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Analyzing Imam Al-Darimi's Criticisms of His Mentor Ibn Maeen in Hadith Scholarship

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Abstract

This study critically examines the discrepancies between Imam Al-Darimi and his teacher, Imam Ibn Maeen, within the framework of Hadith criticism (ʿilm al-rijāl). Addressing the misconception that classical students passively transmitted their teachers' views, the research analyzes instances where Al-Darimi contested Ibn Maeen's evaluations of narrators in his work Al-Tarikh. Employing an inductive-analytical methodology, the authors cataloged 31 critical discrepancies out of 975 examined narrations. These instances reveal Al-Darimi's independent scholarly rigor, particularly in modifying Ibn Maeen's critiques (jarḥ) or validations (taʿdīl) of narrators. Key findings underscore Al-Darimi's mastery of Hadith criticism, his nuanced balance of respect and intellectual autonomy toward his teacher, and the broader implications for understanding classical Islamic scholarship. The study concludes that critical engagement, even with revered authorities, was integral to preserving the integrity of Hadith transmission. By contextualizing these discrepancies through principles of narrator evaluation, the research contributes to debates on scholarly authority, methodological diversity, and ethical critique in early Islamic jurisprudence.

Keywords: *Hadith criticism, Jarḥ wa Taʿdīl, Imam Al-Darimi, Imam Ibn Maeen, narrator evaluation, scholarly autonomy*

INTRODUCTION

The science of Hadith, or Ilm al-Hadith, is one of the most rigorous and meticulous disciplines in Islamic scholarship. It involves the critical examination of narrators and their chains of transmission to ensure the authenticity of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions (Mahmoud et al., 2022; Maraoui et al., 2022). Among the luminaries of this field, Imam Yahya ibn Maeen and his student Imam Othman ibn Saeed Al-Darimi stand out as towering figures whose contributions have shaped the way Hadith is studied and authenticated (Al-Kubaisi & Al-Muhamadi, 2022).

Imam Yahya ibn Maeen, a renowned critic of narrators, was a mentor to many scholars, including Imam Al-Darimi (D. W. Brown, 2019). Their relationship was not merely one of teacher and student but also of intellectual sparring partners. Al-Darimi, while deeply respectful of his mentor, did not shy away from challenging Ibn Maeen's judgments, particularly in his seminal work, Tarikh Ibn Maeen (Winter, 2005). This dynamic offers a

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fascinating glimpse into the scholarly rigor and independence that characterized classical Islamic scholarship.

A common misconception among students of knowledge is that early scholars merely transmitted the words of their predecessors without critical engagement (Rothschild, 2010; Runia, 2017). This view undermines the intellectual independence and critical thinking that were hallmarks of Islamic scholarship. Imam Al-Darimi's work challenges this notion, as he frequently disagreed with his mentor, Ibn Maeen, on various issues related to the reliability of narrators (Al Kubaisi, 2022). This raises important questions about the nature of scholarly transmission and the role of independent judgment in Islamic intellectual tradition.

Despite the rich history of Hadith scholarship, there has been limited exploration of the specific instances where Al-Darimi diverged from Ibn Maeen's opinions. Most studies focus on the broader contributions of these scholars without delving into the nuances of their disagreements. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the 31 instances where Al-Darimi explicitly contradicted Ibn Maeen, offering a detailed analysis of these disagreements and their implications for Hadith scholarship (Yaakob & Shamsudin, 2021). Beyond the specific disagreements between Al-Darimi and Ibn Maeen, this research sheds light on the broader principles of Jarh wa Ta'deel (criticism and validation of narrators) (Mehfooz, 2021). It underscores the importance of balancing respect for one's teachers with the necessity of independent judgment. In doing so, it offers valuable lessons for contemporary scholars and students of Hadith, emphasizing the need for critical engagement with the tradition while maintaining a deep respect for its foundational figures.

This research is not merely an academic exercise; it has profound implications for understanding the development of Hadith criticism. By analyzing Al-Darimi's disagreements with Ibn Maeen, we gain insight into the methodologies and principles that guided early Hadith scholars. This study also highlights the importance of critical thinking and intellectual independence in Islamic scholarship, challenging the notion that students were mere passive transmitters of their teachers' views.

METHOD

The study employs an inductive approach to systematically examine Tarikh Ibn Maeen as narrated by Al-Darimi, aiming to identify, collect, and categorize instances where Al-Darimi diverged from his mentor’s assessments of hadith narrators (Aras, 2024). This method involves a comprehensive survey of the entire text, ensuring that all recorded contradictions between Al-Darimi and Ibn Maeen are meticulously documented (Bin Baru & Bin Deraman, 2011). By extrapolating patterns from these disagreements, the study reveals recurring themes in Al-Darimi’s critical approach, such as his tendency to reassess narrator reliability, his methodological preferences, and his reliance on corroborative evidence from other hadith scholars. This broad and systematic collection of data is essential to avoid selective reporting and ensures that the conclusions drawn are representative of the full scope of Al-Darimi’s scholarly independence rather than isolated instances.

Following this, the study employs an analytical approach to critically evaluate these recorded disagreements, weighing the strength of evidence and reasoning presented by both Al-Darimi and Ibn Maeen. Rather than merely listing instances of contradiction, the research delves into why and how Al-Darimi arrived at different conclusions, considering factors such as variations in transmission chains, regional influences, and differences in evaluative criteria for narrator credibility. This rigorous analysis places each disagreement within the broader context of Hadith criticism, allowing for a nuanced understanding of methodological

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diversity among early hadith scholars. The combined inductive and analytical framework ensures that the study's findings are not only thorough and well-substantiated but also contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on independent reasoning in Islamic scholarship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the extent of Imam Al-Darimi's violations of his Sheikh, Imam Ibn Ma'in, in the book Al-Tarikh. The findings indicate that Imam Al-Darimi displayed an advanced level of critical engagement with his Sheikh's views. The study identified 31 instances of disagreement out of a total of 975 issues (Aziz, 2024; Hasan, 2013). These violations fall under several categories, including disagreements regarding the evaluation of narrators, weighting between narrators, and identifying narrators unknown to Ibn Ma'in. The discussion below expands on these violations, placing them within the broader context of jarh wa ta'deel (criticism and praise of narrators).

Imam Al-Darimi's Critical Approach Toward Ibn Ma'in's Evaluations

The research underscores that Imam Al-Darimi was far from being a passive transmitter of his teacher Ibn Ma'in's opinions; rather, he engaged with them critically and independently (Abd, 2024). While he occasionally upheld Ibn Ma'in's assessments, he also directly challenged them when his own analysis led him to different conclusions. This dynamic intellectual exchange between teacher and student highlights a crucial aspect of early hadith scholarship, the encouragement of critical thinking and independent reasoning rather than blind adherence. Al-Darimi's ability to scrutinize and sometimes refute Ibn Ma'in's evaluations of narrators reflects his deep familiarity with the principles of jarh wa ta'deel, as well as his commitment to an evidence-based approach in hadith authentication (Abdullah, 2012). His critical engagement with his mentor's judgments provides a valuable case study in how hadith criticism developed through scholarly dialogue, rather than through unquestioned transmission of established views.

One of the most striking aspects of Al-Darimi's independent approach is the diversity of ways in which he diverged from Ibn Ma'in. The study reveals that Al-Darimi did not challenge his Sheikh in a single, uniform manner; rather, he applied a nuanced and context-sensitive methodology (Yaakob & Shamsudin, 2021). In some cases, he modified Ibn Ma'in's critiques by softening or reinforcing them, while in others, he completely reversed his teacher's assessment of a narrator's reliability. This finding is significant because it challenges the common assumption that students of major hadith scholars merely echoed their teachers' verdicts without question. Instead, Al-Darimi demonstrated a sophisticated grasp of hadith criticism, showing that he was capable of forming his own judgments based on his understanding of transmission reliability, corroboration, and historical context (Ismail et al., 2014). His ability to disagree with Ibn Ma'in, while still holding him in high regard, suggests that hadith scholarship valued independent verification over rigid conformity to authority.

These findings carry important implications for our understanding of scholarly independence in hadith studies. They suggest that critical engagement was more common than previously assumed and that students were expected to analyze and refine the assessments of their teachers. This active participation in hadith evaluation meant that students like Al-Darimi were not simply passive recipients of knowledge but were instead integral contributors to the evolving discourse of hadith criticism (Ismail et al., 2014). This

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challenges traditional narratives that depict hadith scholars as working in strict hierarchical structures, where students simply preserved and transmitted their teachers' opinions. Rather, scholars like Al-Darimi exercised intellectual autonomy, shaping their own methodologies and making contextual adjustments based on further scrutiny (Yaakob & Shamsudin, 2021). The following sections will explore specific examples of these deviations, analyzing the reasoning behind Al-Darimi's judgments and the broader impact of his methodological independence on hadith authentication.

Contradictions in the Evaluation of Narrators

A significant number of Al-Darimi's violations pertain to contradictions in the evaluation of narrators, illustrating how individual scholars applied different standards when assessing reliability (Yaakob & Shamsudin, 2021). These contradictions reveal Al-Darimi's independent reasoning, as he did not simply accept Ibn Ma'in's judgments but critically examined each narrator based on his own criteria. In some cases, he upgraded narrators whom Ibn Ma'in had weakened, while in others, he downgraded narrators whom Ibn Ma'in had praised. Such differences suggest that hadith criticism was not a rigid or universally agreed-upon discipline but one in which scholars actively debated and re-evaluated narrators based on their own methodologies, experiences, and access to sources. These variations also indicate that the process of jarh wa ta'deel (wound and modification) involved both subjectivity and scholarly discretion, as different critics weighed factors such as consistency, corroboration, and direct experience differently.

One example of this methodological divergence is Sulayman bin Dawood Al-Khawlani, whom Ibn Ma'in dismissed outright, stating that his hadith was unreliable (Afabih & Junianto, 2022). However, Al-Darimi rejected this critique, arguing that Sulayman was a credible transmitter. This difference raises an important question: What criteria did each scholar use to reach their conclusion? Ibn Ma'in may have based his assessment on the broader scholarly consensus or previous criticisms of Sulayman's reliability, whereas Al-Darimi appears to have conducted a direct evaluation of Sulayman's narrations, leading him to a different conclusion. This case highlights how methodology played a crucial role in hadith criticism, as some scholars placed more emphasis on existing critiques, while others preferred to independently scrutinize a narrator's hadith. This independent verification process was essential for maintaining the integrity of hadith transmission, ensuring that narrators were assessed not just by reputation but by a careful study of their actual reports.

Another striking example is Al-Qasim bin Muhammad bin Humaid Al-Maamari, whom Ibn Ma'in labeled a liar, completely dismissing his credibility. Al-Darimi, however, defended him, stating that he had personally met Al-Qasim in Baghdad and found no evidence of dishonesty (Worrall, 2007). This case demonstrates how first-hand experience with a narrator could directly influence a scholar's assessment, leading to contradictory conclusions among hadith critics. Al-Darimi's willingness to vouch for Al-Qasim suggests that he placed greater value on direct observation and personal interaction, rather than simply relying on hearsay or the opinions of other scholars (Coppens, 2021). Similarly, in the case of Abu al-Samh (Daraj), Ibn Ma'in classified him as trustworthy, while Al-Darimi expressed caution, stating that he was merely saduq (truthful) but not at the highest level of reliability. This distinction reflects Al-Darimi's more granular approach, in which he avoided broad classifications and instead provided more precise, context-specific evaluations of narrators. Taken together, these cases reveal that Al-Darimi was not afraid to challenge even a highly

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respected authority like Ibn Ma'in, demonstrating his intellectual independence and commitment to a meticulous, evidence-based approach to hadith criticism.

Disagreements Regarding the Weighting Between Narrators

Another category of violations involves Al-Darimi's disagreements with Ibn Ma'in over the ranking of narrators relative to one another (Yaakob & Shamsudin, 2021). These cases show how Al-Darimi exercised judgment in determining which narrators were more authoritative. For example, when comparing Asim bin Damra and Haritha bin Mudrib, Ibn Ma'in considered both equal in reliability. However, Al-Darimi argued that Haritha was superior, implying that his narrations were more authentic or that he exhibited greater precision in transmission. This preference reflects Al-Darimi's distinct methodology in evaluating narrators based not only on their general reliability but also on the consistency and quality of their hadith.

A similar case is found in the comparison between Abdullah bin Dawood Al-Khuraibi and Abu Asim Al-Nabil (Warren, 2021). While Ibn Ma'in saw them as equals, Al-Darimi ranked Al-Khuraibi higher. This ranking suggests that Al-Darimi placed greater emphasis on factors beyond basic reliability, such as precision, the number of narrations, or external corroboration. Additionally, Al-Darimi showed a preference for Hisham Al-Dastuwa'i over Shu'ba in narrating from Qatada. While Ibn Ma'in had equated them, Al-Darimi considered Hisham's narrations from Qatada superior, perhaps due to stylistic or transmission-related factors. This case exemplifies Al-Darimi's attention to nuances in hadith transmission, as he prioritized narrators based on their individual strengths. These differences underscore Al-Darimi's critical approach and reinforce the idea that hadith scholars did not simply follow their teachers blindly. Instead, they engaged in a sophisticated process of ranking narrators according to multiple criteria.

Cases Where Al-Darimi Identified Narrators Unknown to Ibn Ma'in

In some instances, Al-Darimi was able to provide information on narrators whom Ibn Ma'in admitted he did not know. This highlights Al-Darimi's broader exposure to different sources and his active engagement in biographical research (Muhammad Yusoff, 2020). For example, in the case of Hatim bin Harith al-Ta'i, Ibn Ma'in admitted that he did not recognize him. However, Al-Darimi confidently identified him as a trustworthy narrator, citing additional sources that Ibn Ma'in had not referenced. This suggests that Al-Darimi had access to a broader pool of information, possibly due to different scholarly networks or personal encounters.

Another such case is Muhammad bin Abdul Aziz al-Taymi, who was similarly unknown to Ibn Ma'in but was documented by Al-Darimi. This demonstrates Al-Darimi's reliance on alternative sources to supplement the assessments of his teacher. These cases highlight an important aspect of hadith scholarship: the evaluation of narrators was not static but evolved as scholars encountered new information. Al-Darimi's ability to fill gaps in Ibn Ma'in's knowledge underscores his contributions to the field and reflects the dynamic nature of jarh wa ta'deel.

Variations in the Application of Hadith Criticism Principles

The variations in the application of hadith criticism principles between Al-Darimi and Ibn Ma'in highlight the subjective nature of jarh wa ta'deel (wound and modification) (J. A.

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C. Brown, 2012). While both scholars were highly esteemed for their expertise in assessing the reliability of narrators, their differing approaches indicate that hadith criticism was not a rigid, universally agreed-upon system but rather a discipline shaped by individual methodologies, scholarly preferences, and interpretative frameworks. These variations often resulted in divergent assessments of the same narrator, reflecting how personal experience, regional influences, and academic priorities shaped each scholar's conclusions. By analyzing these differences, we gain insight into the fluidity and adaptability of early hadith scholarship, where critical reasoning and independent judgment played crucial roles in shaping the transmission and authentication of hadith.

One key example of methodological divergence is seen in the case of Musharh bin Ha'an, where Ibn Ma'in and Al-Darimi arrived at opposing evaluations (Noor, 2023). Ibn Ma'in classified Musharh as trustworthy, implying that his hadith transmissions met the standards of reliability without significant cause for concern. However, Al-Darimi expressed reservations about Musharh's credibility, placing him at a lower level of reliability. This suggests that Al-Darimi may have applied stricter authenticity criteria than his mentor, requiring a higher degree of precision, corroboration, or consistency before deeming a narrator as trustworthy. His reluctance to fully endorse Musharh's reliability could stem from concerns about narration inconsistencies, weak corroborating evidence, or Musharh's associations with other less reliable transmitters. This discrepancy underscores the fact that trustworthiness in hadith transmission was not a fixed label but a debated and context-sensitive judgment.

A similar divergence appears in the comparison between Alqama and Ubaidah, two key transmitters of hadith from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. While Ibn Ma'in considered both to be equally reliable, Al-Darimi made a critical distinction, favoring Alqama as the stronger transmitter. This preference was not arbitrary but likely rooted in Al-Darimi's evaluation of their individual narrating styles, consistency, and corroborative support from other scholars (Mahmoud et al., 2022). Historical records suggest that Alqama had closer scholarly ties to Ibn Mas'ud, which may have influenced Al-Darimi's decision to rank him higher. On the other hand, Ibn Ma'in's equal treatment of both narrators implies a broader, perhaps more generalized approach, where he did not perceive enough disparity to differentiate between them. This case exemplifies how hadith critics, even within the same scholarly tradition, could interpret the reliability of transmitters differently based on their emphasis on specific criteria such as proximity to primary sources, precision in narration, and reputation within scholarly circles.

These differences reinforce the idea that hadith criticism was not an exact science but rather a field of scholarly debate and nuanced evaluation. While certain principles of jarh wa ta'deel were widely accepted, such as the importance of corroboration, narrator integrity, and precision, the way these principles were applied varied significantly among scholars. Al-Darimi's approach appears to have been more granular and case-specific, often identifying subtle distinctions that Ibn Ma'in either overlooked or considered insignificant. His willingness to challenge traditional assessments suggests that he prioritized a more rigorous, individualized analysis of narrators, rather than relying on broad classifications. This analytical depth reflects a methodological shift where some scholars moved beyond merely categorizing narrators into "trustworthy" or "weak" and instead engaged in comparative ranking and contextual evaluation.

Ultimately, these variations highlight the intellectual dynamism within early hadith studies. The differences between Al-Darimi and Ibn Ma'in demonstrate that the science of

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hadith criticism was continuously evolving, shaped by the personal methodologies and insights of leading scholars. While Ibn Ma'in was one of the foremost authorities in jarh wa ta'deel, Al-Darimi's ability to critically assess and sometimes challenge his mentor's conclusions emphasizes the value of independent reasoning in Islamic scholarship. These methodological differences serve as a reminder that the authentication of hadith was not a monolithic process but a scholarly discourse, where rigorous debate and individual expertise contributed to the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This research establishes Imam Al-Darimi as a critical and independent scholar in the field of hadith criticism. His willingness to diverge from Ibn Ma'in's assessments, while maintaining a deep respect for his sheikh, exemplifies the intellectual integrity required in Jarh wa Ta'dil. The study also underscores the necessity of revisiting early critiques with a balanced perspective, recognizing that hadith evaluation is a dynamic discipline that benefits from scholarly debate and reassessment. Given the significance of these findings, further research into the methodologies of early hadith critics is recommended. A more comprehensive analysis of additional hadith critics and their discrepancies would provide deeper insights into the evolution of hadith criticism and the principles guiding scholarly disagreements in this field.

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