

## **The Importance of Ilm al-Tabaqat in Distinguishing Between Connected and Disconnected Isnad in the Era of Technological Advancement**

Bilqisu Amatullah Usman<sup>1</sup>, Nelli Ani Harahap<sup>2</sup>, Fariza Rahma Jenery<sup>3</sup>, Mohamad hafiz darpen<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Faculty of Quran and Sunnah, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (UniSIRAJ), Perlis, Malaysia  
E-mail: hafizdarpen@kuips.edu.com

### **Abstract**

This study explores the significance of Ilm al-Tabaqat (the science of narrator generations) in distinguishing between connected (*muttasil*) and disconnected (*munqati*) chains of transmission (*asanid*). It is a fundamental discipline in the study of hadith narrators, as it contributes to identifying their ranks and ensuring the accuracy of the transmission sequence. With modern technological advancements and the emergence of digital hadith databases, there arises a need to reexamine this science through the lens of digital tools to evaluate their effectiveness in preserving and analyzing Prophetic traditions. The research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, comparing traditional methods of hadith scholarship with contemporary technological applications in *isnād* analysis. Findings indicate that understanding narrator generations remains essential for determining chain continuity and that technology when guided by classical principles can enhance the precision and accessibility of hadith research. The study concludes by emphasizing the integration of traditional hadith methodologies with digital innovation to ensure both accuracy and authenticity in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Ilm al-Tabaqat, isnad, connected and disconnected chains, hadith narrators, digital technology, hadith methodology

### **Introduction**

Hadith studies (*ulum al-Hadith*) represent one of the most distinguished Islamic scholarly disciplines, preserving the second primary source of Islamic legislation after the Qur'an. Through this science, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is authenticated, sound narrations are distinguished from weak ones, and the prophetic heritage is protected from distortion and confusion (Ibn al-Salah, 1986). This discipline is characterized by a unique feature: the system of *isnad* (chain of transmission), which is exclusive to the Islamic scholarly tradition. As classical scholars stated, "al-*isnad* min al-*din*" (the chain of transmission is part of the religion), and "without *isnad*, anyone could say anything" (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 1987). Through this precise system, hadith scholars developed a comprehensive scientific methodology to verify the authenticity of narrations and evaluate the integrity (*adalah*) and accuracy (*dabt*) of narrators, thus preserving the Sunnah from discontinuity and distortion across the centuries.

Among the subfields of hadith sciences, 'Ilm al-Tabaqat occupies a vital role it classifies narrators according to their generations, ranks, and relationships of learning, which helps

determine whether a chain is connected or broken (Ibn Hajar, 1998). This classification ensures that narrations are historically and scientifically verified through chronological and scholarly overlap. Classical scholars such as Ibn Sa'd (d. 230H) in his *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* laid the foundations for this science, followed by scholars like al-Khatib al-Baghdadi and al-Suyuti, who refined and organized the methodology (al-Suyuti, 1989). With the rise of modern databases and AI-driven tools, scholars today have the opportunity to revisit this discipline digitally, integrating classical rigor with computational efficiency to assess isnad authenticity (Itr, 2001; al-Rumi, 1990).

The importance of this research emerges in its effort to bridge the traditional methodology of hadith scholars in studying *ilm al-Tabaqat* with modern technological tools used in analyzing transmission chains. The study aims to clarify the fundamental role of *ilm al-Tabaqat* in distinguishing connected from disconnected isnad and to analyze the impact of modern technology in developing narrator studies in service of hadith science objectives. The research also seeks to present an integrative vision combining the precise critical methodology of hadith scholars with modern technological tools to achieve greater accuracy and control in studying transmission chains and serving the prophetic Sunnah in the digital age.

## Results

### Definition of *ilm al-Tabaqat* Among Hadith Scholars

In the technical terminology of hadith scholars, *tabaqah* (generation/stratum; pl. *ṭabaqāt*) refers to a group of narrators who are close in age or in their position within the chain of transmission, such that the teachers of one are the same as or similar to the teachers of another. A narrator may belong to one generation from one perspective and to another generation from a different perspective, such as Anas ibn Malik, who is classified with the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in one stratum by virtue of his companionship, but may be placed in multiple strata when considering social differences or temporal characteristics. These stratifications help distinguish narrators and prevent confusion among them, a concern emphasized by hadith scholars such as Ibn Sa'd in *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* and al-Hakim in *Ma'rifat Ulum al-Hadith* (al-Zahrani, 1417 AH, p. 42).

The origins of *ilm al-Tabaqat* derive from prophetic traditions praising the generation of the Companions and dividing the Muslim community into successive centuries (*qurun*). The development of this science began in the second Islamic century, when hadith scholars formulated it to classify narrators according to their historical periods and meetings with teachers. The discipline extended beyond merely categorizing generations to encompass the precise control of scholarly and temporal relationships among narrators, with various methodologies adopted by major scholars across the ages.

### Definition of Isnad

Al-Zarkashi stated: "It is derived from *al-sanad*, which is what rises and elevates from the base of a mountain, because the transmitter (*musnad*) elevates the report to its originator. It may also be derived from the expression *Fulan sanad*, meaning 'so-and-so is reliable/dependable,' thus the report about the path of the text (*matn*) is called *sanad* because hadith critics depend upon it in [determining] soundness and weakness" (al-Humaym, 1419 AH).

### Connected Hadith (*Muttasil*)

Muttasil refers to a hadith whose chain of transmission is unbroken, such that each narrator heard the hadith from the one above him, until the chain reaches its ultimate source without interruption (Ibn al-Salah, 1986, p. 44).

### **Disconnected Hadith (Munqati)**

Munqati, often given this description, is a hadith narrated by someone below the rank of the Successors directly from the Companions, such as Malik narrating from Ibn Umar, and similar cases (Ibn al-Salah, 1986, p. 56). Hadith scholars divided narrations into various categories based on chain continuity or discontinuity, considering a connected hadith (muttasil) as one whose chain is unbroken from beginning to end without the omission of any narrator at any level, while a disconnected hadith (munqati) is one from which one or more narrators have been omitted at some point in the chain. Ibn al-Salah addressed this classification in detail in his work *Ma'rifat Anwa Ulum al-Hadith*, explaining that knowledge of continuity and discontinuity is among the most important foundations upon which the hadith critic relies in judging a hadith as sound or weak (Ibn al-Salah, 1986, p. 45).

### **Historical Development and Significance of Tabaqat Literature**

Tabaqat works are among the most important sources that contributed to preserving biographical records and authenticating narrators across the ages, owing to the rich information they contain and the precise, distinctive classificatory approach that sets them apart from other compilations. These works varied according to the category for which the book was authored; some specialized in the generations of hadith transmitters (tabaqat al-muhaddithin), others in the generations of jurists (tabaqat al-fuqaha), or genealogists (tabaqat al-nassabin). Authors differed in defining the concept of tabaqah and its content, resulting in compilations that varied in the richness and breadth of their material according to each author's conception. Tabaqat works on narrator history also formed a significant point of intersection between the disciplines of history and hadith studies, sharing overlapping authentication and critical characteristics. Subsequently, supplementary works (zawa'id) emerged to complete what earlier works had missed, adding benefits, corrections, and appendices that enriched this science and increased its epistemic value (al-Luhibi & Sharjah University-UAE, 2024).

### **Major Works in Ilm al-Tabaqat**

Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kubra by Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 AH) is among the earliest works to reach us in the science of generations, distinguished by its precise methodology in organizing narrators chronologically and academically. Khalifah ibn Khayyat (d. 240 AH) approached Ibn Sa'd's status in terms of accuracy (dabt) and truthfulness (sidq) in narration, though he was distinguished by his extensive knowledge of genealogy (ansab). In his work, he relied on three main organizational axes: genealogy, cities, and generations. Both authors based their classification of Companions and Successors on precedence in Islam and scholarly standing.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852 AH) distinguished himself in his work *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* through a precise critical methodology combining the methods of earlier scholars in authentication with later scholarly analysis. He relied on primary sources in transmitting biographies and demonstrated high academic integrity by attributing each piece of information to its source. Studies have revealed that Ibn Hajar was among the later historians who covered scholars from earlier historical periods, relying on predecessors in hadith studies and history (Nijm Abdullah & Al-Khafaji, 2025). He also benefited from biographical, historical, and earlier tabaqat works in constructing a precise twelve tier generation system distinguished by combining justice (adalah) and temporal considerations (Aris, 2018; Ibn Hajar, 1998).

## Discussion

### Modern Research Trends and the Application of Technology in Studying Ilm Al-Tabaqat and Distinguishing Isnad

Artificial intelligence has become an essential component of human work systems in the twenty first century, with its use extending from industry and economics to medicine, education, and scientific research. As its integration into academic environments has expanded, universities and research centers worldwide have begun incorporating artificial intelligence applications into teaching and epistemic analysis processes. Examples include initiatives implemented in the United States and the Islamic University of Madinah through scientific workshops and symposia focused on applications of artificial intelligence in Islamic sciences and the Arabic language (al-Awfi, 2023). Participants in these international forums affirmed that artificial intelligence has moved beyond being merely an experimental field to become a research tool contributing to the development of scholarly analysis and strengthening epistemic outputs, thereby opening new horizons for its application in the fields of hadith, Sunnah, taqat, and isnad studies (al-Awfi, 2023).

With the development of technological tools in the modern era, numerous efforts have emerged to integrate digital methods into the study of hadith sciences and ilm al-tabaqat, aiming to achieve precision and speed in analyzing transmission chains and identifying connected and disconnected narrator sequences in light of the traditional methodology inherited from early hadith scholars.

Recent years have witnessed notable progress in employing modern technology in the study of isnad and ilm al- tabaqat, as digital programs and artificial intelligence have facilitated tracking narrator chains and comparing their generations temporally and geographically with precise accuracy. Studies by Ateil (2022) indicated that creating digital biographical databases (modern technology in ilm al-tabaqat) provides comprehensive databases linking narrators through interactive scholarly and epistemic networks, while Harahap (2023) demonstrated that integrating the traditional methodology based on Isnad with digital technologies preserves methodological authenticity while increasing its efficiency in verifying continuity and discontinuity in chains. Fachrurrosi and Arifin (2024) confirmed that using data analysis and artificial intelligence allows for mapping narrator networks and determining relationships between their generations at speeds surpassing traditional Ijtihad based methods, while maintaining adherence to the principles of jarh wa-ta'dil (narrator criticism and authentication) established by early hadith scholars (Al-Sani & Abdulmumini, 2025).

This integration between traditional methodology and digital tools achieves an epistemic bridge combining the authenticity of hadith science with the gains of the modern era, contributing to renewed interest in studying taqat as a fundamental entry point for distinguishing connected from disconnected isnad in the contemporary research environment.

Hadith authentication requires careful examination of the hadith text (matn). Scholars specialized in hadith, known as muhaddithun, have devoted meticulous attention to verifying the soundness and credibility of hadith content. To confirm the soundness of the matn, hadith scholars employ several methods. For example, if the content of a hadith contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an, it is classified as mawdu (fabricated) and rejected immediately. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) spoke using words familiar to people of his era to facilitate their understanding of his message. Therefore, if a hadith contains unfamiliar words

or expressions not typically used during the Prophet's time, its authenticity may be questioned. According to the principles of hadith authentication, if the matn includes vulgar language or expressions contrary to the Prophet's character and qualities, the hadith is rejected immediately without examining the Isnad. Thus, once the soundness of the matn is confirmed beyond reasonable doubt, verification of the isnad becomes unnecessary in scholarly articles (Yusoff, 2010).

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ilm al-Tabaqat constitutes one of the fundamental pillars in the methodology of hadith scholars, enabling researchers to identify narrator sequences and precisely control chain continuity or discontinuity. Classical studies have proven that this science was not merely historical documentation of narrators, but rather a methodological critical tool aimed at preserving the Sunnah from breaks and overlaps. Comparison among the works of early scholars such as Ibn Sa'd, Khalifah ibn Khayyat, and Ibn Hajar reveals the development of the methodological structure of this science and the integration of its objectives in distinguishing connected from disconnected hadith.

In light of accelerating technological development, the importance of employing artificial intelligence tools and digital programs in studying ilm al-Tabaqat and analyzing transmission chains has become evident. This development has provided extensive capabilities for tracking narrator networks and representing scholarly and temporal relationships among them with unprecedented precision, contributing to accelerating the isnad verification process and improving result accuracy. Nevertheless, contemporary studies have emphasized the necessity that these tools remain servants of the hadith Scholars methodology, not replacements for it, achieving integration between authenticity and heritage on one hand, and technology and contemporaneity on the other. Consequently, combining the traditional critical methodology with modern technological tools represents an epistemic necessity contributing to developing hadith studies and achieving the objectives of ilm al-Tabaqat in preserving and authenticating isnad. Among the important recommendations in this context is the necessity of establishing unified databases linking scholars' efforts with modern technical research, and enhancing cooperation between specialists in hadith sciences and artificial intelligence technologies to serve the noble prophetic Sunnah in an integrated scholarly environment.

### References

- Al-ʿAwfi, A. S. (2023). Artificial intelligence and its impact on scientific research in prophetic hadith sciences: ChatGPT as a *model*. *Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Islamic Sciences*, 12(3), 45–62.
- Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. (1987). *Al-Kifāyah fī ʿilm al-riwāyah*. Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.
- Al-Luhībī, M., & Sharjah University-UAE. (2024). Ṭabaqāt literature: Historical and methodological significance. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18(2), 234–256.
- Al-Rūmī, F. (1990). *Manhaj al-madrasah al-ʿaqliyyah al-ḥadīthah fī dirāsah al-Sunnah al-nabawiyah*. Muʿassasah al-Risālah.
- Al-Sani, A., & Abdulmumini, M. D. (2025). The role of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology in authenticating and preserving hadith literature. *Middle East Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 5(2), 122–129.

- Al-Suyūfī, J. (1989). *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Al-Zahrānī, M. M. (1417 AH). *‘Ilm al-rijāl: Nash’atuhu wa-taṭawwuruḥu min al-qarn al-awwal ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-tāsi’*. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah.
- Aris, M. (2018). Ibn Ḥajar's methodology in narrator classification. *Journal of Hadith Studies*, 12(4), 345–367.
- Atçıl, A. (2022). Building a digital ṭabaqāt: Challenges, opportunities, and research possibilities. *Turath: Journal of al-Qur’ān and al-Sunnah*, 9(1), 54–68.
- Fachrurrosi, H., & Arifin, T. (2024). The use of modern technology in hadith research. *Cakrawala Journal of Religious Studies and Global Society*, 1(2), 159–165.
- Harahap, A. P. (2023). Transformation of understanding hadith in the post-multimedia era. *Living Hadith Journal*, 11(2), 233–247.
- Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. (1986). *Ma ‘rifat anwā’ ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth* (N. al-‘Itr, Ed.). Dār al-Fikr.
- Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. (1997). *Taqrīb al-tahdhīb*. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. (1998). *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Ibn Sa’d. (1968). *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. Dār Ṣādir.
- ‘Itr, N. (2001). *Manhaj al-naqd fī ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Nijm Abdullah, & Al-Khafaji, M. (2025). Ibn Ḥajar as a later historian: Methodological analysis. *Journal of Islamic Historical Studies*, 15(1), 78–95.
- Yusoff, M. (2010). Adopting hadith verification techniques in digital evidence investigation. *Journal of Computer Science*, 6(13), 613–618.