang tidak dapat diklasifikasikan secara memadai sebagai hadis yang sepenuhnya sahih maupun sepenuhnya da‘if. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan komparatif melalui telaah literatur terhadap sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder yang relevan, penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan kebutuhan keilmuan yang melatarbelakangi lahirnya kategori *hasan* serta menganalisis perannya dalam menata korpus hadis yang semakin heterogen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemunculan kategori *hasan* merupakan solusi metodologis terhadap realitas intelektual pada era Abbasiyah, dengan menyediakan ruang klasifikasi menengah bagi riwayat-riwayat yang berada di antara penerimaan dan penolakan. Inovasi ini memperjelas batas-batas evaluatif dalam kritik hadis, memfasilitasi pengelolaan korpus hadis yang terus

berkembang secara lebih sistematis, serta berkontribusi pada penyempurnaan metodologi kritik hadis. Kontribusi akademik penelitian ini terletak pada reinterpretasi kategori *hasan* bukan semata-mata sebagai klasifikasi teknis, melainkan sebagai kerangka epistemologis yang adaptif dan lahir dari kebutuhan historis, sehingga memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai hubungan antara perkembangan sosial-intelektual dengan evolusi *'ilm mustalah al-hadith*.

**Kata kunci:** Historisitas Hadis, Klasifikasi Hadis, Metodologi Hadis, Hadis *Hasan*, Imam al-Tirmidzi.

## Introduction

The science of hadith holds a very important role in Islam, not only as a complement to the Qur'an but also as a guide, an explanation, and a second source of knowledge (Nurmilasari & Muhammad Ali, 2025, p. 170). Therefore, the *ulama* developed a classification system for hadith to assess the quality of narrations; for example, hadith are divided into the categories of *shahih*, *hasan*, and *dha'if* based on the strength of the chain of narration and the clarity of the *matan* (Alawi, 2000, p. 53). This classification approach aims to facilitate the understanding of Islamic teachings and maintain their integrity by preventing the spread of false or weak hadith.

In the early history of the development of the science of hadith, the official classification only recognized two levels: *shahih* hadith (truly strong) and *dha'if* hadith (weak) (Baiquni, 2021, p. 69). The official codification of hadith began during the era of Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz in the early 2nd century H, when efforts to compile and document hadith were systematically advocated (Salim, 2019, p. 16). However, the *shahih-dha'if* dichotomy was deemed inadequate because there were hadiths with a moderate level of reliability that were not accommodated. This situation subsequently raised awareness of the need for an additional category between the two ends of the spectrum.

Imam Abu Isa al-Tirmidzi (w. 279 H) took an innovative step by introducing the new category of hadith *hasan* as a quality level between *shahih* and *dha'if* (Baiquni, 2021, p. 69). Since his time, the classification of hadith quality has been officially recognized as consisting of three levels: *shahih*, *hasan*, and *dha'if*. Al-Tirmidzi's contribution shifted the

traditional paradigm of the science of hadith; for example, sources mention that the term *hasan* which he introduced was later standardized by subsequent generations of *ulama* and became an integral part of hadith quality classification.

Several previous studies have discussed aspects of the development of the science of hadith in a more general manner (Nurmilasari & Muhammad Ali, 2025, p. 173). presents a systematic periodization of the history of hadith growth up to the stage of organized codification (Salim, 2019, p. 16). elaborates on the process of formal hadith codification during the era of Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz (Yusuf, 2018, p. 103). identifies the main phases in the development of hadith methodology, particularly the era of hadith science compilation in the 3rd century H. In addition, several studies highlight the technical criteria of hadith *hasan*, for example the concepts of *hasan li-dzatih* and *li-ghairih*, but these studies are generally descriptive and have not focused on the historical or epistemological aspects of the emergence of the *hasan* category (Afabih and Junianto 2022, p. 112; Snober 2020; Fatihunnada 2017, p. 345).

Based on the existing literatures, no study has comprehensively examined the historical background and epistemological foundations underlying Imam al-Tirmidhi's formulation of the *hasan* hadith category. While previous scholarship has generally focused on the technical definitions and criteria of *hasan* hadith, limited attention has been given to the historical circumstances and intellectual motivations that prompted the emergence of this classificatory innovation. Accordingly, the central question of this study is why and how Imam al-Tirmidhi introduced the *hasan* category within the framework of hadith criticism.

This research aims to investigate the historical and methodological factors that shaped the development of this category and to compare al-Tirmidhi's approach with the classificatory methods employed by earlier hadith scholars. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a historical and comparative analytical approach based on an extensive review of primary sources, including hadith compilations and the works of al-Tirmidhi, as well as relevant secondary academic literature. The discussion is organized into four main sections: first, an overview of the principal hadith classifications (*sahih*, *da'if*, and *hasan*); second, an analysis of the historical context and scholarly needs that led to the introduction of the *hasan* category; third, an examination of al-Tirmidhi's criteria and

methodology for identifying *hasan* hadith; and fourth, an assessment of the influence of this category on the subsequent development of *‘ilm mustalah al-hadith*. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolution of hadith criticism and the role of al-Tirmidhi in shaping its methodological foundations.

## Discussion

### *Development of Hadith Categories Before Imam al-Tirmidzi*

In the early phase of the development of *‘ulum al-hadith*, scholars only recognized two main categories of narration authenticity: *shahih* and *dha’if*. The codification of hadith began to be intensified during the era of Caliph ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in the early 2nd century H, when he ordered the systematic compilation of narrations to preserve the Prophetic heritage from distortion (Watukila, 2024, p. 227). At this stage, the *shahih-dha’if* classification was applied simply; narrations that met the requirements were accepted as *shahih*, while those that did not meet the qualifications were considered *dha’if* and were not used as evidence.

Over time, these two categories were no longer considered adequate to describe the diversity of hadith quality. A number of narrations emerged that did not meet the standards of *shahih* but also did not have serious weaknesses. Historical facts demonstrate that jurists continued to use some of these types of narrations for the purpose of legal reasoning, particularly during the time of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal who frequently used hadith at an intermediate level as evidence (Ihrom et al., 2024, p. 171). This reality indicates an early awareness that hadith quality could not be reduced to only two levels. Thus, the epistemological need to introduce a new category grew stronger.

A *shahih* hadith is understood as a narration that fulfills the strictest requirements in the science of hadith: a connected chain of transmission (*ittisal*), narrators possessing moral integrity (*‘adalah*) and strong memorization capacity (*dabt*), and a text free from anomalies (*syadz*) and hidden defects (*‘illah*) (Nuraini, 2024, p. 60). Due to the stringency of these requirements, the collections of *Shahih* al-Bukhari and *Shahih* Muslim compiled only a small portion of the entire Prophetic tradition. The high nature of this standard indicates that not all circulating narrations could attain the degree of *shahih*.

Conversely, a *dha'if* hadith is a narration that does not meet the requirements of an acceptable (*maqbul*) hadith, either due to weakness in the chain of transmission (*sanad*), instability in a narrator's memory, indications of a hidden defect (*'illah*), or anomalies in the text (*matan*) (Alawi, 2000, p. 66). However, Hadith scholars have noted that the categories of *dha'if* (weak) hadith are highly diverse. In fact, Muhammad as-Simahi classified them into as many as 500 categories. This indicates that the criteria for weakness (*da'f*) are not monolithic. Instead, they manifest as various forms that can appear either in the chain of transmission (*sanad*) or in the text (*matn*) of the hadith (Nurudin, 2015, p. 389). Some scholars permit the use of mildly *dha'if* hadith in the context of virtuous deeds (*fadha'il al-a'mal*), provided they are not used for establishing legal rulings (Rambe et al., 2023, p. 267). This differentiation demonstrates that hadith quality possesses a broader spectrum than merely *shahih* and *dha'if*.

### *Historical Context and the Need for the Hasan Category*

The development of hadith transmission in the 2nd and 3rd centuries H occurred under highly dynamic socio-political conditions, creating an urgent need for more structured narration assessment. During that period, the expansion of Islamic territories produced wide-ranging and non-uniform networks of transmission; hadiths circulated through various cities with narrators of differing authority (Rachman et al., 2025, pp. 85-91). In this situation, the stability of narration quality could no longer be guaranteed by the authority of local communities as it was during the era of the companions.

On the other hand, the emergence of political and sectarian interests since the Umayyad era, peaking during the Abbasid period, created an environment vulnerable to hadith fabrication (*Optimizing Islamic Education Towards the Golden Era of Indonesia*, n.d., p. 21). Narrations supporting political agendas, power legitimacy, or theological propaganda were produced and disseminated by certain groups (Miski, 2022, p. 12-13). This phenomenon generated academic concern among hadith scholars, as the authority of the *Sunnah* as a reference for law and theology was threatened by narrations mixed between the authentic and the fabricated.

In response to this situation, early-generation hadith experts tightened the standards for citing the chain of transmission (*sanad*) and began systematically

researching the character of the narrators. The statement of Ibn Sirin (w. 110 H) regarding the obligation to examine the *sanad* after the occurrence of civil strife (*fitnah*) demonstrates how the verification process became the primary approach to control invalid narrations (Gültekin, 2020, p. 341). This critical tradition was continuously refined by subsequent generations, including Imam Malik and Imam Shafi'i, who emphasized the importance of rejecting narrations from defective narrators, even though they had not yet formed an intermediate category beyond the dichotomy of accepted and rejected.

However, the intellectual reality during the Abbasid era demonstrated that the circulating narrations could not be entirely categorized into two extreme classifications. Many hadiths did not meet the strict criteria of scholars like al-Bukhari, yet they did not exhibit fatal weaknesses that would warrant their classification as rejected narrations. In practice, some jurists continued to refer to such narrations when no stronger evidence was available, provided their weaknesses were not substantive and supporting transmission paths existed (Fian & Munawir, 2023, p. 33). It was this intermediate spectrum that demanded a more proportional category than simply classifying them as *dha'if*.

Imam Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidzi lived during a phase when the science of hadith criticism had matured, sources of narration were abundant, and verification methodologies had become increasingly strict (Baiquni, 2021, pp. 70-71). Within this epistemic landscape, he realized that the two traditional categories were no longer capable of accurately reflecting the variation in narration quality. Many hadiths were, in practice, used by previous jurists and hadith scholars, yet could not be classified as *shahih* without loosening the standards. Simultaneously, categorizing them as purely *dha'if* was inconsistent with their epistemic value.

Therefore, al-Tirmidzi's step of introducing the *hasan* category was a methodological response firmly rooted in the scholarly reality of his time. This category enabled a more nuanced reading of narrations that did not meet the highest standards but still possessed sufficient weight to be used selectively. Through its systematic application in *al-Jami' al-Tirmidzi*, he operationally distinguished between narrations that were slightly weakened, narrations that had corroborating evidence, and narrations worthy of

acceptance with a certain level of caution. Thus, the emergence of the *hasan* category was not merely terminological but rather a scholarly solution to the accumulation of intermediate-grade narrations that could not be forced into the two classical poles.

This historical context demonstrates that al-Tirmidzi's innovation emerged from a disciplinary need: to reorganize the highly heterogeneous landscape of narration, to establish clear boundaries between narrations worthy of consideration and those that are not, and to provide an analytical tool for managing the vast corpus of the hadith heritage. He positioned himself as the formulator of a new framework that clarified the spectrum of narration quality, thereby providing the tradition of hadith criticism with a previously unaccommodated intermediate category a step that was subsequently accepted and developed by scholars of later generations.

Nevertheless, Ibn Rajab and several later hadith scholars highlighted that the use of terms such as *hasan*, *hasan shahih*, and *hasan gharib* was not always consistent, thereby creating ambiguity in understanding the level of a narration's authenticity. They observed that al-Tirmidhi sometimes categorized narrations with minor weaknesses as *hasan*, while on other occasions he employed the same term for chains of transmission that were in fact strong (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 11). Such inconsistency led some scholars to call for a re-examination of his evaluations, particularly given that he often included critical remarks about the chain of transmission after having classified it as *hasan*.

Similar critiques have emerged from modern scholars, albeit with a more analytical approach. Some contemporary researchers have demonstrated that al-Tirmidhi's definition of *hasan* does not entirely align with the definition later standardized by later scholars (*muta'akhkhirin*), particularly concerning the conditions regarding the strength of a narrator's memory (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 11). Others have observed that the term *hasan gharib* in al-Tirmidhi's work is often misinterpreted because its usage does not consistently indicate weakness, yet neither does it provide assurance of strength; consequently, modern scholars have emphasized the need for caution in treating al-Tirmidhi's *hasan* classification as a definitive conclusion without additional verification of the chain of transmission and its supporting paths (Kamil, 2024, p. 140). Nevertheless, such critiques do not negate al-Tirmidhi's significant

role in shaping the framework of hadith classification; rather, they affirm that his conception of the term *hasan* must be understood within its historical and methodological context, and not solely through the lens of later hadith standards. Consequently, the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding al-Tirmidhi's conception of *hasan* highlights not a methodological deficiency, but rather the dynamic evolution of hadith criticism, underscoring the enduring relevance of his contribution as a foundational bridge between the formative and classical phases of *'ilm mustalah al-hadith*.

### *Methods and Criteria for Evaluating Hadith Hasan According to Imam al-Tirmidzi*

The concept of hadith *hasan* formulated by Imam al-Tirmidzi constitutes a significant milestone in the history of hadith criticism, as for the first time an intermediate category was operationally standardized. In *al-Jami' al-Shahih*, al-Tirmidzi affirmed that a hadith he graded as *hasan* is a narration whose "*isnad* is *hasan* according to us," an expression marking a systematic effort to fill the epistemological gap between *shahih* and *dha'if* (Anam & Sulaeman, 2023, p. 63). This category emerged from the needs of hadith criticism in the 3rd century of Hijra when the scholars compiled thousands of narrations of varying quality that could not be adequately accommodated by the classical *shahih-dha'if* dichotomy.

According to al-Tirmidzi, the determination of *hasan* quality rests on three fundamental principles: first, the *sanad* of the hadith must be free from narrators accused of lying (*laysa fi isnadihi man yuttahamu bi al-kadzib*). This standard indicates that the integrity of the narrator is a minimum requirement, even though their memorization strength does not need to be at the same level as the narrators of *shahih* hadith. Second, the narration must not contain any anomaly (*syadz*). This stipulation underscores al-Tirmidzi's commitment to transmission consistency, so that a narration cannot be accepted if it contradicts stronger hadith. Third, the hadith ideally has other supporting paths (*yurwa min ghayri wajh*) (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 11). The existence of *mutaba'at* or *shawahid* provides additional validity to a narration with a moderately graded *sanad*.

These three elements demonstrate that al-Tirmidzi's assessment was combinative: a narration obtains *hasan* status not only due to the strength of its narrators, but also because of supporting transmissions and textual harmonization. However, al-Tirmidzi did not always require supporting paths; sometimes he graded a solitary narration as *hasan gharib* when its single chain was substantively sound (Baiquni, 2021, p. 79). This flexibility gave rise to terms such as *hasan shahih* and *hasan gharib*, reflecting the dynamic nature of assessment based on combined aspects of the chain of transmission. Later scholars endeavored to explain these combined terms, for example Ibn Daqiq al-'Id who understood that the two labels refer to two different quality aspects within single hadith.

Al-Tirmidzi's orientation extended beyond mere chain evaluation to encompass legal practice. In *al-'Ilal*, he emphasized that the hadiths in his work represent narrations practiced by scholars of Islamic knowledge, except for two hadiths whose defects he explained (al-Tirmidhi, 1409, p. 21). This demonstrates that the *hasan* grade in his perspective was not merely a technical category, but rather an indicator that such hadiths possessed juridical authority and were recognized by the community of jurists. Thus, his criteria reflect the relationship between transmission validity and socio-intellectual acceptance within the Islamic legal tradition.

Sulayman al-Khattabi affirmed that a hadith *hasan* is a narration whose transmission origins are known and which is widely accepted by *ulama* and *fuqaha*' (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 11). Al-Khattabi's focus on the aspect of transmission popularity indicates that hadith quality is not determined solely by technical sanad aspects, but also by the authority of acceptance within the scholarly community. Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali deepened this by explaining that al-Tirmidzi's definition opens a broad space for narrations with minor weaknesses, provided the weakness does not originate from a narrator accused of lying and the narration is supported by other paths (Baiquni, 2021, p. 79). This analysis demonstrates that al-Tirmidzi adopted a more inclusive approach compared to later scholars who tended to be more restrictive.

Historically, al-Suyuti noted that the term *hasan* before al-Tirmidzi's time lacked a standardized technical definition (Suhendra, 2015, pp. 350-351). Scholars such as al-Shafi'i and al-Bukhari used the term *hasan* in its linguistic sense meaning "good," not as a category of *sanad* criticism. It was only after al-Tirmidzi provided an explicit formulation

and applied it extensively in his hadith works that the term *hasan* evolved into a standard terminology in *musthalah al-hadith*. His influence is evident from the attention of subsequent scholars and their efforts to reconcile al-Tirmidzi's distinctive terms with the increasingly established methodology of hadith criticism.

Continuing this development, later scholars such as Ibn al-Salah sought to eliminate the ambiguity surrounding the term *hasan* by synthesizing the various specifications proposed by al-Tirmidhi, al-Khattabi, and Ibn al-Jawzi (Gümüş, 2021, p. 1233). Furthermore, they distinguished *hasan* hadith into two categories: *hasan li-dhatihi* (*hasan* in itself), which refers to a hadith whose narrators are characterized by both integrity and a moderate degree of accuracy; and *hasan li-ghayrihi* (*hasan* due to external factors), which refers to a weak hadith that becomes strengthened due to the existence of corroborating evidence (Maheningsih, 2023, pp. 72-73). This classification represents an effort to systematically reorganize the practice already implemented by al-Tirmidhi, even though al-Tirmidhi himself did not establish such a terminological division. Scholars such as al-'Iraqi, al-Nawawi, and al-Suyuti solidified this definition, thereby establishing it as the terminology used to the present day.

Thus, Imam al-Tirmidzi's method for evaluating hadith *hasan* occupies a strategically important historical position. He not only introduced a new category but also formulated an evaluation model that combines narrator integrity, textual consistency, and transmission support. This approach became a crucial foundation in the development of hadith sciences and shaped the methodological framework used by *muhaddithin* in assessing narrations situated between accepted and rejected status.

### *An Example of the Application of Imam al-Tirmidhi's Theory: The Hadith on the Prohibition of Debating*

An examination of Imam al-Tirmidhi's application of hadith criticism methodology is evident in his analysis of the tradition prohibiting debate, as narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas. This tradition is documented in both *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (no. 1995) and *Al-Adab al-Mufrad* (no. 394), presenting an identical matn (text): the prohibition for a Muslim against engaging in argumentation with his brother, indulging in excessive levity, and making promises which are not subsequently fulfilled. Both

compilations transmit this hadith via the chain of narrators (isnad) comprising Laith bin Abi Sulaim, from 'Abd al-Malik, from 'Ikrimah, from Ibn Abbas.

The Text of the Hadith According to the Recension of *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*:

حَدَّثَنَا زِيَادُ بْنُ أَيُّوبَ الْبَغْدَادِيُّ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا الْمُحَارِبِيُّ، عَنِ اللَّيْثِ وَهُوَ ابْنُ أَبِي سَلَيْمٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الْمَلِكِ، عَنْ عِكْرِمَةَ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: لَا تُمَارِ أَخَاكَ، وَلَا تُمَارِضْهُ، وَلَا تَعِدْهُ مَوْعِدًا فَتُخْلِفْهُ: هَذَا حَدِيثٌ غَرِيبٌ لَا نَعْرِفُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ هَذَا الْوَجْهِ وَعَبْدُ الْمَلِكِ عِنْدِي هُوَ ابْنُ أَبِي بَشِيرٍ. (Tirmidzi, 1975, j. 4, p. 359).

*Ziyād ibn Ayyūb al-Baghdādī narrated to us, saying: al-Muḥāribī narrated to us, from al-Layth, who is Ibn Abī Sulaym, from 'Abd al-Malik, from 'Ikrimah, from Ibn 'Abbās, that the Prophet ﷺ said: Do not argue contentiously with your brother, do not joke with him excessively, and do not make him a promise that you fail to fulfill. Al-Tirmidhī commented: This is a gharīb (solitary) hadith. We do not know it except through this chain of transmission, and in my view, 'Abd al-Malik is Ibn Abī Bashīr.*

The Text of the Hadith According to the Recension of *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الْمُحَارِبِيُّ، عَنْ كَيْثٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الْمَلِكِ، عَنْ عِكْرِمَةَ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: لَا تُمَارِ أَخَاكَ، وَلَا تُمَارِضْهُ، وَلَا تَعِدْهُ مَوْعِدًا فَتُخْلِفْهُ. (Al-Bukhari, 1998, p. 47).

*'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd narrated to us, saying: 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Muḥāribī narrated to us, from Layth, from 'Abd al-Malik, from 'Ikrimah, from Ibn 'Abbās, who said: The Messenger of Allah said: Do not engage in disputation with your brother, do not joke with him excessively, and do not make him a promise that you fail to fulfill.*

Imam al-Tirmidhi assessed this hadith as *hasan gharib* (fair but solitary). This assessment reflects al-Tirmidhi's methodological character, which accommodates narrators deemed truthful (*saduq*) despite weaknesses in their memory, as long as their narrations do not contain serious irregularities (*shudhudh*) or hidden defects (*'illah*) that would compromise the hadith's quality ("Corroboration of Hadith Hassan Legaeri Considering GreatMuhaddiseen's Statements" 2021). The term *gharib* employed by him was not intended as a negative judgment, but rather to indicate that the hadith originated

through a particular chain lacking strong *mutaba'at* (follow-up chains) or *shawahid* (corroborating evidence). Al-Tirmidhi nonetheless accepted the hadith based on his assessment that the narrator's weakness did not reach the level warranting rejection, and that the *matn* (text) of the hadith itself aligned with the general principles of Islamic etiquette (*adab*).

In contrast to al-Tirmidhi, al-Albani deemed the chain of transmission (*sanad*) of this hadith as *da'if* (weak). His evaluation was primarily based on criticism of Laith bin Abi Sulaim's memory quality, whom several scholars noted had experienced *ikhtilat* (memory deterioration) in his later years. Al-Albani applied stricter standards of *sanad* criticism, particularly concerning the stability of a narrator's memory (Fadhil et al. 2023). Consequently, narrations from transmitters who suffered memory impairment during a certain period are considered ineligible for acceptance without corroboration from other chains.

The accounts concerning Laith bin Abi Sulaim's quality are also discussed by other *rijal* scholars such as al-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar (I. H. al-'Asqalani 2014). Both affirmed that he was a truthful narrator but his memory was unstable. These observations indicate that his position falls within an intermediate category: he cannot be outright rejected, yet cannot be ranked among the *mutqin* (narrators with strong memory). This data explains how scholars employing different methodologies can arrive at divergent assessments of the same hadith.

The differing evaluations between al-Tirmidhi and al-Albani in this case illustrate two distinct methodological approaches. Al-Tirmidhi tends to be more flexible, emphasizing the narrator's truthfulness and the relevance of the *matn*, thereby allowing the hadith to remain acceptable with the status of *hasan gharib*. Meanwhile, al-Albani emphasizes greater technical precision regarding memory reliability, resulting in a *da'if* assessment. Through this example, it becomes evident that al-Tirmidhi's theory of hadith criticism operates by considering the balance between a narrator's truthfulness, the condition of the *sanad*, and the coherence of meaning, whereas contemporary critical approaches place stricter emphasis on the stability of a narrator's memory.

### *Comparative Analysis with Scholars ('Ulama) After Imam al-Tirmidzi*

Imam al-Tirmidzi's position as the primary formulator of the *hasan* category establishes him as a central reference in the history of hadith criticism development. However, the *hasan* concept he pioneered did not remain merely as an individual innovation; subsequent scholars reproduced, expanded, and even revised the understanding of al-Tirmidzi, causing the definition of *hasan* to evolve into a more established disciplinary construction. This comparative analysis is crucial for assessing how al-Tirmidzi's thought engaged in dialogue with later generations while simultaneously tracing the evolution of hadith methodology from the classical period toward the period of *musthalah al-hadith* codification.

In the initial stage, scholar's contemporary with al-Tirmidzi such as Abu Sulayman al-Khattabi (w. 388 H) did not dispute al-Tirmidzi's construction of *hasan*, but highlighted its socio-intellectual dimension. According to al-Khattabi, hadith *hasan* is a narration "whose transmission is known and serves as a reference for the community of jurists." His emphasis on *qabul al-'amal* (practical acceptance by legal scholars) indicates that hadith authority is not solely determined by technical standards of chain verification, but also by collective scholarly acceptance (al-Tahhan, 2004, p. 57). Thus, al-Khattabi expanded the scope of *hasan* from merely a transmission category to an indicator of *fiqhi* legitimacy. This confirms that al-Tirmidzi's work represents not only a description of transmission quality but also a reflection of the prevailing '*amal al-fuqaha*' tendencies within Islamic legal practice.

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (w. 795 H) continued this tradition by providing a retrospective analysis of al-Tirmidzi's methodology. He demonstrated that the *hasan* category essentially encompasses narrations that technically possess minor weaknesses, yet remain acceptable when supported by corroborating transmission paths. According to Ibn Rajab, certain leniencies within the *hasan* concept do not signify methodological compromise; rather, they reflect the historical reality that human transmission contains qualitative variations that cannot be reduced into an overly rigid *shahih-dha'if* dichotomy (Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, 1987, p. 606). This is what positions al-Tirmidzi as more flexible compared to later scholars (*'ulama muta'akhkhir*) who subsequently formulated the rules of *hasan* in a much more restrictive manner.

A fundamental development occurred in the 7th century H when Ibn al-Salah al-Sahrazuri (w. 643 H) composed his *Muqaddimah*, which became the primary reference for the discipline of *musthalah al-hadith*. Ibn al-Salah formulated the definition of *hasan* in a terminological and systematic manner through two forms: *hasan li-dzatih* and *hasan li-ghayrihi*. This classification represents a systematization of al-Tirmidzi's practices, although Ibn al-Salah presented it in a more normative form (al-Salah, 1986, p. 37-39). He solidified the concept of *hasan* as a category that could be methodologically tested through explicit criteria a step not formally taken by al-Tirmidzi. Thus, Ibn al-Salah can be viewed as the figure who formalized al-Tirmidzi's legacy within the matured discipline of hadith sciences.

Following Ibn al-Salah, generations of scholars such as al-Nawawi (w. 676 H), al-'Iraqi (w. 806 H), and al-Suyuti (w. 911 H) refined this concept. They accepted Ibn al-Salah's basic framework while still referring to al-Tirmidzi's practices in its application, particularly in understanding distinctive terms like *hasan shahih* and *hasan gharib* (Al-Suyuti, 1996, p. 76-77). Their commentaries demonstrate that the *hasan* category according to al-Tirmidzi possesses historical complexity not fully captured by later classifications, thus requiring re-interpretation to align with the evolved standards of hadith sciences.

During this generation of scholars, conceptual debates emerged regarding the validity, precision, and consistency of the term *hasan* itself. Some scholars viewed al-Tirmidzi's innovation as an urgent scientific necessity because it filled the categorical gap between *shahih* and *dha'if*, particularly within the context of assessing the diversity in narrator quality and the dynamics of hadith transmission. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, for instance, accepted the existence of intermediate-level narrations and developed terminologies such as *shaduq*, *layyin*, and *shalih al-hadith* which align with the spirit of al-Tirmidzi's classification (Yuslem et al., 2024, p. 103).

However, several other scholars criticized the inconsistent usage of this term. Ibn al-Jawzi viewed the term *hasan* as lacking standardized boundaries, thus opening potential for subjectivity, especially with the existence of phrases like *hasan shahih* or *hasan gharib*, which were considered conceptually problematic. Some earlier hadith experts such as Yahya ibn Ma'in and al-Daraqutni did not employ the term *hasan* as a

technical category, leading to the perspective that this term represents a medieval innovation rather than being part of the classical hadith criticism system (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 12).

Amidst these debates, scholars such as al-'Iraqi and Ibn Hajar adopted a compromising position by affirming that *hasan* is a category that developed historically (Wahab, 2023, p. 5). Al-Tirmidzi's practice is understood as a more flexible initial form, while the later concept of *hasan* represents a systematic refinement necessary for disciplinary stability. Thus, these pros and cons do not indicate methodological contradiction, but rather demonstrate that the *hasan* category underwent a gradual process of institutionalization within the treasury of hadith sciences.

Meanwhile, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani provided a compromising approach by critically comparing the quality of hadith *hasan* narrators within the context of a more established *jarh wa ta'dil* system. He affirmed that *hasan* does not merely constitute an intermediate category, but possesses internal quality variations based on the level of *dabt* of its narrators (Bin Yaakob & Binti Shamsudin, 2021, p. 12). Consequently, he positioned the *hasan* category as an analytical instrument that functions not only as an intermediary but also as an indicator of precision in *sanad* classification. This comparative analysis demonstrates that al-Tirmidzi's contribution established the foundation for subsequent developments in hadith methodology. Later scholars did not eliminate al-Tirmidzi's definition, but rather structured, expanded, and adapted it according to the scholarly requirements of their respective periods.

### *The Influence and Significance of the Hasan Category on the Development of Hadith Sciences*

The emergence of the *hasan* category did not conclude as merely a terminological innovation, but rather constituted a turning point that shaped the epistemological structure of hadith sciences in subsequent periods. Prior to al-Tirmidzi, scholars employed a dichotomous scheme of accepted narrations (*shahih*) and rejected narrations (*dha'if*). Al-Tirmidzi's innovation opened a new avenue: a space where narrations that did not meet *shahih* standards yet could not be categorized as *dha'if* found a stable epistemic

position. This space, previously "unnamed," subsequently became the foundation for scholars of hadith sciences.

First, the standardization of terminology within *'ilm mustalah al-hadith* following al-Tirmidhi's scholarship illustrates the extent to which his methodological contribution was institutionally integrated into the discipline. In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn al-Salah formalized the tripartite classification of hadith into *sahih*, *hasan*, and *da'if*, while also establishing the broader distinction between accepted (*maqbul*) and rejected (*mardud*) narrations (al-Salah, 1986, p. 11). Building upon al-Tirmidhi's conceptual framework, he further systematized the category of *hasan* by distinguishing between *hasan li-dhatihi* and *hasan li-ghayrihi*, classifications that continue to constitute a foundational component of hadith studies across the Islamic world. This process represented more than a mere refinement of terminology; it signified the methodological consolidation of al-Tirmidhi's innovation as a practical solution to a longstanding classificatory problem. By providing a coherent framework for evaluating narrations that did not fit neatly into the binary categories of *sahih* and *da'if*, the *hasan* category effectively resolved the ambiguity surrounding a substantial body of intermediate-grade reports and enhanced the analytical precision of hadith criticism.

Second, al-Tirmidzi's innovation stimulated methodological developments among later scholars (*'ulama muta'akhhirin*). Al-'Iraqi, through his *Alfiyyah*, formulated concise rules that bound the definition of *hasan* within the framework of sanad principles: connected chain, narrators possessing *'adl* with *dabt* below the level of *shahih*, freedom from anomalies (*shudhudh*) and hidden defects (*'illah*), and the presence of supporting transmissions (*mutaba'at*) or corroborating chains (*shawahid*) (al-'Iraqi, 2021, p. 105). Ibn Hajar, in *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, established the *hasan* category as a crucial nexus within the accepted-rejected (*maqbul-mardud*) framework, facilitating the process of preference (*tarjih*) when conflicting narrations emerged (A. bin A. bin M. bin H. al-'Asqalani, 2021, p. 88-93). Al-Suyuti subsequently reconciled al-Tirmidzi's distinctive terms such as *hasan shahih* and *hasan gharib* into the standardized framework, enabling their integration into *musthalah* curricula without loss of historical context.

Third, the *hasan* category also generated new quality gradations in *sanad* criticism and biographical works. Al-Zahabi (w. 748 H), through *Mizan al-'Itidal* and *Siyar A'lam*

*al-Nubala'*, presented a spectrum of narrator quality ranging from meticulous (*mutqin*) to truthful but erring (*shaduq yukhti*) (Mighwar & Kosasih, 2025, p. 1589). Evaluations such as *shaduq* supported the emergence of *hasan li-dhatihi* narrations from truthful narrators possessing precision below the standard of thoroughly reliable (*thiqah*) narrators. Ibn Hajar, in *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*, standardized narrator labels (such as *thiqah*, *shaduq*, *layyin*), enabling these intermediate categories to directly impact the final grading: a hadith could be labeled *hasan* based on the configuration of narrator qualities (al-'Asqalani, 2014, p. 13). Meanwhile, according to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, a hadith may be graded *hasan li-dzatihi* if narrated by a just and truthful narrator known for acceptable reliability (*shalih al-hadith, laysa bihi ba's*), provided the narration does not contradict stronger narrators and remains free from hidden defects (*'illah*) and anomalies (*shudhudh*) (Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 1357, p. 27). In the realm of *matan* criticism, the existence of *hasan* expanded the scholars' focus to include thematic coherence and the absence of relative anomalies, thereby elevating *matan* criticism beyond mere subordination to sanad criticism.

Fourth, in the domain of *usul al-fiqh*, the recognition of the *hasan* category clarified the structure of *istidlal* (the procedure for deriving evidence). The *fuqaha'* accepted hadith *hasan* as valid evidence, though its priority ranks below *shahih*. When two narrations conflict, absent other external factors, the *shahih* narration takes precedence over *hasan*, and *hasan* over *dha'if*. This consolidation strengthened the discipline of *tarjih* and made the utilization of hadith more measurable. In matters of *fadha'il al-a'mal*, the *hasan* category provided a stronger alternative than relying on mildly *dha'if* narrations, thereby expanding the reservoir of evidence without compromising authentication standards (Rambe et al., 2023, p. 268). Thus, the *hasan* category functions as an "epistemic valve" that maintains balance between the ideal of authenticity and the practical needs of *fiqh*.

Fifth, in the development of curricula, hadith commentaries, and modern research, the *hasan* category continues to function as an essential instrument. Classical-contemporary methods such as *Taysir Musthalah al-hadith* and *Manhaj al-Naqd* treat the discussion of *hasan* as a core teaching unit. Commentators of *sunan* works utilize the *hasan* category to guide readers regarding the suitability for practice while indicating that the narration's quality ranks below *shahih* (Rambe et al., 2023, p. 268). In modern

research, the existence of the *hasan* category facilitates the mapping of source reliability, particularly in chapters concerning worship and transactions not covered by the two *Shahih* collections. In critical editions, *hasan* narrations are typically retained with annotations regarding *sanad* and *matan* criticism, enabling readers to comprehend the rationale for their legal authority.

Sixth, the harmonization of al-Tirmidzi's terminology with the standard *musthalah* framework demonstrates the enduring nature of his influence. Phrases such as *hasan shahih* or *hasan gharib*, which initially generated debate, were explained by later scholars (*ulama muta'akhkhir*) through multi-aspect analysis: combined strength of transmission paths, identification of uncommon narrations without downgrading their status, or balancing between multiple *sanad* evaluations. This integration reveals that al-Tirmidzi's methodological legacy was not merely accepted, but refined to remain functionally applicable within contemporary hadith evaluation mechanisms.

Overall, the *hasan* category has provided fundamental contributions to the development of hadith sciences: it shaped the definitional structure of *musthalah al-hadith*, enriched the methodology of *sanad* and *matan* criticism, structured the hierarchy of evidence in *fiqh*, and created a technical language that remains relevant in modern scholarship. Without this category, hadith sciences might have remained confined within a rigid dichotomy incapable of capturing the broader spectrum of narration quality. Thus, the significance of *hasan* is not merely historical, but epistemological and methodological, establishing it as one of the crucial pillars throughout the history of the hadith sciences discipline.

## Conclusion

Imam al-Tirmidhi's introduction of the *hasan* category represents one of the most significant methodological innovations in the history of hadith criticism. This category emerged as a scholarly response to the limitations of the classical *sahih–da'if* dichotomy, particularly in addressing narrations whose evidentiary status could not be adequately accommodated within these two categories. Its development was closely linked to the historical realities of the second and third centuries AH, a period marked by the expansion of transmission networks, increasing diversity in narrator reliability, and

concerns regarding the authenticity of reports amid complex socio-political dynamics. In formulating the *hasan* category, al-Tirmidhi employed a nuanced evaluative framework that considered multiple criteria, including the moral integrity of narrators, an acceptable level of precision in transmission that fell short of the standards required for *sahih* classification, the absence of anomalous elements (*shudhudh*), and, where applicable, corroboration through supporting chains of transmission. Beyond serving as a technical classificatory device, the *hasan* category established an important normative basis for the acceptance and utilization of narrations in legal and religious discourse, positioning such reports between *sahih* and *da'if* in terms of evidentiary value. The concept was subsequently refined and institutionalized by later scholars, including Ibn al-Salah, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, and al-Suyuti, who developed its subcategories and codified its methodological applications within *'ilm mustalah al-hadith*. The academic contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the *hasan* category should be understood not merely as a technical addition to hadith terminology but as an epistemological framework that mediated between the ideal of rigorous authenticity and the practical needs of scholarly application. By highlighting the historical and methodological dimensions of this innovation, the study reveals how al-Tirmidhi's classification expanded the analytical capacity of hadith sciences, enabling greater flexibility in evaluating narrations while preserving the discipline's commitment to critical verification.

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