

A STUDY ON THE USAGE FORMS AND COURSE OF MEANING OF *ŞĀḤĪB SUNNA* AS A PRAISING (*TA‘DĪL*) TERM

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Abstract

Şāḥib sunna is one of the most common terms in *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl* literature. This concept signifies a reason for preference in the determination of narrators from whom a ḥadīth will be transmitted in written form or through narration. Therefore, this article concentrates on the different usages of *şāḥib sunna* over the course of time, the meanings ascribed to it, the influence of historical circumstances on its meaning, and the value of being described as *şāḥib sunna* within *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl* studies. *Şāḥib sunna* is apparent in ḥadīth sources as a term of accreditation (*ta‘dīl*) since earlier periods; in *riwāya* terminology, however, it is used in *ṭabaqāt-tarājim* works as a term that expresses the competence of a narrator in terms of delivering the narrative, particularly since the 3rd century AH. It is possible to assert that *şāḥib sunna* has an extensive structure of meaning depending on the author, the period or the kind of work, and this openness in meaning primarily originates from semantic diversity regarding the use of the concept of “Sunna” in different sciences such as ḥadīth, uşūl al-fiqh, and kalām.

Key Words: *Şāḥib sunna*, *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl*, ḥadīth, Sunna, *‘ilm al-rijāl*

Introduction

Al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl, namely, discrediting and accrediting, is the most notable branch of *ilm al-rijāl*; its progress has occurred in parallel with the rise of critical mentality in Islamic thought as of the mid-2nd century AH. In this period, there was a rise in the number of ḥadīth scholars; moreover, movements such as *bid'ā* and *ilhād* became widespread, whereupon the fabrication of ḥadīths tragically grew. These facts brought about the rapid development of *al-jarḥ* and *al-ta'dīl*.¹ Accordingly, the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH witnessed periods of *tadwīn* (codification) and *taṣnīf* (classification), and studies concentrated on narrators and made use of discrediting and accrediting terminology in criticisms regarding the *rijāl* (transmitters) of ḥadīths. *Al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, which signifies the determination of reliability/credibility of the narrators and the transmission of them to posterities, brought about many terms in its definition of narrators.²

These terms, the most important elements of the *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* discipline, appeared as a result of a specific process. Scholars of *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* ascribed various meanings to these terms over the course of time by preferring different usages; they also studied the grade of such wordings used for the acceptance or criticism of narrators with regard to their narratives.³ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) was the first person to collect discrediting and accrediting terms and to classify them according to the judgments they express. Prior to Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī (d. 198/813-814) and al-Jūzjānī (d. 259/873) also classified narrators in terms of acceptance and refusal.⁴ In later periods, Ibn Abī Ḥātim's classification was adopted wholesale by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d.

¹ Emin Âşıkutlu, *Hadiste Ricâl Tenkîdi (Cerh ve Ta'dîl İlmi)* (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 1997), 27-61.

² For grades and terms regarding *al-jarḥ* and *al-ta'dīl*, see Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī* (ed. Badī' al-Sayyid al-Laḥḥām; Damascus: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, 2005), II, 400-405; Abū l-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Sharḥ al-Nukhbba Nuzbat al-naẓar fī tawḍīḥ Nukhbbat al-fīkar fī muṣṭalaḥ abl al-atḥar* (ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr; 3rd edn., Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Şabāḥ, 2000), 136-137; also see İzmirli İsmâil Hakkı, *Hadis Tarihi* (ed. İbrahim Hatiboğlu; Istanbul: Dâru'lhadis, 2002), 198-200.

³ Âşıkutlu, "Cerh ve Ta'dîl," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, VII, 394.

⁴ Âşıkutlu, *Hadiste Ricâl Tenkîdi*, 171.

463/1071), Ibn al-Şalāh (d. 643/1245) and al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277). Furthermore, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1449), al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) classified the wordings in an even more detailed manner.⁵

The ḥadīth critics employed discrediting and accrediting expressions in their criticisms of narrators, instead of using extensive explanations,⁶ to provide the reader with easier access to information and to clearly delineate the positive and negative aspects of a narrator.⁷

These critical terms in biographical works underwent evolutions even from their first appearances.⁸ The determination of the appearance of these wordings and their semantic evolution is very important with respect to the value of discrediting and accrediting.⁹ However, there are several issues that need to be taken into consideration at this stage. For example, specialists on *al-jarḥ* and *al-ta'dil* have used terms that incorporate common meanings but have also ascribed different meanings to the same words. Therefore, the author using an expression becomes as important as the expression itself about the narrator. The determination of the semantic framework of these wordings or expressions serves as a guide to the recognition and introduction of a narrator. Consequently, it is vital to consider the first appearance of a discrediting and accrediting term, its first user, its various forms of usage, and the eventual meanings ascribed to it if we are to determine and analyze the term.

⁵ Aşikkutlu, "Cerh ve Ta'dil," 398; For further information about studies on *al-jarḥ* and *al-ta'dil* see Ahmet Yücel, *Hadis İlminde Tenkit Terimleri ve İlgili Çalışmalar* (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 31-50.

⁶ Yücel, *Hadis İlminde Tenkit Terimleri*, 22.

⁷ Muḥammad Dīyā' al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī, *Dirāsāt fī l-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dil* (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabā' al-Athariyya, 1995), 289.

⁸ G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 176. In his evaluation based on *Tabḍīb al-Tabḍīb* by Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Juynboll describes the usage of discrediting and accrediting expressions in biographies as arbitrary pursuant to his critical approach on the issue; nevertheless, he has some notable opinions about the question.

⁹ Yücel, *Hadis İstıblarının Doğuşu ve Gelişimi: Hicrî İlk Üç Asır* (2nd edn., Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2014), 112.

Şāḥib sunna is one of the most common expressions in *al-jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl* literature.¹⁰ The term signifies a “possessor of Sunna”, which is a notable reason for the preference of narrators from whom the ḥadīths will be written or transmitted. Therefore, this study focuses on its usage in *al-jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl* literature as well as the scholars who prefer to use this expression in their relevant studies and the meanings they ascribe to the word. Moreover, it is important to note whether the expression was used in biographies of some prominent figures and the value and reflections of *şāḥib sunna* in the context of the concepts of *aşḥāb al-sunna* or *aşḥāb al-ḥadīth* in the following periods.

Usages of *Şāḥib sunna* in *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl* Literature

Şāḥib sunna is employed as an accrediting expression in *ṭabaqāt* and *tarājim* works. It is either used individually or accompanied by other accrediting terms. Most often, it is indicated together with the term *thiqa* (ثقة/trustworthy) in the form of *thiqa şāḥib sunna* (ثقة صاحب سنة).¹¹ Numerous assessments of narrators, which are attributed to al-ʿIjlī (d. 261/875), include such examples.¹²

Şāḥib sunna is also employed in combination with certain expressions in biographies. The most common combination is *şāḥib sunna wa-jamāʿa* (صاحب سنة وجماعة),¹³ which was frequently preferred by Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845). He sometimes added “there are ḥadīths he narrates” (وكانت عنده أحاديث) after this combination.¹⁴ Ibn Saʿd also used

¹⁰ For *taʿdīl* expressions used in ḥadīth studies see Yücel, *Hadis İlminde Tenkit Terimleri*, 135-141.

¹¹ Abū Bakr Kāfī, *Manbaj al-Imām al-Bukḥārī fī taşḥīḥ al-aḥādīth wa-taʿlīlibā (min kbilāl al-jāmiʿ al-şāḥib)* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2000), 137; ʿAbd al-Rāḥmān ibn Yaḥyā al-Muʿallimī, *al-Tankīl bi-mā fī taʿnīb al-Kawtharī min al-abāṭil* (ed. with notes by Muḥammad Nāşir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq Ḥamza; 2nd edn., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1986), I, 414; II, 612.

¹² Abū l-Şafāʿ Şalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Şafādī, *Kitāb al-wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (eds. Aḥmad al-Arnāʿūt and Dhikrī Muşṭafā; Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʿ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000), VI, 261; IX, 166; XX, 57; XXII, 134; XXVII, 129; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tabḍīb al-Tabḍīb* (eds. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq and ʿAdil Murshid; Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1996), I, 28.

¹³ Al-Muʿallimī, *al-Tankīl*, I, 282.

¹⁴ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd ibn Manīʿ al-Zuhrī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās; Beirut: Dār Şādir, 1968), VI, 386.

this term in the form of *ṣāḥib sunna wa-faḍl wa-kbayr* (صاحب سنة (وفضل وخير)¹⁵).

Al-ʿIjlī occasionally opted for another form in the use of the expression: “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ittibāʿ* (صاحب سنة واتباع).”¹⁶ The same usage is also seen in *Tadbkirat al-ḥuffāz*¹⁷ and *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalā*¹⁸ by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348). Apparently, al-Dhahabī also employed the form “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ḥadīth* (صاحب سنة وحديث).”¹⁹ Al-Yāfiʿī (d. 768/1366) used “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ḥadīth*” only once, in the biography of Abū Zayd Jaʿfar ibn Yazīd al-Ḥamawī (d. 554/1159).²⁰ As for Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), he often preferred “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-faḍl* (صاحب سنة وفضل).”²¹ Occasionally, the expression is used with the addition of *Qurʾān*, in which case it is indicated as “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-Qurʾān* (صاحب سنة وقرآن).”²²

Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) included previous usages of the expression in his *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāz*. These include “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ḥadīth* (صاحب سنة وجماعة),”²³ “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-faḍl wa-kbayr* (صاحب سنة وفضل وخير),”²⁴ “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ʿibāda* (صاحب سنة وعبادة),”²⁵ and

¹⁵ Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 358-359.

¹⁶ Abū I-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣāliḥ al-ʿIjlī, *Maʿrifat al-thiqāt min rijāl abl al-ʿilm wa-l-ḥadīth wa-min al-ḍuʿafāʾ wa-dhikr madhbābībim wa-akbbāribim* (ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Bastawī; Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1985), I, 312, 372, 411.

¹⁷ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿUthmān al-Dhahabī, *Tadbkirat al-ḥuffāz* (ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Yaḥyā al-Muʿallimī; 3rd edn., Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1955-1958), III, 813, 936, 1130; IV, 1256.

¹⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalā* (eds. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭī, et al.; Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1981-1988), X, 369, 490.

¹⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar* (ed. Abū Ḥajar Muḥammad al-Saʿīd ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1985), III, 22.

²⁰ ʿAfif al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Asʿad ibn ʿAlī al-Yamānī al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqzān fī maʿrifat mā yuʿtabar min ḥawādith al-zamān* (ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), III, 235.

²¹ Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān ibn Aḥmad al-Tamīmī, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1973), VIII, 155, 180, 254; IX, 47, 116, 118.

²² Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl* (ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī; Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), II, 224.

²³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 145.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

“*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ittibāʿ* (صاحب سنة واتباع).”²⁶ As can be seen in his works, al-Suyūṭī used the form “*ṣāḥib sunna wa-ʿibāda*,” unlike his predecessors.

To comprehend the signification of any critical term, we have to take into account the accompanying terms used by critics.²⁷ Apart from the word *thiqa*, the accompanying terms to *ṣāḥib sunna* note the virtues and benevolence of the narrator, thus proving he was a man of *jamāʿa* and *ʿibāda* and was on the right path or subject to the Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad. Biographers who prefer *ṣāḥib sunna* as an accrediting qualification seek to feature the character of narrators rather than their competence with regard to narratives. They frequently use this expression after the term *thiqa*, as they intend to assess the personal traits and attitudes of the narrator with respect to Sunna because they do not consider him to be troubled by fairness and recording.

Users of *Ṣāḥib sunna* as a means of Acceptance and Meanings Ascribed to the Term

Similar to *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth*, a term that was used in the *ṣaḥāba* era prior to the emergence of *tabaqāt* and *tarājim* authors,²⁸ the appearance of *ṣāḥib sunna* occurred during the same period, albeit in plural form.

A narrative, quoted from Muʿādh (d. 17/638), reveals that it was important to attribute a ḥadīth to a *ṣāḥib sunna*. Once Muʿādh discovered that the persons brought in his presence were *aṣḥāb al-sunna*, he could not help crying before saying, “If I knew that you were *aṣḥāb al-sunna*, I would come to your home and narrate

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 360.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 456.

²⁷ See Yücel, *Hadis İlminde Tenkit Terimleri*, 184.

²⁸ Abdullah Aydınli, “Ehl-i Hadīs,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, X, 507. According to Aydınli, the terms of *abl al-ḥadīth* and *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth* are synonymous. His ground is the words, “You are our successors and *abl al-ḥadīth* after us” by Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī. In later periods, Shuʿba was considered as *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth*, whereas Farqad Ṣabākhi and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Nāfiʿ were not so described. However, the important point here is that the term of *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth* dates back to the time of the *ṣaḥāba*.

ḥadīths to you.”²⁹

In the following periods, the concept of *ṣāḥib sunna* was associated with the emergence of *isnād* (chain of transmission). In earlier periods, no chain was questioned, whereas the practice changed for the authentication of narratives in later eras. As the search for an *isnād* began, the ḥadīths by *ṣāḥib sunna* were written down whereas others not by *ṣāḥib sunna* were ignored.³⁰ Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729) explains this fact as follows:

كانوا لا يسألون عن الإسناد، ثم سألوا بعدُ ليعرفوا من كان صاحب سنة أخذوا عنه، ومن
لم يكن صاحب سنة لم يأخذوا عنه

They were not used to searching for an *isnād*. Then, they began to seek *isnād* for information. They derived ḥadīth from *ṣāḥib sunna*, and did not collect from others.³¹

Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) utilizes the expression *ṣāḥib sunna* in an interpretation as follows:

إذا بلغك عن رجل بالشرق صاحب سنة وآخر بالمغرب فابعث إليهما بالسلام وادع
لهما ما أقل أهل السنة والجماعة

If a ḥadīth (or any knowledge) comes to you from persons who are *ṣāḥib sunna*, one of whom is from the East and one from the West,

²⁹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Thābit, *al-Jāmi‘ li-akblāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘* (ed. Maḥmūd Ṭaḥḥān; Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1983), I, 332.

³⁰ Rif‘at Fawzī ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, *Tawthīq al-sunna fī l-qarn al-bijrī al-tbānī: Ususubū wa-ittijābātuhū* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1981), 148.

³¹ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Faḍl al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī al-ma‘rūf bi-(Sunan al-Dārimī)* (ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī; Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī li-l-Tawzī‘ wa-l-Nashr, 2000), IV, 496; Also see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Itḥāf al-mabara bi-l-fawā’id al-mubtakira min aṭrāf al-‘asbara* (eds. Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, Maḥmūd Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Muḥsin, et al.; Medina: Wizārat al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Awqāf wa-l-Da‘wa wa-l-Irshād & al-Jāmi‘a al-Islāmiyya, 1994-2004), XIX, 427.

send them your regards and pray for them. Indeed, how few are people who belong to *sunna* and *jamā'a*.³²

Zā'ida ibn Qudāma al-Thaqafī (d. 161/777) also uses the same term. When Ḥusayn al-Ju'fī (d. 203/819) asked Zā'ida about someone, Zā'ida said the person was *ṣāḥib sunna*, whereupon al-Ju'fī says that he does not mind the expression, indicating "*Ṣāḥib sunna?* They are sons of Abū Bakr." In response, "Killers of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān were also sons of Abū Bakr," says Zā'ida, insisting that the term *ṣāḥib sunna* matters because it signifies a higher value of acceptance and accreditation.³³ Moreover, rumor has it that Zā'ida ibn Qudāma narrated ḥadīths from *ṣāḥib sunna* but not from others.³⁴

Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812) reportedly employed *ṣāḥib sunna* as a word of accreditation. According to Wakī', *thiqa ṣāḥib sunna* is a second-rank accrediting expression. For him, the expressions that primarily accredit a narrator are *athbat al-nās* and *thiqa thiqa*, whereas secondary qualifications are *thiqa* and *thiqa ṣāḥib sunna*. Wakī' uses *ṣāḥib sunna* not individually but as a part of an accrediting expression.³⁵ For example, when 'Alī ibn Khashram (d. 257/871) asked Wakī' about Faḍl ibn Mūsā (d. 191-192/806-807), Wakī' praised 'Alī ibn Khashram, saying "he is *thiqa* and *ṣāḥib sunna*."³⁶ Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāḥ also describes what it means to be *ṣāḥib sunna*:

من طلب الحديث كما جاء، فهو صاحب سنة، ومن طلبه ليقوي به رأيه، فهو صاحب
بدعة

³² Abū Zakariyyā' Yahyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Salmāsī, *Kitāb manāzil al-a'imma al-arba'a Abī Ḥanīfa wa-Mālik wa-l-Shāfi'ī wa-Aḥmad* (ed. Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, Medina: al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya, 2002), 69.

³³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmi'*, I, 332.

³⁴ Abū l-Qāsim Kamāl al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī tārikh Ḥalab* (ed. Suhayl Zakkār; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), VIII, 3735; Abū l-Ḥajjāj Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tabḍīb al-Kamāl fī asmā' al-rijāl* (ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf; 6th edn., Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1994), IX, 277; al-'Ijlī, *Ma'rīfat al-thiqāt*, I, 367.

³⁵ Muḥammad al-Firwānī, "al-Imām Wakī': ḥayātih^ū wa-āthāruh^ū," *Majallat al-buḥūth al-Islāmiyya* 12 (1985), 342.

³⁶ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Thābit, *Kitāb talkbīs al-mutashābih fī l-rasm wa-ḥimāyat mā asbkala minbu 'an bawādir al-taṣṣīf wa-l-wahm* (ed. Sukayna al-Shihābī; Damascus: Dār Ṭalās li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1985), 86.

Şāhib sunna is the person who gets a ḥadīth as it is; the one who learns ḥadīth in order to strengthen his view is *şāhib bid'a*.³⁷

By these words, Wakī' asserts how he cares about authenticity in the narration of ḥadīths and refuses to consider ḥadīth as a means to strengthen a certain point of view. This determination by Wakī' might originate from his attitude against Mu'tazila and other *bid'a* groups with respect to issues such as *kbalq al-Qur'ān*, etc.³⁸

According to relevant sources, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī, who passed away in 198 AH, one year after Wakī', is another scholar who applied the term. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī used the expression to describe Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). For him, anyone who loves Ibn Ḥanbal is a *şāhib sunna*.³⁹

In chronological terms, the first ones to use the expression are Mu'ādh, one of the *şahāba*/Companions, and Ibn Sīrīn. Nevertheless, Zā'ida ibn Qudāma appears to be the first scholar to employ it exclusively as an accrediting expression, as his interpretation directly concerns the status of a narrator. As for the upcoming period, it is impossible to determine whether Wakī' or 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī was the first person to use *şāhib sunna*, as both scholars are contemporary and passed away almost at the same time. Nevertheless, we can assert that its appearance as an accrediting term dates back to the second half of the 2nd century AH.

As said above, Ibn Sa'd frequently used the expression *şāhib sunna*, whose usage became ubiquitous upon the compilation of *ṭabaqāt* and *tarājim* works. Ibn Sa'd mentions the term as another trait of many *thiqa* narrators. For him, however, being *şāhib sunna* does not necessarily mean that the person is *mutqin* (in other words, exact). Accordingly, in one of his biographies, Ibn Sa'd categorizes the narrator as *şāhib sunna* but indicates that his ḥadīth narrative is weak⁴⁰ or that there are many mistakes⁴¹ in his narratives.

³⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, IX, 144.

³⁸ For attitude of Wakī', see Mehmet Emin Özafşar, "Vekī' b. Cerrâh," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XLIII, 8.

³⁹ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Idrīs Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dil* (ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yaḥyā al-Mu'allimī; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1952-1953), I, 308.

⁴⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 360.

Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d.233/848) also employs the term for the criticism of narrators. Concerning Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād (d. 228/843), Ibn Maʿīn initially says *laysa fi l-ḥadīth bi-sbayʾ*,⁴² nevertheless, he later indicates “However, he is *ṣāḥib sunna*,” and thus accredits the mentioned narrator.⁴³

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is another scholar who used this common means of accrediting. In his comments about Wahb ibn Jarīr (d. 206/821), Ibn Ḥanbal asserted that Wahb was never seen together with Shuʿba (d. 160/776) but that Wahb was *ṣāḥib sunna*; thus, Ibn Ḥanbal tried to appreciate the narrator.⁴⁴ Moreover, being *ṣāḥib sunna* is a reason for preference among narrators in the eyes of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. He claims that Wahb ibn Jarīr ibn Ḥāzim is *ṣāḥib sunna* and that, accordingly, he is more favorable than Hammām (d. 132/750).⁴⁵ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal prefers the same expression for accrediting Warqāʾ ibn ʿUmar, whom Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889) asks

⁴¹ *Ibid*, VII, 488.

⁴² This wording by Ibn Maʿīn adds *fi l-ḥadīth* to his *laysa bi-sbayʾ*. Two expressions are almost synonymous. There are different comments about usage of *laysa bi-sbayʾ* in the time of Ibn Maʿīn. *Kadhbāb* (fabricating, lying) narrators and narrators with relatively less ḥadīths are included in such comments. Besides, it is related that Ibn Maʿīn uses the same term for reliable narrators. Therefore, it is unclear whether he means discrediting or accrediting a narrator through this expression; see Erdiñç Ahatlı, “Yahya b. Maʿīn’in Eserleri ve Kullandığı İhtılaflı ve Garib Lafızlar,” *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1 (1996), 227; there is ambiguity about the meaning of this expression emphasized by Ahatlı; nevertheless, there is a concord between ḥadīth scholars that no ḥadīth should be derived from a narrator with such a description. See Yücel, *Hadis İlminde Tenkit Terimleri*, 108.

⁴³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Thābit, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām wa-akbbār muḥaddithihā wa-dbīkr quṭṭānibā l-ʿulamāʾ min gbayr ablibā wa-wāridihā* (ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), XV, 419; al-Mizzī, *Tabdhīb*, XXIX, 475; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tabdhīb al-Tabdhīb*, IV, 235.

⁴⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-ʿitidāl*, IV, 351; Also see Bashīr ʿAlī ʿUmar, *Manhaj al-Imām Aḥmad fi ʿlāl al-aḥādīth* (Riyadh: Waqf al-Salām al-Khayrī, 2005), 820. Wahb’s father makes the same comment for his son, see Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fi ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl* (eds. ʿAdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwad, and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sayyid Sulaymān Abū Sinna; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), VIII, 342.

⁴⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira*, I, 199.

after. When it was reported that Warqāʾ was a Murjiʿī, Ibn Ḥanbal said that he had no such information.⁴⁶

Al-ʿIjlī serves as a reference source in regard to the usage of the expression in biography works after him, as he is the scholar who most frequently applied the term for the criticism of narrators. According to him, the narrative of a narrator who is *ṣāḥib sunna* may bear “the quality of *ḥujja* (evidence)” if he narrated from *thiqāt* (reliable transmitters).⁴⁷ According to al-ʿIjlī, the term *ṣāḥib sunna* signifies that a narrative by such a narrator is acceptable and can serve as evidence. In another analysis where he separately uses the concepts of ḥadīth and *sunna*, *ṣāḥib sunna* has a meaning outside or different from ḥadīth knowledge. Concerning Ibrāhīm ibn al-Taymī (d. 92/710-711), al-ʿIjlī uses the qualities *ḥasan al-ḥadīth* and *ṣāḥib sunna* in addition to *thiqa*, *rāwiyat^{am} li-tafsīr al-Qurʿān wa-ṣāḥib al-tafsīr*.⁴⁸ Therefore, al-ʿIjlī ascribes to *ṣāḥib sunna* a meaning beyond mere knowledge of or competence in ḥadīth narrative. Likely, this meaning includes the significance of the Sunna concept, which is historically considered to have a broader sense than ḥadīth.

The most interesting usage of the expression is that it can be employed for persons who love some others. The characterization of those who love certain historical persons as *ṣāḥib sunna* is first seen in an *ʿaqāʾid* study by Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī (d. 329/940-941).⁴⁹ In his *Sbarḥ al-Sunna*, al-Barbahārī dubs as *ṣāḥib sunna* those who love Abū Hurayra (d. 58/678), Anas ibn Mālik (d. 93/711-712), and Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr (d. 20/641).⁵⁰ Al-Barbahārī also adds names such as Yūnus ibn ʿUbayd (d. 139/756), Wahb ibn Jarīr,

⁴⁶ Al-Mizzī, *Tabdbīb*, XXX, 435.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tabdbīb al-Tabdbīb*, II, 329.

⁴⁸ Al-ʿIjlī, *Maʿrifat al-thiqāt*, I, 201.

⁴⁹ Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Khalaf al-Barbahārī is a Ḥanbalī scholar who defends Salafī creed against Muʿtazila, and who studied the sciences of fiqh, ethics and *ādāb* through Abū Bakr al-Marwazī, the disciple of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. See Ahmet Saim Kılavuz, “Berbehārī,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, V, 476.

⁵⁰ Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Khalaf al-Barbahārī, *Sbarḥ al-Sunna* (ed. Abū Yāsir Khālīd ibn Qāsim al-Radādī; Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabāʾ al-Athariyya, 1993), 119.

Ḥammād ibn Salama (167/784), Mālik ibn Anas, al-Awzā'ī, Zā'ida ibn Qudāma, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal to this category.⁵¹

An evaluation by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) includes a relevant example. According to al-Rāzī, one from Baghdād who loves Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is *ṣāḥib sunna* and one who dislikes Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn is a *kadhbdbāb* (fabricator).⁵² According to 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī, Baṣrans who love Ḥammād ibn Zayd (d. 179/795), Kūfans who love Zā'ida and Mālik ibn Mughawwal (d. 158/775), Damascans who love al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774) and Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī (d. 188/804), and Hijāzians who love Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) are *ṣāḥib sunna*.⁵³ According to Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Ṭabarī (d. between 307-314/919-926), one is *ṣāḥib sunna* if he is from Khurāsān or Rayy and loves Abū Zur'a (d. 264/878) and Abū Ḥātim.⁵⁴ Qutayba ibn Sa'īd (d. 240/855) produces a similar interpretation of the issue. According to him, the most prominent figure of his time is Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797). Then, he names Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, whom he calls "youngster," as the leading personality and claims that one who loves him is *ṣāḥib sunna*. For Qutayba, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal would have left behind al-Thawrī, Layth (d. 175/791) and al-Awzā'ī if he were their contemporary.⁵⁵ In his *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim uses the following chapter title indicating that one who loves Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is *ṣāḥib sunna*:

باب استحقاق الرجل السنة بمحبة أحمد بن حنبل

⁵¹ Al-Barbahārī, *Sbarḥ al-Sunna*, 191-121; also see Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Abī Ya'ālā al-Farrā', *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (ed. 'Abd Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-'Uthaymīn; Riyadh: al-Amāna al-'Āmma li-l-Iḥtifāl bi-Murūr Mi'at 'Ām 'alā Ta'sīs al-Mamlaka, 1999), III, 66-67.

⁵² Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām*, XVI, 263; also see Sa'ādī Maḥdī al-Hāshimī, *Ikbtīlāf aqwāl al-nuqqād fi l-ruwāt al-mukhtalaf fīhim ma'a dirāsāt bādbībī l-zābira 'inda Ibn Ma'īn* (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2005), 50.

⁵³ Abū l-Qāsim Thiqat al-Dīn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibat Allāh Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq wa-dhīkr faḍlibā wa-tasmiyat man ḥallabā min al-amātibil aw ijtāza bi-nawāḥibā min wāridibā wa-ablibā* (ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Sa'īd 'Umar ibn Gharāma al-'Amrawī; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995-2000), VII, 128.

⁵⁴ Al-Mizzī, *Tabdbīb*, XXIV, 389.

⁵⁵ 'Alī 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ Mazīd, *Manābij al-muḥaddithīn fi l-qarn al-awwal al-bijrī wa-ḥattā 'aṣrinā l-ḥādir* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 2002), 240.

“Chapter on why a lover of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal deserves to be *şāhib sunna*”

Under this title, he collects relevant assessments by Qutayba ibn Sa'īd and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī. According to Qutayba ibn Sa'īd, one who loves Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is *şāhib sunna wa-jamā'a*. As said above, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī claims that one who loves Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is *şāhib sunna*.⁵⁶

The term is very often used for Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, likely because of the Miḥna where his debates on *kbalq al-Qur'ān* played a major part.⁵⁷ The discussions on *kbalq al-Qur'ān* appeared in the late first century AH., prior to Miḥna,⁵⁸ and these debates became very influential on the criteria for discrediting and accrediting. There are many discrediting expressions in the works concerning this issue.⁵⁹ Miḥna had a decisive effect on the evaluations of ḥadīth narrators and the relations between scholars.⁶⁰ For example, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) tells that for many scholars, those who assume that the

⁵⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, I, 308.

⁵⁷ In a letter to the Baghdād governor Işḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm in 218 AH., Caliph al-Ma'mūn wanted him to query the qāḍis and ḥadīth scholars such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yūnus, Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn, and Zubayr ibn Ḥarb with respect to *kbalq al-Qur'ān*. Many scholars, who were added to list in a following letter, acknowledged that Qur'ān is created. However, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ, Sajjāda, and al-Qawārīrī objected to this view. In the wake of tortures, Sajjāda and al-Qawārīrī backed down, while Ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ insisted on their opinion. See Hayati Yücesoy, “Mihne,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXX, 26-27.

⁵⁸ Talat Koçyiğit, *Hadisçilerle Kelamcılar Arasındaki Münakaşalar* (4th edn., Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1989), 187. Ja'ūd ibn Dirham, a scholar in the time of Marwān the Caliph (rule: 127-132 AH.), was the first ever person to claim that Qur'ān was created. See *ibid.*, 192.

⁵⁹ See 'Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda, “Halk-ı Kur'an Meselesi: Raviler, Muhaddisler, Cerh ve Ta'dil Kitaplarına Tesiri,” (translated into Turkish by Mücteba Uğur), *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20 (1975), 311; also see Özafşar, *İdeolojik Hadisçiliğin Tarihî Arka Planı: Mibne Olayı ve Haşeviye Olgusu* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 1999), 67.

⁶⁰ Yücel, *Hadis Taribi* (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 84.

Qurʾān is *makblūq* (created) are *kāfir* (infidel/unbeliever).⁶¹ Again, al-Bukhārī reports that ʿUbayda ibn ʿĀʾisha said they would never perform *ṣalāt* behind anyone who says “the Qurʾān is created.”⁶² Conceivably, the accrediting terms about Ibn Ḥanbal also originate from Miḥna events. Qutayba ibn Saʿīd, Abū Ḥātim and Ibn Abī Ḥātim,⁶³ scholars subject to the same Miḥna events, also claim that those who love Ibn Ḥanbal are *ṣāhib sunna*, which is probably in reaction to these incidents. As is known, Ibn Ḥanbal was subject to Miḥna. Nevertheless, he allocated a central role to the Sunna and practices by *al-aṣḥāb al-kirām* (noble Companions) in his creed and severely criticized *abl al-bidʿa*. Thus, Ibn Ḥanbal began to represent *abl al-ḥadīth*.⁶⁴ The ḥadīth circles who were victims of Miḥna gathered around Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and made him a symbol.⁶⁵ He was considered to be *ṣāhib sunna*, and the most important factor for this qualification should be his attitude during discussions concerning the creation of the Qurʾān. In these debates, he responded to questions about the issues other than the Qurʾān and Sunna, such as theological ones, saying “I don’t know... Give me something from the book of Allah or Sunna of the Prophet, so I can say it ...,”⁶⁶

Apart from the aforesaid names, those from Anbār who love Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Aṣram (d. 336/947), Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥudhāʾ (d.?) and al-Muthannā ibn Jāmiʿ al-Anbārī (d.?) were also described as *ṣāhib sunna*.⁶⁷ Likewise, it is claimed that one who is from ʿUkbarā and sympathizes with Abū Ḥafṣ ibn Rajāʾ (d.?),⁶⁸ or one from Baghdād and loves Abū l-Ḥasan ibn Bashār (d. 313/923) and Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī is also *ṣāhib sunna*.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Khalq afʿāl al-ʿibād wa-l-radd ʿalā l-Jahmiyya wa-aṣḥāb al-taʿṭīl* (3rd edn., Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1990), 8, 11, 14.

⁶² Al-Bukhārī, *Khalq afʿāl al-ʿibād*, 12.

⁶³ Ibn Abī Ḥātim is among victims of Miḥna. Maʾmūn threatens him, whereupon, for fear of death, he admitted that Qurʾān is created. See Koçyiğit, *Münakaşalar*, 197.

⁶⁴ Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Ehl-i Sünnet,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, X, 526.

⁶⁵ Özafşar, *İdeolojik Hadisçiliğin Tarihî Arka Planı*, 153.

⁶⁶ Koçyiğit, *Münakaşalar*, 209.

⁶⁷ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām*, III, 414.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, 93.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 534.

The most striking point about this *şāḥib sunna* attribution is the indication of city and region names. It is not coincidental that not a more general statement but specific places, such as Baghdād, Damascus, al-Anbār, al-Kūfa and al-Ḥijāz, are associated with certain persons. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, for example, was born in Baghdād and spent much of his scientific career there. Ḥammād ibn Zayd was from al-Başra. During his lifetime, his status in al-Başra was similar to those of Sufyān al-Thawrī in al-Kūfa, Mālik ibn Anas in al-Ḥijāz, and al-Awzā'ī in Damascus.⁷⁰ Al-Awzā'ī was considered the “fiqh authority” of the Damascus (Syria) region in his time. Therefore, each personality is associated with the region where he was born and was active in scientific terms. In brief, sympathy for these persons in their cities became a means to becoming *şāḥib sunna*.

Şāḥib sunna is also used for expressing that ḥadīths, narrated by a narrator, can be derived and written down. For example, al-Dāraqutnī (d. 385/995) indicates that Layth ibn Abī Salīm (d. 143/760) “is *şāḥib sunna*; his ḥadīths can be derived.”⁷¹ As is known, the validity of quoting narratives from *hawā* and *bid'a* followers is controversial. According to 'Alī ibn Ḥarb (d. 265/879), no ḥadīth should be quoted from them because they are liars. If a ḥadīth is to be written down, it should be obtained from *şāḥib sunna*.⁷² Likewise, according to Ibn Ma'in, if Abū Nu'aym al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn (d. 219/834) dubs someone as Murjī'i, that person is *şāḥib sunna* and *lā ba's bib*,⁷³ in other words, ḥadīths can be written down through him.

Şāḥib bid'a is also employed as an antonym of *şāḥib sunna*. This usage is exemplified by al-Awzā'ī, who claimed that one who talks benevolently about him is *şāḥib sunna*, whereas one who casts

⁷⁰ Tayyar Altukulaç, “Hammād b. Zeyd,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XV, 489.

⁷¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, VI, 181.

⁷² See Abū l-Faraj Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Sbarḥ 'İtal al-Tirmidhī* (ed. Hammām 'Abd al-Raḥīm Sa'īd; Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2001), 357; Abū l-Khayr Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Fathḥ al-mughūth bi-sbarḥ Alfīyyat al-ḥadīth li-l-Ṭrāqī* (ed. 'Alī Ḥusayn 'Alī; 3rd edn., Dār al-Imām al-Ṭabarī, 1996), II, 60.

⁷³ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, III, 350; the expression “*lā ba's bib*”, often used by Ibn Ma'in, indicates that the narrator is reliable; see Ahatlı, “Yahya b. Ma'in Eserleri ve Kullandığı İhtilafı ve Garib Lafızlar,” 225-226.

aspersions on him is *ṣāḥib bidʿa*.⁷⁴ In the biography of Aḥmad ibn Aṣram ibn Khuzayma (d. 285/897), al-Dhahabī uses *ṣāḥib sunna* as an antonym of *abl al-bidʿa* to accredit him. For al-Dhahabī, Aḥmad ibn Aṣram is *ṣāḥib sunna*, and, accordingly, Ibn Aṣram is strictly against the followers of *bidʿa*.⁷⁵

Qualification as *ṣāḥib sunna* is also used as a reason for preference between narrators. According to the father of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī, Zāʿida ibn Qudāma is more reputable than Abū ʿAwāna (d. 176/792) because the former is *thbiqa* and *ṣāḥib sunna*.⁷⁶

Principally an expression for accrediting, *ṣāḥib sunna* is also employed for discrediting the narrators. A narrator is discredited by saying that he is not *ṣāḥib sunna*, whereupon he is considered to be lacking a notable quality for acceptance. For example, Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/976) does not acknowledge ʿAbd Allāh ibn Dāwūd al-Wāsiṭī (d. ?) as a *ṣāḥib sunna* narrator.⁷⁷

Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī offers an expansion in the meaning of *ṣāḥib sunna* in addition to its semantic framework within *ṭabaqāt* and *tarājim* works. In his *Sbarḥ al-Sunna*, al-Barbahārī describes a person as *ṣāḥib sunna* if he:

1. Believes in the Qurʾān and its content without the slightest doubt in his heart⁷⁸
2. Prays for the salvation and peace of the ruler⁷⁹
3. Embodies all characteristics of Sunna.⁸⁰

Al-Barbahārī depicts people with opposite behaviors or attitudes as *ṣāḥib hawā* or *ṣāḥib bidʿa*. Frequent use of and extensive explanations about *ṣāḥib sunna* in the works by al-Barbahārī can be

⁷⁴ Abū l-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn ʿAlī Ibn Manzūr, *Mukhtaṣar Tārīkh Dimashq li-Ibn ʿAsākir* (eds. Rūḥiyya al-Naḥḥās, Riyāḍ ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Murād, Muḥammad Muṭīʿ Ḥāfiẓ et al.; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984-1989), XIV, 320.

⁷⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashābir wa-l-aʿlām* (ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī; Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990-2000), XXI, 53.

⁷⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, III, 613.

⁷⁷ Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil*, V, 399.

⁷⁸ Al-Barbahārī, *Sbarḥ al-Sunna*, 107; Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, III, 60.

⁷⁹ Al-Barbahārī, *ibid*, 116; Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *ibid*, III, 65.

⁸⁰ Al-Barbahārī, *ibid*, 132; Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *ibid*, III, 71-72.

revealed through his point of view. Al-Barbahārī severely objects to propagators of Shī'ā, kalām scholars of Mu'tazila and Ahl al-sunna, and the kalām method; instead, he insists on the need to return to the Qur'ān and Sunna. Moreover, he opposes any *bid'ā*, claiming they should be rejected. Therefore, he lays stress on the sound comprehension and knowledge of religion and highlights the Qur'ān and Sunna. According to him, sound knowledge about the Qur'ān and Sunna should be obtained from persons, who learned and practiced the original form of Islam, such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Mālik ibn Anas, al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ (d. 187/803), 'Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak and Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith [Bish ibn al-Ḥāfi] (d. 227/841).⁸¹ This is why he considers Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Mālik ibn Anas to be *ṣāḥib sunna*.

Biographies of ṣaḥāba reveal another usage of the term, this time concerning the Four Caliphs. The comments regarding the superiority of 'Uthmān and 'Alī above one another have set the stage for the usage of *ṣāḥib sunna*. This comment is attributed to Ibn Ma'īn. According to him, whoever sets the superiority line as Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, but admits the priority and superiority of 'Alī is *ṣāḥib sunna*. Similarly, whoever states the line as Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Alī and 'Uthmān and accepts the priority and superiority of 'Uthmān is also *ṣāḥib sunna*. Hārūn ibn Ishāq relates that when he said to Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn that there are some persons who mention Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, and not 'Alī, Ibn Ma'īn had some very harsh words about them.⁸²

The above-mentioned assessment by Ibn Ma'īn can be evaluated as an effort to find a compromise. Ibn Ma'īn wanted to prevent faith and madhhab debates around 'Uthmān and 'Alī and tried to highlight the value of both ṣaḥābī. Ibn Ma'īn stated that the sympathy for and acceptance of the virtues of both serves as a means to become *ṣāḥib sunna*.

According to current comments about the meaning of *ṣāḥib sunna*, the term signifies ḥadīth scholars who are attentive to obeying Sunna in all their deeds and thoughts, who are competent in

⁸¹ Kilavuz, "Berbehārī," V, 477.

⁸² Abū 'Umar Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Namarī, *al-Istī'āb fī ma'rīfat al-aṣḥāb* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī; Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1992), III, 1116.

certifying the *isnāds* of ḥadīths and who can distinguish the eligible ḥadīth narratives from the non-eligible.⁸³ Moreover, the term is used in plural form as *aṣḥāb al-sunan* (أصحاب السنن) with the same meaning.⁸⁴

Certain Personalities Qualified or not Qualified as *Ṣāḥib sunna*

Ṣāḥib sunna is used to describe certain well-known personalities in *rijāl* literature. For example, there is an effort to accredit al-A‘mash (d. 148/765) qualifying him as *ṣāḥib sunna*, though he is known one who made *tadlīs* (concealment, giving the impression that one has narrated from an authority, whereas in this instance he has not).⁸⁵ Al-Dhahabī also categorizes Ḥammād ibn Salama with the same expression.⁸⁶ According to information reported by al-Khaṭīb, Zā‘ida ibn Qudāma qualifies Sufyān al-Thawrī, who was near Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/819), as being *ṣāḥib sunna*, saying “Narrate ḥadīth from this friend of mine, oh Abā l-Ṣalt!”⁸⁷ In another work, al-Thawrī is called *ṣāḥib sunna wa-ittibā‘*.⁸⁸

Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), the disciple of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), is also described as being *ṣāḥib sunna* in biographies. Strikingly, two separate expressions are employed in assessments about Abū Yūsuf. These terms are *ṣāḥib sunna* and *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth*. This fact is important, as it reveals that the terms “sunna” and “ḥadīth” had different significations in early periods. Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn relates that Abū Yūsuf was both *ṣāḥib sunna* and *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth*.⁸⁹ ‘Amr ibn Muḥammad explains that he does not like to narrate ḥadīth from

⁸³ Aydınlı, *Hadis Istılabları Sözlüğü* (4th edn., Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2011), 265.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁵ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām*, X, 5; Abū Ibrāhīm ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl Amīr al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tawḍīḥ al-afkār li-ma‘ānī Tanqīḥ al-anzār* (ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd; Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, n.d.), I, 353.

⁸⁶ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhbīr*, I, 203.

⁸⁷ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmi‘*, I, 333.

⁸⁸ Al-‘Ijlī, *Ma‘rifat al-thiqāt*, I, 411.

⁸⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Manāqib al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa wa-ṣāḥibayhī Abī Yūsuf wa-Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan* (eds. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī and Abū l-Wafā‘ al-Afghānī; Hyderabad: Lajnat Iḥyā‘ al-Ma‘ārif al-Nu‘māniyya, n.d.), 63.

aşḥāb al-raʿy other than Abū Yūsuf and that the latter is *şāḥib sunna*.⁹⁰

For Abū Yūsuf, Sunna precisely signified the practices of the Prophet. This comprehension is apparent in his many judgments and practices.⁹¹ Moreover, he had a pro-ḥadīth approach because he believes in the necessity of transmitting the Sunna through *isnāds*.⁹² This attitude held by Abū Yūsuf toward the Sunna of the Prophet and ḥadīths must have played a part in his being described as *şāḥib sunna* even though he was a member of *abl al-raʿy*.

Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) is also mentioned among the *şāḥib sunnas*. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 268/881) indicates that he learnt most of his knowledge from al-Shāfiʿī, including *qiyās*, and therefore al-Shāfiʿī is *şāḥib sunna*.⁹³ The lexicographer Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām (d. 224/838) bears the same qualification. Abū Manşūr al-Harawī (d. 370/980) mentions Abū ʿUbayd among the linguistic scholars of the third group, introducing him as a scholar, a man of letters, a jurist and *şāḥib sunna*.⁹⁴ Al-Harawī also describes Abū I-Haytham al-Rāzī (d. 226/840), another linguistic scholar of the third group, as *şāḥib sunna*.⁹⁵ Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) is credited through qualification as *şāḥib sunna wa-ittibāʿ*.⁹⁶ Qutayba ibn Saʿīd, who deems Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal as *şāḥib sunna*, is also described as *şāḥib sunna wa-jamāʿa*, in addition to reportedly quoting *thabt* [sound] narratives.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām*, XVI, 372; Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 466; al-Dhahabī, *Manāqib al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa*, 63.

⁹¹ For some of these judgments and practices, see Mehmet Özşenel, *Ebū Yūsuf'un Hadis Anlayışı* (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2011), 24-29.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 156.

⁹³ Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Intiqāʿ fi fadāʾil al-tbalātba al-aʿimma al-fuqabāʾ: Mālik wa-l-Shāfiʿī wa-Abī Ḥanīfa wa-dbīkr ʿuyūn min akbbāribim wa-akbbār aşḥābibim li-l-taʿrīf bi-jalālat aqdāribim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 73.

⁹⁴ Abū Manşūr Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Azharī al-Harawī, *Tabdhīb al-lugha* (ed. Muḥammad ʿIwaḍ; Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001), I, 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 23.

⁹⁶ Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhbīr*, III, 1130.

⁹⁷ Abū ʿAbd Allāh Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Şādir, 1995), I, 468.

Nevertheless, this common term was not applied for ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān. According to a narrative related by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd (d. 144/761) was asked about the validity of the *fatwā* by ʿUthmān concerning “his making his spouse inheritress of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān’s property after a period of delay,” whereupon ibn ʿUbayd responded, “ʿUthmān is not *ṣāḥib sunna*”⁹⁸ and expressed that he did not mind ʿUthmān’s views.

It is very interesting that a *ṣaḥābī*, a caliph, such as ʿUthmān is not qualified as *ṣāḥib sunna*. If the term is generally to be understood as “holding knowledge of Sunna,” it is unlikely that a caliph would not have a good grasp of Sunna knowledge. We think that the comment by ʿAmr originates from certain criticisms against ʿUthmān during his caliphate. These criticisms include the following: he compiled the Qurʾān but burnt its other copies, he performed the prayer of resident instead of a prayer of traveler in Minā, and he climbed over the step of Muḥammad at the *minbar* of the Prophet in Medina.⁹⁹

We should analyze evaluations about ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd to determine the value of his comments about ʿUthmān. ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd al-Baṣrī is considered to be one of the founders of Muʿtazila and ranks among the earliest ḥadīth narrators; nevertheless, because he rejects *qadar*, ḥadīth scholars do not accept him as being *thiqa* and even accuse ʿAmr of lying and fabrication.¹⁰⁰ Views on ʿAmr often focus on his status as a narrator; however, comments concerning ʿUthmān by a person who is accused of unreliability and lying are open to discussion. On the other hand, ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd is not the only person to produce such comments on ʿUthmān.

Conclusion

In chronological terms, the semantic circle of discrediting and accrediting expressions expanded over the course of time. There are terms for which there is common agreement about their meaning as

⁹⁸ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-salām*, XIV, 63.

⁹⁹ Adnan Demircan, “Üçüncü Halife Osman’a Yöneltilen Bazı Eleştirilere Bâkılânî’nin Cevapları,” *İSTEM: İslâm San’at, Tarih, Edebiyat ve Mûsikîsi Dergisi* 4/8 (2006), 9-26.

¹⁰⁰ Avni İlhan, “Amr b. Ubeyd,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, III, 93-94; about ʿAmr and for claims of him being a Qadarī, also see W. Montgomery Watt, *İslâm Düşüncesinin Teşekkül Devri* (translated into Turkish by Ethem Ruhi Fiğlalı; Istanbul: Sarkaç Yayınları, n.d.), 147-149.

well as many expressions that undergo expansion and differentiation in signification. This is the consequence of a natural process depending on the factors of man and time. In narrator critiques, some changes may occur in the wording of certain findings; as a result, *al-jarḥ* and *al-ta'dīl* experts may ascribe different meanings to the same term. Therefore, it is impossible to restrict such terms to having only a single meaning. Nevertheless, it is probable that the closest sense can be determined through a determination of which meaning is primarily focused on by scholars.

As an accrediting word, *şāḥib sunna* has been employed since the earliest periods. In particular, biographers such as Ibn Sa'd, al-ʿIjlī, and others utilized this term for accreditation in their work. Al-ʿIjlī serves as a notable reference for the usage of this term in following works. Widespread usage of *şāḥib sunna* within *ṭabaqāt-tarājim* terminology began in the 3rd century AH. The term principally notes the competence of a narrator with regard to his narrative. The discrediting and accrediting expressions during the first two centuries AH concentrated on the acceptability of narratives by a narrator, whereas as of the 3rd century AH, the terms were intended to describe one's competence regarding narratives.¹⁰¹

Bringing together all usages in relevant works, the prerequisites for employment of the term for a person can be summarized as follows:

1. Sympathy for scholars such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, al-Awzāʿī and Mālik ibn Anas
2. Acquire and narrate a ḥadīth as is
3. Object to *bid'a*
4. Be attentive to obeying Sunna and competent with regard to ḥadīth science
5. Sincere commitment to the Qurʾān and its content
6. Pray for salvation of and peace for the ruling authority.

Due to differences in the expansion of meanings about *şāḥib sunna*, the term does not match to a single signification. In particular, it is impossible to restrict the meaning of *şāḥib sunna* merely to being

¹⁰¹ See Yücel, *Hadis İstıblarının Doğuşu ve Gelişimi*, 116, 188.

the opposite of *ṣāḥib bid'ā* or to claim that *bid'ā* is the antonym of Sunna. Lovers of al-Awzā'ī were called *ṣāḥib sunna*, and his haters were named *ṣāḥib bid'ā*; nevertheless, this was only a temporary usage. In the following periods, the meaning of the term underwent a notable expansion.

In fact, the association of *ṣāḥib sunna* with sympathy or antipathy toward a person is also a habit of the relevant era. Indeed, this usage is now limited to scholars who lived in a certain period. Generally, discussions on the creation of the Qur'ān constitute the historical ground with respect to the accrediting of scholars during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH. That the term became a criterion, especially in the person of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, insofar as his lovers were described as *ṣāḥib sunna*,¹⁰² and the indication of such by scholars such as al-Barbahārī are consequences of a natural process. Ibn Ḥanbal, who stood out among the few objectors of Miḥna,¹⁰³ inevitably became a symbolic figure for Sunna. As he was always a defender of Sunna, sympathy for him was set as a criterion for being *ṣāḥib sunna* to give due credit to such a personality.

An analysis of author and work basis is necessary for an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the term. This principle, which is valid for many discrediting and accrediting expressions, should be used for *ṣāḥib sunna* as well. An evaluation of *Sharḥ al-Sunna* by al-Barbahārī reveals semantic nuances between its usage in *'aqa'id* literature and *ṭabaqāt-tarājim* works. In *'aqa'id* literature, *ṣāḥib sunna* is often reduced to being the opposite of *bid'ā*, whereas *ṭabaqāt* works utilize it in a broader sense. Therefore, the determination of the true meaning of the term involves various factors such as the author and the type and time of the work.

We think that the expansive meaning of *ṣāḥib sunna* originates from the word *sunna*. In the terminology of the Islamic sciences, *sunna* is ascribed various meanings depending on specialty. In spite of certain disputes, *sunna* is generally considered as being synonymous with ḥadīth. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, it signifies the deeds that should be fulfilled in an exact manner and without any binding. In *kalām*, *sunna* is conceived as the “path of the Prophet and companions with regard to faith and deeds.” In *ṣaḥāba* and *tābi'ūn-*

¹⁰² See Özařar, *İdeolojik Hadisçiliğin Taribî Arka Planı*, 67.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 81.

related usage, *sunna* is also employed to note the exemplary behaviors of companions such as Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, in addition to those of the Prophet.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, the current interpretation on *şāhib sunna* comprises only a part of its previous meanings. The usages and meanings, which we tried to determine and analyze in chronological terms, reveal that it once had a broader sense than is known or used today. Apart from comments on its meaning, the accrediting quality of the term is very high, as is seen in the value ascribed to it by Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ. As said above, this accrediting value is evident because Wakīʿ and later biographers and *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* scholars use the term alongside *thiqa*.

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¹⁰⁴ For hereby meanings of Sunna and more, see Murteza Bedir, “Sünnet,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXXVIII, 150.

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