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Sunni *Ḥadīth* and Continuous Commentaries on the Eschatological Mahdī: A Literary Analysis

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Abstract: Many contemporary studies approach Mahdism from a political-science orientation or historical perspective, as the evidence is marshalled from the influential Mahdist movement in Islamic history—Abbasids, Fatimids, Muwahhids, Sudanese Mahdists, and so on. As such, it can be seen that there has been a lack of discourse as regards abstraction, particularly concerning the literary structure of Mahdī *ḥadīth*. This paper explores a panoramic view of *ḥadīth* commentaries in order to understand their commentarial production on apocalyptic questions, specifically focusing on the subject of Mahdī within this trend of Sunni *ḥadīth* scholarship. *Ḥadīth* commentaries are meant to bridge the gap in space and time between Prophetic words or teachings and the actual world of the reader. Hence, this study provides a brief survey of the documentation of Mahdī *ḥadīth*, starting with the classical Sunnite *ḥadīth* compendia of the second century of Hijrah. The material has been drawn from *ḥadīth* compendia, topical *ḥadīth* works, *sīrah* literature, classical-to-modern *ḥadīth* commentaries, and other theological writings and has been balanced when feasible with details (or lack thereof) contained in the Quran. Advocators have always adopted and adjusted their hermeneutics in order to answer challenges posed by deniers of Mahdī *ḥadīth*. Regardless of how exactly these strategies, attitudes, and uses arose, it is safe to assume that these scholars undertook their work out of professional vocation in addition to religious devotion. Eventually, *ḥadīth* commentaries found their place in the theological discourse according to orientations and operations of eschatology, which to a certain extent reflect classical, medieval, or contemporary attitudes toward the meaning and relevance of Mahdī *ḥadīth*.

Keywords: *ḥadīth*; *sīrah*; Sunni; Mahdī; commentaries; eschatology; apocalypse



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1. Introduction

Few would argue that the *ḥadīth* literature is critical to Islamic eschatology, and especially the apocalypse. These documents have served as the focal point for the theological, intellectual, and cultural contentions that have characterised Islam since the inception of the Muslim community. At its most basic level, an eschatological *ḥadīth* is either a remark made by the Prophet Muhammad regarding a particular circumstance, or an answer to a question (or a query of questions), or involves his ability to see the future. All of this information has been scrutinised minutely by generations of Muslim scholars over the last 1400 years who have interpreted it and written tomes upon tomes to explain and comment on it, to authenticate its transmission, and to reconcile its various discrepancies. Unlike early scholars who were concerned with employing *ḥadīth* as the main domain of metaphysical postulation however, contemporary Muslim scholars prefer to confront the significant Western focus on reason. Ryad (2017) recently argued that this attitude arose because contemporary rationalists questioned the extensive conventional information about life after death and rewards in heaven. Nonetheless, Daniel Brown (1999) correctly points out that the diverse, divergent, and frequently antagonistic approaches to sunnah that have emerged in modern Islam should not be viewed as expressions of a contest

between “tradition” and “modernity,” because each approach maintains some form of continuity with “tradition.” “Tradition,” on the other hand, is both subject to change and has been utilised as a vehicle and reason for change. As a result, contemporary Muslim apocalyptic literature has a strong, cohesive, and accessible heritage for describing the end of the world. Despite this, this vision is mostly related to various aspects of the political environment in the Muslim world, and does not, to a certain extent, represent *ḥadīth* scholarship (Mohd Rapingi and Ismail 2022). While the nature of *ḥadīth* literature predisposes it to a conservative, non-interpretative role, this is simply insufficient in the reality in which we live. Apocalyptic (and several other *ḥadīth*) genres must be made relevant. Although going against the grain of Muslim history, there have been endeavours to do so over the last thirty years (Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād 2017; Hawwā 2016).

In general, as part of their work compiling the *ḥadīth*, which involves almost every aspect of the pillars of Islamic faith, scholars of *ḥadīth* used to dedicate separate books or chapters in their collections to eschatological themes (Muhammad Yusoff 2020b). Although the Quran depicts the day of judgement and the habitations of the garden and fire in great detail, it makes little if any reference to the condition of the world between death and resurrection or *ashrāt al-sā'a* (apocalypse). These apocalyptic events are a subcategory of eschatology, which we might refer to as composite eschatology (Donner 2017). The eschatological scheme presented in the *ḥadīth*, for example, envisions *ashrāt al-sā'a* as the final judgement, which is preceded by a lengthy period of wars, marked by the appearance of the Dajjal or Antichrist, and then by the second coming of Jesus, who will vanquish the Dajjal and inaugurate the millennium—a prolonged period of earthly bliss—which will eventually be followed by the judgement (Muslim 2014). The *ḥadīth* that speak of the Mahdī, or eschatological deliverer, are also part of this scheme since they anticipate the Mahdī's advent as heralding the start of an anticipated age “when the world will be filled with justice as it was formerly filled with injustice.” This preparatory, earthly phase will finally give way to the end-time, the final judgement, and the definitive assignment of all souls to paradise or fire. The typical types of apocalypses found throughout Muslim literature include the historical, cosmic, and political eschatology known as *al-fitān* and *al-malāḥim* (trials and fierce battles) or *ashrāt al-sā'a* from which we derive our apocalypses. According to Smith and Haddad (2002), the Muslim apocalyptic literature, which contains a plethora of analysis on these conditions, is typically inaccessible in English. Yet as William Chittick (2007) remarks,

In assessing the role of eschatology in modern Islam, we should remember first that we are talking about a fifth of humanity, and there exists no survey of what Muslims are saying and writing today in their diverse languages. Nonetheless, a good deal of uninformed generalization goes on in the Western media, especially in the wake of 9/11 and the reported beliefs of those who undertake suicide missions. Many scholars of Islam have spoken out against the misinterpreted teachings about martyrdom and the afterlife that are used in the indoctrination of radicals, though little notice is taken of them in the media. Scholarship is more likely to make the news when it enters the fray against the Islamists by continuing the long-standing efforts of Orientalists to undercut the authority of the Koran.

It goes without saying that the ideas and beliefs of leaders and intellectuals, both ideological and theological, have likely impacted how people perceived the Mahdī. In the 20th century, the debate on theological problems on Mahdī had split into at least two views: the expectation of al-Mahdī and its rejection. There are modern scholars such as Rashīd Riḍā (1947) in his famous *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Aḥmad Amīn in his books *al-Mahdī wa al-Mahdawīyyah* (Amīn 2012) and *Ḍuḥā al-Islām* (Amīn 1952), Al-Sammān (1954) in *al-Islām al-Muṣaffā*, Sa'd Muḥammad Ḥasan (1953) in *al-Mahdīyyah fī al-Islām Mundhu Aqdām al-'Usūr Ḥattā al-Yawm*, Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1971) in his encyclopaedia *Dā'irah Ma'ārif al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Annān (1970) in his work *Tarājim Islāmiyyah Sharqīyyah wa Andalusīyyah*, Al-Khaṭīb (1980) in *al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar wa man Yantaẓirunā*, Al-Maḥmūd (2015) in his treatise *Lā Mahdī Yuntaẓar Ba'd al-Rasūl Sayyid al-Bashar*, and many

other Sunnis who publicly rejected the coming of al-Mahdī. More specifically, the rejection was expressed through various arguments. Most of them appear to refute the concept of Mahdī, contending that it is mythical without credible support from the foundational Islamic scriptures. They maintain that even the Prophet did not endorse it (Wajdi 1971); the notion of Mahdī originally entered among the ranks of Sunnis from the Shiite tradition (Hasan 1953; Amīn 1952) as a supernatural idea that initially came from Christianity and Judaism (Al-Sammān 1954; Al-Khaṭīb 1980). The *Ṣaḥīḥayn* or al-Bukhārī and Muslim sources do not include any Mahdī *ḥadīth* (Riḍā 1947; Al-Maḥmūd 2015); all these *ḥadīth* are *ḍaʿīf* (weak) or *muḍṭarib* (confused) (Riḍā 1947) along with several others.

However, the predominance of Sunnis believes that the Mahdī will appear at the end of time to bring justice to the world, much like the Prophet Muḥammad. Highlighting criticism on some of the deniers of Mahdī, Al-Tahānawī (2010), Aḥmad Shākir (Ibn Ḥanbal 1995), Al-Ghumarī (1347AH), Al-Albānī (1995), Al-Abbād (1969), Yūsuf ʿAbd Allāh Al-Wābil (1991), Al-Tuwayjirī (1983), and many others have raised the method of argument that one might say express doubts. Generally, in response to the oppositions' rejections of the authenticity of *ḥadīth*, they argue that the narrators in the *sanad* (genealogy of transmission) are reliable, and the *ḥadīth* are considered authentic as the weakness of a *ḥadīth* is compensated by a multiplicity of narratives (Al-Tahānawī 2010). As far as the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* not including any Mahdī *ḥadīth* is concerned, proponents (Al-Tahānawī 2010; Al-Abbād 1969; Al-Tuwayjirī 1983) cite support for their view through indirect *ḥadīth* as follows: Al-Bukhārī reported in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the chapter of the descent of Jesus, the son of Mary, from Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) said: "What would be your state when Jesus, son of Mary, descends amongst you and your Imam is from amongst you?" Another *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet also reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* from Jābir that he heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) saying: "A group of my Ummah will remain steadfast on the truth and will remain victorious until the Day of Resurrection. Then Jesus, son of Mary, will descend and their leader will say, 'Come and lead us in prayer.' Jesus, son of Mary, will say, 'No, one of you is the leader of this Ummah, honored by Allāh.'" The discussion structure takes place around the content of the *ḥadīth* from the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. For advocates, the complex argument of the implicit presence of Mahdī is possible owing to the phrase, "What would be your state when the son of Mary descends amongst you and your Imam is from amongst you?" Apart from these multiple narratives, Al-Abbād (1969) emphasises that this allows for the epistemological certainty of an ultimately authentic story of Mahdī with reliable reference from the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.

2. Method and Scope

Essentially, a theologian may view a *ḥadīth* and its commentary as a tool to construct a belief system. In contrast, a *ḥadīth* scholar may view it as a unique attempt to resolve a disagreement over ethical, legal, or religious principles that spans generations of scholars. These two perspectives are not seen as mutually exclusive in this paper. By exploring significant *ḥadīth* literature, this paper explores a panoramic view of *ḥadīth* commentaries in order to understand their commentarial production on apocalyptic questions and specifically the subject of Mahdī within this trend of Sunni *ḥadīth* scholarship. *Ḥadīth* commentaries are meant to bridge the gap in space and time between Prophetic words or teachings and the actual world of the reader. Therefore, this study examines their strategies for incorporating, examining, critiquing, or evading the traditional theological views of al-Mahdī *ḥadīth*. What contributions have these scholars or authors made to the doctrine of al-Mahdī, the portents before or surrounding these occurrences, and the nature of Islamic eschatology? How did they connect their comprehension of early Muslims to theological truths about eschatological subjects?

As scholars have argued that the doctrine of Mahdī refers to a theological discussion rather than a historical event, we will mostly focus on the eschatological Mahdī. The study of Mahdī as an "eschatological issue" in this study thus excludes historical factors and doctrinal forms in favour of the literary form and content about the specific apocalypse

under discussion. [Lawson \(2017\)](#) opines that the study of the apocalypse as “eschatology” focuses only on religious and theological concepts pertaining to the “end times.” It thus extends beyond simple literary analysis to elucidate the manner in which a specific work, or perhaps a social movement, contemplates and teaches about the last things. These “last things” may relate to solely historical events in “time, moment or hour” or to final things in a deeper existential or spiritual dimension: the sphere of the soul. Eschatology is therefore often used to allude to a synthesis of both of these “fields of operation.” The many manifestations of apocalyptic events and eschatological notions provide a fertile topic of study. It is hoped that the categories of classical *ḥadīth* compendia and commentaries outlined below contribute to the development of a concise and unambiguous descriptive analysis that will facilitate comparative work by allowing scholars from diverse fields to grasp the essential characteristics of various interpretative schemes for various *ḥadīth* more easily. In this regard, then, and if these works can be called apocalypse commentaries, studying them may help shed light on an issue that still occupies people’s minds today: what societal context gave rise to these writings? Scrutinising the Mahdī as a subject in these works, which employs much of the *ḥadīth*, means that the reader is forced to see the *ḥadīth* material in its (perhaps original) apocalyptic light.

Classical-to-modern scholars of *ḥadīth* interpreted these Mahdī *ḥadīth* in serial iterations over long periods of time in response to diverse sects and attacks. These interpretations and commentaries operated at two levels: to prove the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* of Mahdī amid the manoeuvres of a complex scholarly scene and to do so while simultaneously championing the hermeneutic standard that Sunni scholars believed best preserved the meaning of *ḥadīth*. Overall, these interpretations and commentaries offered the commentator social reward in achieving interpretive excellence through the practice of commentary. Its enormous allegorical and strong teaching potential for religious belief contribute to the value of the *ḥadīth* corpus. Without running the risk of being over-schematic when interpreting these medieval scholars, one should tentatively draw attention to the general considerations. In his overview study of the genre of *ḥadīth* commentaries, [Mustafa Macit \(2020\)](#) proposes ten types of material most commonly found in *ḥadīth* commentaries: (1) The identification of sources that include the same or a similar *ḥadīth* (in other words, this basic type involves *takhrīj* or the retracing of *ḥadīth*); (2) the *ḥadīth*’s relationship with the *bāb* (chapter) and its *tarjamah* (heading); (3) the identification and criticism of transmitters in the *isnād* (transmission genealogy); (4) the evaluation of the *ḥadīth*’s authenticity; (5) the *ḥadīth*’s grammatical structure; (6) the determination of legal rulings and the discussion of legal school doctrines; (7) the study of rare words in the *ḥadīth* (*gharīb al-ḥadīth*); (8) the reconciliation of contradictory *ḥadīth*; (9) the critique of earlier commentators; and (10) answers to anticipated questions.

Contemporary researchers approaching the interpretive discourse of *ḥadīth* can now undoubtedly access dozens of elements, characteristics, and domains with several clustered themes. Perhaps the most fundamental considerations are described in a recent paper by [Bin Jamil \(2019\)](#): “Islamic Scriptures and Voice Intonation: A Preliminary Survey in Arabic Linguistic Thought and *Ḥadīth* Interpretive Discourse”. In spite of the fact that Bin Jamil’s study is intended to determine the appropriate intonation in reading the *ḥadīth*, he proposes six potential contributions that can be adapted as domains of interpretive discourse for *ḥadīth*: (1) the study of uncommon words in *ḥadīth*, (2) the study of *al-amthāl al-nabawiyyah* (Prophetic proverbs), (3) the study of Arabic rhetorical strategy devices in the *ḥadīth*, (4) the study of *al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh* (abrogation) in *ḥadīth* literature, (5) the study of *sabab wurūd al-ḥadīth* (the *ḥadīth* background), and (6) the study of *ta’addud al-riwāyāt* (multiple narratives) of a *ḥadīth*. Bin Jamil poses structurally interrelated domains, constantly touching on the significant areas of *ḥadīth* commentaries or interpretative discourses. These characteristics can, to a certain extent, be generalised with regard to the wide range of *ḥadīth* that are comparable. All our commentary examples of Mahdī *ḥadīth*, which differ in set-up, structure and content, should not be grouped as texts that merely record facts. With regard to their general considerations, they are unequivocally

postulations for Sunni theology. Various so-called problematic and contradictory elements of *ḥadīth* can also be detected. These elements reconcile the first or original canonical *ḥadīth* compendia, and, to a more-limited extent, medieval *ḥadīth* scholars regarding what is being commented on and how. Using the technique of *takhrīj*, or retracing the *ḥadīth* of Maḥdī, scholars of *ḥadīth* practise authentication; that is, they cross the boundary from epistemology to eschatology. A basis is thus constructed, whether consciously or unconsciously, to encourage a conviction or even to create a new one. A situation is prepared in which both *muḥaddith* and the listener or recipient (the latter through their individually shaped assimilation of the text) closely examine such a belief.

3. Diversity of the Record: The Maḥdī Inscription in the Sīrah Literature

Before delving into the classical and medieval *ḥadīth* literature of this eschatological Maḥdī, it will be helpful to explore the related corpus and its various versions and spot manifold historical materials to determine why it became a point of contention. It should be noted that the word Maḥdī is a derivative of the same Arabic root for the words for guide, vanguard, to guide, to rightly guide; to explain, to clarify; road; daylight; objective; piety; mode; manner; a present, to give a present; and a sacrificial offering, to offer a sacrificial offering. In this *h-d-y* root, 11 forms occur 291 times in the Quran: *hadā* (to give the ability to know right from wrong, to give the ability to fend for oneself, to instil the instinct for survival), 114 times; *hudiya* (to be shown the way), 4 times; *yahiddi* (to guide someone), once; *ihṭadā* (to use for guidance), 39 times; *hādī* (one guiding to the right path), 10 times; *hudā* (guiding, showing the right way), 85 times; *ahdā* (more/most guided), 7 times; *muḥṭadī* (one finding the way, one coming to a conclusion, one reaching the right decision), 4 times; *muḥṭadun* (pl. *muḥṭadūn*), 18 times; *hady* (offering brought to the Sacred Mosque in Makkah in accordance with the teachings), 7 times; and *hadiyyatun* (gift), twice (Badawi and Muhammad 2008).

In general, the study of the Maḥdī *ḥadīth*, as it is among the major eschatological issues, could also consider the literature of *sīrah* to analyse its position from the viewpoint of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* (proof and evidence of prophethood). Literature on *sīrah* of the Prophet is known to focus on the history of Arab society in the Arabian Peninsula before the birth of the Prophet, the events before his prophethood, his preaching, and the response of both Arabs and non-Arabs towards his message, the establishment of the first Islamic community, and the life of the Prophet's wives, family members, and his companions. Additionally, the events involving the miracles of the Prophet are recorded as part of the *Sīrah* accounts in early literature, as Kister (1983) once observed,

Stories about miracles, either performed by the Prophet himself or wrought for him by God, were widely current and were later collected; compilations of stories about his miracles were *Amārāt al-Nubuwwah*, *Alām al-Nubuwwah*, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*. The miraculous power granted the Prophet by God, and his extraordinary feats, are often compared in these books with the miracles performed by the preceding prophets.

A glance at the earliest *Sīrah* works such as Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768) and Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828), *Maghāzī* of al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822), *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* of Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), and *Jawāmi' al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* of 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Qutubī (d. 456/1063) finds that there is no narration mentioned regarding the emergence of Maḥdī. It is only clearly noticeable from the literature of *Sīrah* from around the fourth or fifth century of Hijrah when Abū Sa'd 'Abd al-Malik al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/1016) in his *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* (Al-Kharkūshī 2003) mentioned a Maḥdī *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet said: "The world will not perish until it is reigned by a man from my House, his name will be my name, he will fill this world with justice and equity," under the "Chapter on al-Maḥdī, and he is from the House of the Prophet." In the same century, al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1065), in his *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* (Al-Bayhaqī 1988), also mentioned a specific chapter of the "Collection of Narrations Regarding the Prophet's Informing of Events after Him, and Allāh's confirming in all that He promised to Him." Concerning several Maḥdī *ḥadīth* contained in the sub-

chapter of “Compiling a number of narrations on the reign of the al-‘Abbās clan,” it can be clearly remarked that the Mahdī *ḥadīth* in this work confirms the reign of the al-‘Abbās clan in later Islāmīc history about which ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-‘Abbās is reported to have said: “There will be from our family al-Manṣūr, al-Saffāh, and al-Mahdī.”

Another work of *Sīrah* identified to include Mahdī *ḥadīth* is *Dhakhā’ir al-‘Uqbā fī Manāqib Dhawī al-Qurbā* (Al-Ṭabarī 1937) by Muḥib al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī (d. 694/1294) wherein it is mentioned that the Mahdī is descending from the two grandsons of the Prophet, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Al-Ṭabarī even further confirms the Mahdī’s lineage from al-Ḥusayn by citing a *ḥadīth* narrated by Ḥudhayfah wherein the Prophet said: “If there is only one day left in the world (before the Qiyāmah), Allāh will prolong that day until a man from my children, whose name is the same as my name, emerges”. Salmān asked: “O Messenger of Allāh, from which of your children will he come?” He replied: “From my children, from this one”, and he pointed with his hand to al-Ḥusayn. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372), in his *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Ibn Kathīr 1990), also included Mahdī *ḥadīth* in the “Chapter of *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwah*” under a subchapter regarding the reign of the al-‘Abbās Clan. He only mentioned a few *ḥadīth* to confirm that the Mahdī comes from the family of al-‘Abbās. In the ninth century of Hijrah, Aḥmad bin ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) compiled a number of Mahdī *ḥadīth* under the chapter “The Prophet’s Narrative on the Reign of al-‘Abbās Clan” in his *Imtā’ al-Asmā bimā lī al-Nabī min al-Aḥwāl wa al-Amwāl wa al-Ḥafadah al-Matā* (Al-Maqrīzī 1999). This compilation of Mahdī *ḥadīth* covers several important issues such as the Prophet’s prophecy on the emergence of the Mahdī from the al-‘Abbās Clan, as the al-Mansūr and al-Saffāh will also come from them, and of the Mahdī’s black flag coming for Khurasān with the urge of the Prophet to give a pledge to him even if they are on snow.

In its most common form, the *ḥadīth* of the Mahdī consist of several notions: the arrival of the Mahdī reveals that some of these *ḥadīth* announce the birth of the Mahdī from the Prophet’s family, specifically his daughter Fatima. In contrast, historically, to the Fatimite Mahdī proposal (Madelung and Walker 2021), some *ḥadīth* speak either tacitly or openly of a Hashimite Mahdī, Abbasid Mahdī, Sufyanid Mahdī, Tamimite Mahdī, Qahtamite Mahdī, or Mawali Mahdī (Madelung 1986). A *ḥadīth* also thoroughly refutes the existence of any other Mahdī but Isa (Ibn Mājah 1998). The Rāfiḍite Shī’a first adopted the concept that gave the visionary groups of the Umayyad era their chiliastic impetus: the concept of *raja* (the return) at the end of time (Sachedina 1981). As an initial in-depth analysis of the Mahdī concept, Sachedina explores the evolving relationship between the Shiite and political regimes and contrasts the Judeo-Christian and Shiite conceptions of the Messiah and Mahdī. His primary sources for the evolution of theology around the Mahdī are the writings of early Imamite scholars who established their theories during a time when they were a marginalised group in the Islāmīc world.

4. Voices of the Text: The Reception of Islāmīc Eschatology in the Early Ḥadīth Literature

A number of samples are translated below; it is intended that these, along with the commentary and analysis that follow, will show another strength or quality of those works. In offering a case study, this paper aims to contribute to the expanding literature on the apocalypse *ḥadīth* as sources of knowledge, as opposed to archives of neutral information. This study also intends to call attention to the idea that the narrative framing of certain commentaries may have a very specific purpose in the author’s life in addition to being a component of a larger framework for moulding the identity of groups. Understandably, the messianic figure and his foes are the primary focus of the apocalyptic literature. To deal with this topic, one must first consider the fundamental reference that is known in Sunni traditions. Probably the most significant feature of the *ḥadīth* of the Mahdī is that it is well-attested and appears in some of the most important early compendia of *ḥadīth*. Awareness of the rapid organisation and interpretation of apocalypse-related issues in the Islamic world increased considerably around the same era as the early *ḥadīth* collections were being formed. The inclusion of the apocalyptic material (*ashrāṭ al-sā’a*, i.e., the signs-

of-the-hour literature), a genre that developed into an independent form of writing early in Islam, demonstrates that the authors were attempting to create a world of seamless continuity, from creation to the end of the world, passing through the apocalyptic events. Islamic scholarship's interest in issues central to the apocalypse stretches back to the early period, as examples illustrate. In the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, early Sunni sources recording Mahdī ḥadīth can be found in the work of 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/826) in *Kitāb al-Muṣannaf* (the section on Mahdī), Abū Bakr Ibn Abi Shayba (d. 235/849) in *Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, and three canonical ḥadīth compendia of Ibn Mājah (d. 273/886), [Abū Dāwūd \(1998\)](#) (d. 275/888), and [Al-Tirmidhī \(1998\)](#) (d. 297/909). The fourth/tenth century include eminent works by Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923) in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) in his *al-Taqāsim wa-l-anwā* or the famously known *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, *al-Mustadrak* al-Ḥākim, and many more. The realm of ḥadīth collections on Mahdī or apocalyptic texts in the classical era was clearly dominated by *Kitāb al-Fitan* by Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād al-Marwazī (d. 228/843). By the middle of the fifth/eleventh to the end of the eighth/fourteenth century, other collections had emerged as the primary subject of Mahdī ḥadīth, a trend that gained steam over the course of the next three centuries, including *Kitāb al-Mahdī* of Abū Nu'aym al-Aṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), *al-Bayān bi-akḥbār ṣaḥīb al-zamān* of Muhammad ibn Yūsuf al-Kunhī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 658/1260), *Iqd al-durar fī akḥbār al-muntaẓar* of Abū al-Faḍl Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Salamī al-Maqdisī (d. 685/1286), *al-Manār al-Munīf* of Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350), and *al-Nihāyah fī l-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* of [Ibn Kathīr \(1988\)](#) (d. 774/1372).

Particularly thorough commentaries on Mahdī ḥadīth were written in Mamluk capital, Cairo sometime in the ninth/fifteenth century. In spite of the fact that there are works such as *al-Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī al-āmāt al-mahdī 'akhīr al-zamān* by Ibn Kamāl Bāshā al-Ḥanafī (d. 940/1533), the towering figures of the era and the whole history of the genre are *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasanah* of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1496) and al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *al-Hāwī li-l-fatāwī* (section entitled *al-Urf al-wardī fī akḥbār al-Mahdī*) and *al-Āya al-kubrā fī sharḥ qiṣṣat al-isrā* ([Al-Suyūṭī 1987](#)). There was an expansion in literary production starting around the tenth/fifteenth century and continuing afterwards. The eleventh/thirteenth century saw the production of many commentaries, including *al-Muhdī ilā mā warada fī al-Mahdī* by Muhammad ibn Ṭūlun al-Dimashqī (d. 953/1546), *Majma' al-zawā'id* (vols. VII–VIII–section on *fitan* and *malāḥim*) by Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytāmī (d. 974/1566), *al-Burhān* by 'Alī ibn Husām al-Dīn al-Muṭqī al-Hindī (d. 975/1567), *al-Mahdī min al-Rasūl* by Mulla 'Alī ibn Sulṭān al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605), and *Farā'id al-fikar fī al-imām al-mahdī al-muntaẓar* by Mārī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624). Recently, many authors have alluded to the importance of Mahdī ḥadīth for a proper attestation of the apocalyptic figure. 'Abd al-'Alīm 'Abd al-Aẓīm [Al-Bustawī \(1999\)](#), a contemporary scholar who dedicated a whole book to an analysis of this account, *al-Mahdī al-muntaẓar fī daw' al-aḥādīth wa al-athār al-ṣaḥīḥah wa aqwāl al-ulamā* (*The Awaited Mahdī in the Light of Ḥadīth, Authentic Sayings and Scholars' Argument*), presented well over fifty different versions in canonical compendia as well as authoritative lists of early ḥadīth compendia describing the Mahdī. The account of the Mahdī was expressed through a variety of ḥadīth transmissions, most of which appear to have been similar to those found in the classical ḥadīth compendia.

As mentioned earlier, the ḥadīth of the Mahdī were collected by classical ḥadīth scholars such as 'Abd al-Razzāq, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), al-Tirmidhī, Abū Ya'la al-Mawṣilī (d. 307/919), Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), al-Ḥākim (d. 405/1014), and many others. For all we know, the first to mention the ḥadīth of the Mahdī in a work from the second century of Hijrah is *al-Jāmi* by Ma'mar ibn Rashīd (d. 153/770). Ma'mar mentions the ḥadīth at least twice, once from the transmission Qatādah and once from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī. The chapter about the Mahdī has some ten reports of ḥadīth, anecdotes, and the words of the companions. Ma'mar supplies the ḥadīth with sanad, and with a unique *matn*. Although there has been some disagreement about the authorship, the majority of experts agree that Ma'mar ibn Rāshid is the author of the *al-Jāmi* ([Sezgin 1967](#)). *Al-Jāmi* of Ma'mar ibn Rashīd has been preserved and is published with the *Muṣannaf* of

‘Abd al-Razzāq (1983). It thus ranks among the earliest *ḥadīth* texts still in existence today. There is significant evidence, both external and internal, to support the view that it was actually authored by ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s instructor, Ma‘mar, and that ‘Abd al-Razzāq merely transmitted it—albeit with some minor additions—rather than questioning the claim that he was the author. Nevertheless, it appears that Ma‘mar is among the first scholars to collect Mahdī *ḥadīth* in compilation work. It is probably the first recorded *ḥadīth* of the Mahdī that is well-attested, and it appears in some of the most important compendia:

The Messenger of Allah mentioned that the trials befalling this Ummah were so much that a man will not find refuge to seek protection from the tyranny. Then Allah will send a man from my heir, my household, who will fill the earth with justice, as it shall be beset by injustice and oppression. The dwellers of the heavens and the earth will be happy for him. The heaven will not leave any of its blessings but descend generously, the earth will not leave any of its plants but bring them forth, so much so that the living ones will wish they were dead. He will live in for seven or eight or nine years.

This *ḥadīth* is located in three different versions of the early *ḥadīth* compendia, i.e., Muṣannaf of ‘Abd al-Razzāq (1983), *Musnad* of Aḥmad (Ibn Ḥanbal 2001), and *Mustadrak* of Al-Ḥākim (2002). Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim provide different versions of the *ḥadīth*, *la taqūm al-sā‘ah ḥattā tamtalī al-arḍ zulman wa ‘udwān, thumma yakhruju rajul min ‘itrati aw min ahl bayt yamlaaha qīṣṭan wa adlan kamā muliat zulman wa ‘udawānan* (The Hour will not occur until the earth will be beset with oppression and hostility. Then a man will rise from my ahl al-bayt, who will fill it with equity and justice, as it will be replete with tyranny, hostility and oppression).

I bring you the glad tidings of the Mahdī. He will be sent to my Ummah during a time of peoples’ dispute and hostility. He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it will be full of oppression and tyranny. Because of him, those who live in heaven as well as on earth will experience joy. He will be responsible for the equitable distribution of wealth. A man asked him, “What is saḥaḥa?” He said, “Equality between the people.”

The pinnacle of documentation of the *ḥadīth*, and that which had the most popularity in classical work, is the canonical *ḥadīth* compendium of the third century of Hijrah. The 38th of 43rd books in Sunan by Abū Dāwūd (1998), entitled *Kitāb al-Mahdī* (Book of the Promised Deliverer), opens with a *ḥadīth* narrated by Jābir ibn Samurah, from the Prophet SAW: “The religion will continue to be established till there are twelve caliphs over you, and the whole community will agree on each of them. I then heard from the Prophet SAW some remarks which I could not understand. I asked my father: What is he saying? He [the Prophet] said: all of them belong to Quraysh.” This book contains 13 *ḥadīth*, not counting repetitions, and personal remarks by Abū Dāwūd, as well as abbreviated reports. Interestingly, it seems that Abū Dāwūd discussed the Mahdī *ḥadīth* on separate occasions. In the broader arrangement of the Sunan, this book is preceded by the *Kitāb al-fitan wa al-malāḥim* (The Book of Trials and Fierce Battles), which summaries how apocalyptic events will happen; it is followed by the *Kitāb al-malāḥim* (The Book of Battles) concerning the apocalyptic phenomenon. Perhaps the broad outlook of *Kitāb al-Mahdī* is due to his arrival being related to the start of Armageddon.

We choose a cluster of *ḥadīth* in Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān (Ibn Balbān 1988) and depict the debate using his *tarjamāt al-bāb* (chapter titles) to map the contours of this early *ḥadīth* collection in high definition, particularly in the fourth century of Hijrah. *Tarjamāt al-bāb* is one of the early commentaries under which scholars of *ḥadīth* arranged their compendia. Each *tarjamah* advised readers about how a *ḥadīth* or set of *ḥadīth* may possibly be best construed and what their legal or theological implications ought to be (Lucas 2006; Burge 2011). As the cumulative tradition of *ḥadīth* progressed over time, external debates arose over the proper methods of textual interpretation. A cluster of *ḥadīth* in Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān, were placed in five chapters entitled: (1) “an account of the explanation that the emergence of

the Mahdī will only take place after the appearance of injustice and oppression,” (2) “an account of the reports of the description of the name of the Mahdī and his father’s name against the saying of whom claim Mahdī is Jesus,” (3) “an account of the explanation that the character of Mahdī is similar to the character of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace,” (4) “an account of the information describing the period that will be for the Mahdī at the end of time,” and (5) “an account of the place where the Mahdī pledged allegiance.” These five title chapters correspond to five uninterrupted *ḥadīth* that are meant to symbolise the appearance of the Mahdī:

- (1) Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) said: The Prophet said: “Verily the earth will be beset with oppression and hostility. Then a man will rise from my ahl al-bayt, who will fill it with equity and justice, as it will be replete with tyranny, hostility and oppression;”
- (2) ‘Abd Allah b. Masʿūd said: (d. 33/653) said: The Prophet said: “The Hour will not come until a man from among my family, whose name will be my name, whose father’s name is the same as my father’s, rules over the people and fill this world with justice and fairness;”
- (3) ‘Abd Allah b. Masʿūd said: (d. 33/653) said: The Prophet said: “A man from my ummah will come out whose name will be my name, in which his character is mine, and fill this world with justice and equity just as it initially was filled with oppression;”
- (4) Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) said: The Prophet said: “The Hour will not come until a man from among my family [with] curved nose, fills this world with justice as it initially was filled with oppression, and he will rule for seven years;”
- (5) Abū Qatadah [al-Anṣārī] (d. 54/676) said: The Prophet said: “Pledge of allegiance is given to a man between al-rukṇ (black stone at the corner of Kaaba) and al-maqām (lit. station of Abraham). This house (Kaaba) will not be deliberated except by members [of the house] (*ahl al-bayt*), and if they do so, do not ask about the destruction of the Arabs. Then *al-ḥabshah* (lit. Ethiopians or Abyssinians) will emerge and demolish the house completely and seize the treasures in it.”

Ibn Ḥibbān transmits five prophetic *ḥadīth* (one for each *tarjamah*) that specify matters of the Mahdī which, according to him, every Muslim is required to understand. It appears that Ibn Ḥibbān categorised Sunnah (wont of the Prophet or authoritative precedent) into five divisions: commands, prohibitions, formatives, permissible things, and Prophetic actions specific to him (Muhammad Yusoff 2020a). This cluster of five *ḥadīth* can be found in sequence, and the original location of these *ḥadīth* in Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān is under Division 3 (formatives or Prophetic reports that [his followers] are required to know). While we do not have detailed anecdotal accounts of commentary on these *ḥadīth* and their reception in this early period, we can learn much about how these *ḥadīth* were interpreted and debated by Ibn Ḥibbān. Ibn Ḥibbān remarked, in the first chapter title, that the emergence of the Mahdī will only take place after the appearance of injustice and oppression in this world and their victory over truth and earnestness (Ibn Balbān 1988). Ibn Ḥibbān also notes that the identification of the Mahdī with ʿĪsā was legitimately rejected. Neither the scepticism nor questions about the *ḥadīth* are clearly presented, but a sceptic is depicted as someone who equates the Mahdī with ʿĪsā (Ibn Balbān 1988). On further reflection, when describing the characteristics of the Mahdī, Ibn Ḥibbān presents a *ḥadīth* that suggests that the quality of the Mahdī is similar to that of the Prophet. The last two *ḥadīth* associate the Mahdī with important measurements: place and time. The clear message, underlined by the fourth *ḥadīth*, is that the Mahdī will rule for seven years, and the last *ḥadīth* depicts the Kaabah as the place where the Mahdī pledged allegiance. We can thus construct a micro-narrative about Ibn Ḥibbān’s thought process in crafting this section. Sebastian Günther (1998), discussing the genre of *ḥadīth* literature, described this activity as “fictional narration and imagination”, adding that “the nature of which can be described, according to modern theory of literature, as ‘narrative’ because things were not merely ‘recorded’ or ‘reported’ therein but were ‘narrated’.” Certainly, this cluster has been chosen in part because the five *ḥadīth* under these five chapter headings involved significance viewpoints as well as important debate among scholars within this early era. Understanding the technique

with which *ḥadīth* are compiled and organised enables an understanding of the underlying viewpoints and theologies of the compilers themselves.

5. A Bridge between Classical and Medieval Commentaries on the Mahdī: Selected Works

Let us now turn to selected medieval writings of Mahdī commentaries. The works selected for this article are patently not *sharḥ* (commentary) in the classical sense. A typical *sharḥ* employs any early *ḥadīth* compendium, the first Book of Revelation in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Al-Bukhārī 2001) for instance, and moves seriatim through all the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, concluding at the Book of *Tawḥīd* (Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī 2001). The method, methodology, and approach of commentators may change from time to time along with how much they participate in the act of *sharḥ*. There may be more or less dependence on the Quran, more or less reliance on grammatical analysis, more or less reliance on theological and philological issues, more or less reliance on poetry, more or less reliance on history, and so on. Two or three *ḥadīth* are broken up into smaller portions by each member of the chapter group, who then explains what each verse, section, or term means. One component of the act of *sharḥ* is a vow of devotion to the historical heritage and to the community, as Joel Blecher (2018) noted in seminal research published several years ago. The meaning of the *ḥadīth* is given, despite the fact that it is not *sharḥ* in the broad, technical sense. This is frequently accomplished through the paraphrasing or appropriate use of *ḥadīth* as well as through other techniques such as rhyme and allusion.

Writing in an age of scholarly tradition, the *ḥadīth* commentarial debates over the Mahdī in the medieval world reflect a number of trends among the Sunni commentators. Up until this point, the literatures we have explored provided a sense of the competitive context in which medieval commentaries were initially produced. In these literatures, which were produced long after the canonisation of *Kutub al-Sittah*, all texts within them provide an interpretation of a *ḥadīth* found in *Kutub al-Sittah* in an attempt to denigrate its theological impetus. We have also shed light on commentarial intentions, the grounds for commentarial authority, and the commentators' networks since all of these factors fundamentally affected the forms and functions of the commentaries. But did these contexts have an explicit and direct effect on the interpretation of specific *ḥadīth*? In order to answer this question, we will analyse some phrases from the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries of Hijrah works: the *Iqd al-durar fī akhbār al-muntaẓar* of Yūsuf bin Yaḥyā bin ʿAlī bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Salamī, *al-ʿArf al-Wardī fī Akhbār al-Mahdī* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, and *al-Burhān fī ʿalāmāt al-mahdī akhir zamān* of ʿAlī ibn Husām al-Dīn al-Mutqī al-Hindī.

For all intents and purposes, *Iqd al-Durar* by al-Salamī (Al-Salamī 1989) was authored in the seventh/thirteenth century, and most of the presentations and organisations became material upon which the contemporaneous al-Salamī and later scholars of *ḥadīth* could draw from in their theological discussions, including the subject of the Mahdī or the apocalypse. According to Muhayb, an analysis of *al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fī ʿAlāmāt al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar* of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-ʿArf al-Wardī* of al-Suyūṭī, *al-Burhān fī ʿalāmāt al-mahdī akhir zamān* of al-Mutqī al-Hindī, *al-Buḥūr al-zākhīrah fī ʿulūm al-ākhirah* of al-Safraynī, and *Bishārāt al-anām fī zuḥūr al-mahdī ʿalayh al-salām* of al-Kāẓimī may conclude that they are books that reflect the construction of *Iqd al-Durar*. A cursory examination of *Iqd al-Durar* reveals a high proportion of Mahdī *ḥadīth* presentations that are deemed to be similar, whether in wording, meaning, theme, or due to the presence of a common feature with earlier compendia.

Al-Salamī's brief outline of *Iqd al-Durar* has been accepted as conclusive regarding a number of topics. Variants of Mahdī *ḥadīth* have been produced according to a variety of views, which reflect this disciplinary context and related theological assertions. Al-Salamī distinguished twelve topics; (1) the Mahdī as the descendant of the Prophet; (2) the Mahdī's name, characteristics, and nickname; (3) his justice and adornment; (4) trials as indicators of his rule; (5) predecessors of his emirate; (6) miracles during his reign; (7) his honour and great status; (8) his generosity and dispensation; (9) his conquest and biography; (10) the prayer of Isa, peace be upon him, behind him; (11) Discrepancies of riwayat (transmission

genealogy) on his domicile; and (12) trials during his days and the end of his period. These topics share certain traits, particularly in their focus on the use of *ḥadīth* as the object of an ontological argument: the assumption that using *ḥadīth* is not a neutral means of conveying a message, but rather shapes Muslim perceptions of the world, and that such shaping takes on the hierarchical structures of power which are formulated and upheld by revelation. The variety of references made by al-Salamī translates to a fair degree of variety in the content of Mahdī *ḥadīth*, and their actual use offers possibilities for change or resistance to the dominant discourse through being situated as particular moments in time in particular contexts. In the introduction, al-Salamī addressed peripherally, if at all, the negotiated meaning of problematic *ḥadīth*, especially the issue of “the Mahdī is no other than Isa” *ḥadīth*, as he lingers on the greater criticism in which the *ḥadīth* circulated or on issues of early narration. There are two approaches clearly involved in engagement with this particular *ḥadīth*: verification and commentaries on grammatical structure. First, al-Salamī deems this *ḥadīth munkar* (unknown or unacceptable) due to the pronouncement of *rijāl* (narrator) criticism by al-Nasāī, al-Bayhaqī, and others. Second, al-Salamī quotes Abū Shāma Shihāb al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1267) to show that if the *ḥadīth* is accepted, it could be interpreted from the perspective of grammatical structure,

Another aspect of interpretation for “there is no Mahdī but Jesus, son of Mary,” is that the *muḍāf* (possessive) should be removed, so that it is henceforth “except for the Mahdī of Jesus”. The one who comes during the time of Jesus, peace be upon him, is thus a precaution against those who are called the Mahdī before that, among the rulers and others, or it is a *taqaddī* (elapse): except during the time of Jesus. Meaning: He who comes at that time, not at any other time. God knows the best.

In the ninth/fifteenth century, the next scholar to discuss the “the Mahdī is no other than Isa” *ḥadīth* is Al-Suyūṭī (2006) in his *al-ʿArf al-Wardī fī Akhbār al-Mahdī* (*The Rose Scented Perfume: On the Reports of the Mahdī*). Al-Suyūṭī provides Ibn Mājah’s version of the *ḥadīth*, “Things will only become harder, the world more distant, and the people more miserly. And the Hour will not come except upon the worst of people. And there is no Mahdī except Isa ibn Maryam.” Al-Suyūṭī’s disapproval of the *ḥadīth* employs the typical isnād criticism with its emphasis on earlier scholars’ evaluation of weakening this particular *ḥadīth*. Al-Suyūṭī begins his answer by quoting from *al-Tadhkirah* of al-Qurtubī,

Its isnād is *ḍaʿīf* (weak), and the many *ḥadīth* from the Prophet (peace be upon him) clearly mentioning the coming of the Mahdī from his descendants, the children of Fatimah, are firmly established and more authentic than this *ḥadīth*. So, the judgement is given in preference to them over it.

However, we also see here that, after all, scholars around the ninth/fifteenth century verified this *ḥadīth* into a more coherent structure, which they attempted to synthesise into the broader system of authentication. Since al-Suyūṭī takes *ḥadīth* as his point of departure, he directs more energy to arguing the *ḥadīth*’s veracity, and, at most, we get al-Suyūṭī’s attempted reconciliation of contradictory *ḥadīth* (Al Amin 2021). al-Suyūṭī thus bolsters his discussion by bringing in another scholarly opinion by Ibn Kathīr,

It seems apparent to reason that this *ḥadīth* is in conflict with the *ḥadīth* that firmly establish that the Mahdī is someone other than ʿĪsā ibn Maryam—*ʿalayh al-salām* -. But upon reflection, it does not negate it, as the meaning might be that the Mahdī in the truest sense of the word is Isa, without negating that, other than he might also be a Mahdī.

For al-Suyūṭī, the truth of the Mahdī is irrefutably established through its position in various transmissions. He therefore casts this *ḥadīth* into a thoroughly accepted mould where the content could be accepted through corroborated or parallel *ḥadīth* aiming to serve as clarification. Isnād analysis, the distinctive scholarly activity of *ḥadīth* scholars, is a basic trajectory for the majority of commentaries. Indeed, al-Suyūṭī affirmed the

availability of *mutawātir* (transmitted frequently) *ḥadīth* on the Mahdī. It is well known that the classification of *mutawātir* and *āḥād* (solitary) is related to the number of transmissions constituting a *ḥujjah* (argument) if it meets certain conditions (Muhammad Yusoff 2020b). Generally, the term *ḥadīth āḥād* was applied to a report that goes back to a single authority in the *isnād*. In contrast, *mutawātir* refers to a report “transmitted frequently” in every generation. There has, however, been debate over this classification since many modern scholars have shown that no *ḥadīth* has been transmitted through two narrators on each level of the *isnād* (Itr 1979; Al-Awnī 1996; Hansu 2009). Fittingly, al-Suyūṭī restricts his position that Mahdī *ḥadīth* are transmitted through *tawātur*. The quotation from Abū al-Ḥasan Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm al-Aburrī is implicit in his argument,

The reports are *mutawātir* and supported by the abundance of their narrators from al-Mustafa (the chosen one), peace be upon him, regarding the coming of the Mahdī, that he is from his household. He will rule for seven years and will fill the earth with justice. He will come with Isa, peace be upon him, who helps him to kill the Dajjal at the gate of Ludd in the land of Palestine. He will lead this Ummah and that Isa, peace be upon him, will pray behind him, along with other lengthy details about his story and his rule.

While Suyūṭī makes use of a wide range of sources, it seems that in assembling extensive reference works he was combining early *ḥadīth* compendia, topical *ḥadīth*, chronicles, and biographical dictionaries. Among the list of sources are the famous exegesis of al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn ‘Asākir, and *Iqd al-Durar fī Akhbār al-Muntaẓar* of Yūsuf al-Salamī that particularly prompted Suyūṭī to deal with the diverse origins of the Mahdī issue. To offer a comprehensive idea of this literature quantitatively, Suyūṭī describes scholars who dedicated a specific book to the subject of the Mahdī. He also explains, in the introduction, that by modelling his work on Abū Nu‘aym al-Aṣbahānī’s *al-Arba‘ūn Ḥadīthan fī al-Mahdī* (40 *ḥadīth* on the Mahdī), he hoped that those who consulted the *al-Arf al-Wardī* on other key collections would come away knowing, among other things, how to formulate and reconcile problematic *ḥadīth* and the important variants contained in earlier collections, and they would be aware of any major scholarly controversies. In certain instances, Suyūṭī consciously reduced the commentary tradition he inherited, retaining lengthy commentary on more popular *ḥadīth* and eliminating commentary that served arcane discussions. In other instances, his decisions to abbreviate or omit seemed arbitrary.

Beyond the commentary of al-Suyūṭī, in our general consideration, we focus on the discussion of the *ḥadīth* with the panoptic vision of *al-Arf al-Wardī* is *al-Burhān fī al-ālmāt al-mahdī akhir zamān* of ‘Alī ibn Husām al-Dīn al-Mutqī al-Hindī (d. 975/1567). Al-Hindī (1992), an Indian *ḥadīth* scholar who lived in the same century as al-Suyūṭī, devoted a specific work in his commentary to a discussion of criticism of the *ḥadīth*. While this cumulative archive of explanations may appear to be a list of opinions actively or passively acquired and transmitted, a close reading shows how a medieval *ḥadīth* criticism, as well as offering commentary, could be delicately steered to construct a narrative about the *ḥadīth*’s proper interpretation and to reinforce the control of one’s institution. The use of al-Hindī’s commentaries of previous scholarly opinions buttressed his interpretative privilege, and, as a result, he proceeded to the next degrees of reasoning by discussing related Mahdī *ḥadīth* in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. In listing all the sources mutually illuminating the Mahdī *ḥadīth*, al-Hindī simultaneously subscribed to the viewpoint that *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* and *Muslim* were authoritative references.

While al-Hindī did not make explicit reference to al-Bukhārī and Muslim authorities as his primary sources, he nevertheless accepted ideas by others supporting the *ḥadīth*. For instance, he lists the *ḥadīth* about the emergence of Sufyani who, in apocalyptic *ḥadīth*, appears as the rival and opponent of the Mahdī. In view of this, the *ḥadīth* mentioned in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is, “A seeker of refuge would seek refuge in the Sacred House and an army would be sent to him (in order to kill him) and when it entered open ground, it would be made to sink.” (Muslim 2014). Al-Hindī quotes a *ḥadīth* without *isnād* going back to al-Bukhārī, “An army will invade the Kaaba and when the invaders reach al-Baida, all the

ground will sink and swallow the whole army. I (Aishah) said, ‘O Allah’s Messenger! How will they sink into the ground while amongst them will be their markets (the people who worked in business and not invaders) and the people not belonging to them?’ The Prophet replied, ‘all of those people will sink but they will be resurrected and judged according to their intentions.’” (Al-Bukhārī 2001). The preceding *ḥadīth* without isnād were presumably meant to depict the origin and development of the Sufyani and its relationship to the apocalyptic event that describes the conquest of the Kaabah by the army of the Sufyani and its being swallowed by the desert. In an effort to convince the reader of the corroborated and verified *Ṣaḥīḥayn ḥadīth*, al-Hindī extends some *ḥadīth* that are indirectly mentioned in the classical *ḥadīth* compendia as well as stories from the renowned *Kitāb al-Fitan* (the Book of Tribulations) by Nu’aym ibn Hammād (2017).

Al-Burhān not only contains sizable commentaries on the collection of prophecies concerning the Mahdī, but also gives the historical background of earlier events, which is vital for any serious investigation of their provenance. One clear pattern is al-Hindī’s favourable reference to medieval scholars in Chapter Thirteen, particularly Ibn Ḥajar Al-Haytamī’s (n.d.) *fatwa* (pronouncement) on the Mahdī and the end of times. Al-Hindī employs the word *fatwa* here to emphasise the critical implications for those who reject the concept of the Mahdī. The use of *fatwa* also suggests that al-Hindī will be arguing against pseudo-Mahdists, especially his fellow countrymen. In this final chapter, al-Hindī’s decisive move is to tackle the sceptics’ rejection as well as the contemporaneous political movement of pseudo-Mahdists, Mahdawiyyah, founded by Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri in India in the late fifteenth century. Jaunpuri declared his claim to be the Mahdī in 900/1495 during his journey to Makkah for pilgrimage. He reasserted this on his return to Ahmadabad in India in 1499 and incurred the criticism of the majority of scholars, including al-Hindī. Al-Hindī responded to the issue of Jaunpuri by quoting Ibn Ḥajar’s *fatwa* on Mahdawiyyah which can be summarised thusly: “The belief of this sect is evilly wrong, explicit ignorance, heinous heresy, and horrible deception.” Since Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami was a well-known Shafiite scholar, the *fatwa* here presupposes the opinions of other madhhab-affiliated scholars and implies the refutation of sceptics. Three observable layers of Hanafite, Maliki, and Hanbalite opinions, arranged systematically by al-Hindī, also reflected his venture to demonstrate consensus among Sunnis regarding belief in the appearance of the Mahdī.

6. Conclusions

We have covered multiplex productions of Mahdī commentarial *ḥadīth* in this short paper to show the capacity this literature has for enriching contemporary readers. This type of Mahdī topic has directed scholars of *ḥadīth* across the ages to develop a specific genre with a view to preserving, whether intellectual, theological, or emotional, the traditional sayings of the Prophet. Although the genre of *ashrāf al-sā’a*, the subject of Mahdī *ḥadīth*, could be viewed from its protracted development, the interest of this paper is the discussion of commentary techniques for retaining the text and context of apocalyptic *ḥadīth*. The scope of apocalyptic *ḥadīth* mentioned in what we have selected here is a common or general understanding that relates to the end of time, the eschaton, as well as the normal practice of Muslims in integrating contemporary reality with theology. In the modern time when the theological discourse was drifting farther from the specialised study of *ḥadīth*, the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* became the most authoritative *ḥadīth* references for deniers of Mahdī *ḥadīth* more narrowly focused on availability. In the maintenance of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* culture, we see a direct response of multiple narratives and interpretations of implicit *ḥadīth* of *Ṣaḥīḥayn* by the advocates.

Demonstrating compatibility with the fundamental roots of Islam, and so acquiring legitimacy, has been of paramount importance for a broad spectrum of Muslims from classical *ḥadīth* scholars to madhhab-affiliated scholars, and commentary has proved to be an immensely valuable tool in this regard. *Tawātur* and *takhrīj* have played an important role in the arguments and conclusions of the many examples of commentaries presented in this

paper. The problem of contradiction, in the “Mahdī is no other than Isa” *ḥadīth*, has been treated according to reconciliation or synthesis techniques, and these techniques then lend themselves to further contemporary reading corresponding to modes of source interaction, which is the primary architectural aspect of the prophetic guidance. Meanwhile, the typical qualities of *ḥadīth* commentaries appear to be undergoing some modification. Medieval authors such as al-Salamī, al-Suyūṭī, al-Hindī, and others can still publish substantial work on a significant *ḥadīth* compendium, but a growing number of commentators choose their material from a variety of *ḥadīth* sources according to their preferences, rather than relying on a particular compendium. The rapid pace of this survey necessitated a breadth of depiction in order to follow change and continuity in the slow-moving, cumulative tradition of commentaries on Mahdī *ḥadīth*. Certainly, *ḥadīth* commentaries have found their place in theological discourse according to their orientations and operations, which to a certain extent reflect classical or medieval attitudes toward the meaning and relevance of Mahdī *ḥadīth*. Regardless of how exactly these strategies, attitudes, and uses arose, it is safe to assume that *ḥadīth* commentators undertook their work due to both professional vocation and religious devotion.

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