

Methodology for Proving the Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥah) of Traditions (Aḥādīth) on Imamate (Imāmah) with a Comparative Approach

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Imamate, as a central pillar of the Imāmī creedal system, is such that any Qur'ānic or tradition-based (riwā'ī) argument concerning it is inevitably grounded in the presupposition of the authenticity (ṣiḥḥah) of the transmitted texts (nuṣūṣ-i riwā'ī). Hence, the main question of this article is whether, on the basis of the principles accepted in Sunnī ḥadīth sciences ('ulūm al-ḥadīth), a coherent methodology can be formulated for proving the authenticity of the traditions concerning the imamate of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). Within this framework, the aim of the research is to formulate a set of intra-Sunnī criteria, derived from their ḥadīth and biographical evaluation (rijāl) sources, that would provide a methodical support for Imāmī theological (kalāmī) arguments concerning imamate. Employing a comparative approach and a descriptive-analytical method, and through a re-examination of Sunnī ḥadīth and rijāl sources, this research extracts and compares eight strategies for proving the authenticity of traditions on imamate. The findings indicate that these strategies can be grouped into five methodological categories: Foundational authenticity; Confirmatory authenticity; Argumentative authenticity; Descriptive authenticity; and Homogeneous authenticity. On the basis of these five methodological categories, and in accordance with principles accepted by Sunnīs themselves, a ruling of authenticity can be issued for a considerable portion of the traditions on imamate, thereby methodically strengthening the foundation of theological arguments concerning imamate.
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1. Introduction

The question of "proving the authenticity (ṣiḥḥah) of traditions on Imamate" holds fundamental importance within the Imāmī theological (kalāmī) tradition, because a significant portion of Qur'ānic-tradition-based arguments (istidlālāt-i Qur'ānī-riwā'ī) as well as rational formulations (ṣūrat-bandīhā-yi 'aqlī) concerning Imamate ultimately depend upon "the authority (i'tibār) of the text and chain (sanad) of traditions." However, in the context of inter-sectarian discourse (guftugūhā-yi bayn-madhhabī), intra-sectarian acceptance of a tradition is insufficient; the opposing party typically relies on its own specific ḥadīth and biographical evaluation (rijāl) criteria and, in argumentative dispute, demands that the reasoning be "binding" (ilzāmpazīrī).

From this arises the main research question: On the basis of principles accepted within Sunnī ḥadīth sciences ('ulūm al-ḥadīth), can a "systematic and refined methodological framework" be formulated for proving the authenticity of traditions on Imamate, such that it (a) is grounded in the intra-Sunnī (darūn-madhhabī) foundations and (b) possesses the capacity for persuasion (iqnā') and binding force (ilzām) in theological argumentation?

Focusing on this gap, the present article seeks—rather than merely collecting chains (ṭuruq) or offering case-by-case defenses of well-known traditions (such as those of Ghadīr, Thaḳalayn, Wilāyah, Madīnah, and Ṭayr)—to extract the multiple methodological patterns (algūhā-yi rawishī-yi mutakāthir) employed by Sunnīs in practice for "authenticating, strengthening, or practically accepting a tradition" and to classify them within a unified framework. The innovation of this study lies in not reducing "proof of authenticity" merely to the technical authentication (taṣḥīḥ-i iṣṭilāḥī) of a chain, but rather introducing a network of indicators (qarā'in) and validation pathways—traceable within the Sunnī ḥadīth school—as methodological tools for defending traditions on Imamate. It demonstrates that alongside "foundational authenticity" (ṣiḥḥat-i mabnā'ī), other pathways also play a significant role in the Sunnī ḥadīth tradition.

2. Methodology

This research is comparative (taṭbīqī) in approach and descriptive-analytical (taṣḥīfi-tahlīlī) in execution. The methodological procedure consists of the following stages:

- Stage one: Authoritative texts in Sunnī ḥadīth sciences and rijāl, as well as their practical applications in Sunnī ḥadīth, commentary (sharḥ), and theological works, were re-examined.
- Stage two: "Indicators considered authoritative by Sunnīs themselves" that lead to the acceptance of authenticity or the strengthening (taqwīyah) of a tradition's authority were extracted.

- Stage three: After extraction, the criteria were systematized and compared based on their shared logic.
- Stage four: Finally, they were presented in a classified framework.

The methodological logic of the article rests on two principles:

Intra-sectarian nature of criteria: The criteria must be explicitly stated or firmly established in Sunnī ḥadīth-rijāl literature.

Applicability to traditions on Imamate: The criteria must be usable in evaluating traditions related to Imamate (whether concerning explicit designation (naṣṣ), virtue (faḍīlah), or scholarly authority with Imamate-related function) and must not remain merely theoretical.

To demonstrate the efficacy of this framework, the article, while explaining the criteria, points in some cases to well-known examples (such as the traditions of Ṭayr, Madīnah, Wilāyah, and Thaḡalayn) to clarify how each criterion can strengthen the "argumentative authority" (i'tibār-i ihtijājī) of a tradition.

3. Findings

The main finding of the research is that "proving the authenticity of traditions on Imamate" within the Sunnī tradition cannot be reduced to a single pathway. Rather, a set of eight strategies (rāhkarhā) can be identified, which are gathered into five methodological categories:

3.1. Foundational Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥat-i Mabnā'ī) – Intrinsic (Dhātī) and Extrinsic (Ghayrī)

Intrinsic foundational authenticity is based on the definition of a sound (ṣaḥīḥ) ḥadīth and the fulfillment of the five classical conditions: continuity of chain (ittiṣāl al-sanad), uprightness ('adālah) of the transmitter, precision (ḍabt) of the transmitter, absence of irregularity (shudhūdh), and absence of hidden defect ('illah).

Extrinsic foundational authenticity is built upon the principle of strengthening (taqwīyah) a tradition through multiple chains (ta'addud-i ṭuruq) and the convergence of supporting evidence (shawāhid). In this manner, the minor weakness of some chains is compensated for by the multiplicity of pathways, and the tradition is elevated to the rank of ḥasan (good) or even ṣaḥīḥ (sound). This section demonstrates that, in Sunnī logic, "multiplicity of chains" is not merely a secondary technique but a recognized mechanism for generating a type of confidence (iṭmīnān) and increasing a tradition's authority.

3.2. Confirmatory Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥat-i Iqrārī) – Validation Through Sunnī Affirmation/Explicit Statement

This category covers three sub-pathways:

Explicit affirmation of authenticity (izhār-i ṣarīḥ-i ṣiḥḥah): An explicit statement by a Sunnī scholar or ḥadīth expert affirming the authenticity of a tradition.

Transmission in the canonical sound collections (kutub-i ṣaḥīḥ-nigāri): The presence of a tradition in books recognized within the Sunnī tradition as "sound" (ṣaḥīḥ) or as works of sound-collection, where the presumption is the authenticity of their traditions.

Transmission using a formula of certainty (riwāyat bā ṣīghah-yi jazm / irsāl-i musallam): The use of categorical expressions in transmitting a tradition, which in the writing logic of ḥadīth is considered an indication of confidence in its issuance (ṣudūr) and avoidance of reckless attribution to the Prophet.

3.3. Argumentative Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥat-i Iḥtijājī)

In this approach, the main criterion is that the tradition has been actually employed in constructing theological and scholarly arguments within Sunnī works. Such "argumentative employment" is regarded as a methodological indicator that the tradition—at least in terms of authority (i'tibār) for the one arguing—has passed the threshold of scholarly acceptance.

3.4. Descriptive Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥat-i Tawṣīfī)

An important finding is that, within the Sunnī scholarly tradition, narrative descriptors (awṣāf-i riwā'i)—such as expressions related to "the door of the city of knowledge" (bāb madīnat al-'ilm) in describing the scholarly station of Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī (peace be upon him)—are sometimes used extensively in the works of scholars to introduce key figures. The persistent repetition of these descriptions across different periods constitutes an "indicator of reliance" (qarīnah-yi i'timād) and can be analyzed as evidence of the acceptance of the tradition's content and, consequently, as a reinforcement of its authority.

3.5. Homogeneous Authenticity (Ṣiḥḥat-i Hamsānī)

According to this criterion, if the chain of a tradition on Imamate is completely identical to the chain of another tradition whose authenticity has been explicitly affirmed by Sunnī scholars and ḥadīth experts, then the ruling of authenticity (in the absence of conflicting indicators) may be extended (sarāyat) to the tradition on Imamate. This method provides a precise, chain-based mechanism for transferring a ruling of authority.

Summary of findings: The convergence of these findings is that with this five-category / eight-strategy framework, a significant spectrum of traditions on Imamate can be regarded as possessing a support of authority (pāshitiwānih-yi i'tibār) within the framework of accepted Sunnī foundations. This allows movement from scattered, case-by-case defenses toward methodological defense (difā'-yi rawishmand).

4. Conclusion

The article concludes that designing a methodological framework for proving the authenticity of traditions on Imamate based on intra-Sunnī criteria is not only possible but, from the perspective of inter-sectarian theological

discourse, necessary. The most significant achievement is demonstrating that "authenticity" in the actual practice of Sunnī ḥadīth scholarship is not solely the product of the technical authentication of a single chain. Rather, it is supported by multiple pathways: explicit affirmation, inclusion in sound collections, multiplicity of chains, argumentative employment, descriptive indicators, and chain-homogeneity.

Consequently, Imāmī arguments in defense of the foundational traditions on Imamate can, by relying on this very network of Sunnī criteria, acquire a more refined and binding form. While preserving their own theological identity, they can also be methodologically grounded (mustanad) in the ḥadīth common ground (zamīn-i mushtarak) of the opposing party. This formulation also paves the way for further research, including a comprehensive case study evaluating the efficacy of each criterion on a specific tradition.

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