

When Less is More: On the Chapter Headings and
Organization of Ḥadīths in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

When Less is More: On the Chapter Headings and Organization of Ḥadīths in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*

Introduction

The *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Imām al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH) and Imām Muslim (d. 261 AH) occupy a sacrosanct space in the hearts of Muslims and are justifiably considered the most reliable collections after the Qurʾān. While each of these two works possesses features that have persuaded scholars over the centuries to prefer one over the other, al-Bukhārī’s literary genius truly shines in his chapter headings (*tarājim*). Chapter headings are a useful way for authors to guide their readers.¹ They provide clarity on their contents, operate as a platform to respond to interlocutors, and present the authors’ personal views.² From this angle, chapter headings serve as the earliest instance of textual commentaries by the compilers themselves.³ Although *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*’s astonishing structure and systematic presentation of ḥadīths are unparalleled, there is considerable scholarly debate on the authorship of its chapter headings.

Despite a dearth of conclusive evidence, there is general agreement that Muslim wrote the main chapter titles (*kutub*)

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- 1 The word *tarjama* has multiple usages in scholastic discourse: (1) a biography, e.g., the *tarjama* of Abū Hurayra; (2) a particular chain of transmission, e.g., al-Bukhārī transmits fifty ḥadīths with the *tarjama* “Mālik, from Nāfiʿ, from Ibn ʿUmar;” and (3) chapter headings. See ʿAwwāma, annotations on *Tadrīb al-rāwī* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 2:315.
 - 2 On the function of chapter headings, see Zakariyyā Kāndhlawī, *al-Abwāb wa-l-tarājim* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʿir al-Islāmiyya, 2012), 1:124ff.
 - 3 Joel Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary Across a Millennium* (California: University of California Press, 2018), 5, 111–115.

of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*,⁴ e.g., *Kitāb al-Īmān* (the Book of Faith),⁵ based on early references to them by al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385 AH) and Ibn Manjawayh (d. 428 AH).⁶ Furthermore, there is no disagreement that the ḥadīths in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* follow a coherent sequence within these main chapters, as mentioned by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643 AH); this is apparent to anyone who peruses the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁷ The point of contention lies in the titles of the sub-chapters (*abwāb*)—henceforth, chapter headings. In this paper, I will briefly explore the authorship of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*'s chapter headings and outline Muslim's method of presenting and critically examining ḥadīths in his magnum opus.

Did Imām Muslim Write the Chapter Headings?

A minority view maintains that Muslim himself added the chapter headings. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zayla'ī (d. 762 AH) appears to hold this view. In *Naṣb al-rāya*, he uses the phrase “Muslim titled the

4 Muḥammad al-Sanūsī (d. 895 AH) opines that even the main chapter titles were added by later scholars. See al-Sanūsī, *Mukammil ikmāl al-ikmāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 1:48.

5 Mashhūr Ḥasan, *al-Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1994), 187; Abū Ghudda, footnotes on *Sabāḥat al-fīkr fi al-jahr bi-l-dhīkr* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2009), 37. That being said, there are differences in the placement and number of the *kutub*. A comparison between the *kutub* mentioned in Ibn Manjawayh's *Rijāl Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and those found in the printed editions of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* reveals differences in the titles, such as *Kitāb al-aḍāḥī* or *al-ḍaḥāyā* and *Kitāb al-ṣiyām* or *al-ṣawm*.

6 As will be explained later with respect to the chapter headings, these references do not definitively prove that the main chapter titles were from Muslim due to the possibility that these references were based on the overall theme or wording of the ḥadīths.

7 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṣiyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim min al-ikhlāl wa-l-ghalaṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1984), 101–103.

chapter...”⁸ The editor of *Ikmāl al-mu‘lim*, Yaḥyā Ismā‘īl,⁹ and the late Ḥadīth expert, Yūnus Jawnpūrī (d. 2017), are among a handful of contemporary scholars who share this opinion.¹⁰ This position is based on (1) the presence of chapter headings in some early manuscripts (*nusakh*) and recensions (*riwāyāt*) of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and (2) scholarly references to specific chapters in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹¹ The majority view is that the chapter headings were a later addition.¹²

The evidences provided by the first group are not satisfactory. That chapter headings are found in some manuscripts of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* is not conclusive proof because they could have been added by scribes. The disparity in the placement and titles of the chapter headings in these manuscripts demonstrates the

8 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zayla‘ī, *Naṣb al-rāya li-aḥādīth al-hidāya* (Beirut: Mu‘asasat al-Rayyān, 1997), 2:59, 66.

9 Yaḥyā Ismā‘īl, “Introduction,” in *Ikmāl al-mu‘lim bi-fawā‘id Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Wafā‘, 1998), 1:24.

10 Yūnus Jawnpūrī, *al-Yawāqīt al-ghāliya fi taḥqīq wa-takhrīj al-aḥādīth al-‘āliya* (Leicester: Majlis Da‘wat al-Ḥaqq, n.d.), 3:336. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī (d. 1848) writes, “Muslim is alluding to this in the chapter heading of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.” See al-Laknawī, *Sabāḥat al-fikr*, 37. This may have been a slip of the pen on al-Laknawī’s part, so it cannot be used as definitive proof that he held this view.

11 Yaḥyā Ismā‘īl, “Introduction,” in *Ikmāl al-mu‘lim*, 1:24; Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uṣaymī, “Tafṣīl nafīs ḥawl tarājim Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim,” YouTube video, 06/05/2020, <https://youtu.be/oaO-PGK1WIU>. Yaḥyā Ismā‘īl incorrectly quotes Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ as saying, “Consequently, the claim that Muslim did not place chapter headings is disproved.” The citation that he provides from Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (2:160) only states, “It is narrated by Muslim in one of his chapter headings as found in some recensions...” See Kāmran Ajmal, “Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim key abwāb wa-tarājim,” *Māhnāma Dār al-‘Ulūm* 98, no. 10 (2014): 7.

12 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṣiḡānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 103; idem, *Ma‘rifat anwā‘ ‘ilm al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 20. Ibn Diḥya (d. 633 AH) expressly states that Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 544 AH) is responsible for adding the chapter headings. See al-Zarkashī, *al-Nukat ‘alā muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* (Riyadh: Adwā‘ al-Salaf, 1998), 1:167.

doubtfulness of them having been added by Muslim.¹³ Moreover, only some of the manuscripts contain chapter headings; many of them do not.¹⁴ The chapter headings found in Ibn Khayr al-Ishbīlī's (d. 575 AH) prestigious manuscript are definitely not from Muslim since the location of the chapter headings interferes with Muslim's organization of ḥadīths, which will be discussed later.¹⁵

As far as recensions are concerned, it is important to note that there are two major recensions of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*: (1) Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sufyān (d. 308 AH), whose route eventually became the dominant recension of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and (2) Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qalānisī's recension, which was exclusively found in the Maghrib.¹⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ observed that the handwritten manuscript of al-Julūdī (d. 368 AH), the primary transmitter from Ibrāhīm, did not contain chapter headings.¹⁷ Moreover, al-Māzarī (d. 536 AH) and Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544 AH) based their commentaries of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* primarily on Ibrāhīm's recension, yet neither of them included chapter headings.¹⁸ It is important to add that they

13 Kāmran Ajmal, "Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim key abwāb wa-tarājim," 7.

14 Ibid., 5. Al-Suyūṭī writes that the earliest manuscripts were devoid of chapter headings. See al-Suyūṭī, "Introduction," in *al-Dībāj ʿalā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim b. al-Hajjāj* (Cairo: Dār Ibn ʿAffān, 1996), 1:33.

15 ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Muḥammadi, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim min al-sanāʿa al-ḥadīthiyya ilā al-tabwīb al-fiqhī* (Baghdad: Dīwān al-Waqf al-Sunnī, 2018), 49. For examples, see *ibid.*, 50–55. Al-Muḥammadi argues that Ibn Khayr's manuscript is based on Ibrāhīm's recension and was compared with Ibn Māhān's (via al-Qalānisī). See *ibid.*, 39. It should be noted that although this manuscript of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is ascribed to Ibn Khayr, it was never his personal manuscript; he was simply responsible for comparing it and amending it, and therefore, it was attributed to him. Ibn ʿUfayr al-Ishbīlī (d. c. 580 AH) was its actual owner and scribe. See Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥumaydī, "Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-l-Qarawiyyīn," *al-Nashra al-Shahriyya* 21, (1440): 23ff. As such, the chapter headings in this manuscript most probably were added by Ibn ʿUfayr himself.

16 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṣiyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 103, 109.

17 Ibid., 114; al-Muḥammadi, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 22, 28.

18 The current chapter headings found in the printed edition of *Ikmāl al-muʿlim* were added by the editor. The actual manuscript does not contain

also had access to Ibn Māhān’s recension (via al-Ashqar from al-Qalānisī). It therefore follows that the recensions of Ibrāhīm and al-Qalānisī were devoid of chapter headings.¹⁹

Scholarly references to particular chapter headings, such as al-Dāraquṭnī’s (d. 385 AH) statement, “In the chapter ‘Which Islām is Best?’”²⁰ and al-Māzarī’s occasional references,²¹ are based on the overall theme or part of the wording of the ḥadīths—a common practice among scholars. They do not indicate that Muslim actually wrote those chapter headings. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ clearly states that the chapter headings were a later installment, yet he keenly references Ibrāhīm b. Sufyān’s omissions by saying “The first (omission) occurs in the Book of Hajj under *the chapter of shaving and trimming*.”²² Likewise, al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH) writes in his commentary, “As for Muslim’s statement in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* under the *chapter on the description of prayer*...” In addition, if these references were actually based on Muslim’s own chapter headings, scholars like al-Dāraquṭnī would have cited them at every given opportunity instead of making scattered references, and al-Māzarī would have added them to the relevant sections in his commentary.²³

the entire ḥadīths of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and its chapter headings. Unlike *Ikmāl al-mu’lim*, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ’s *Mashāriq al-anwār* was not a work exclusive to *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Hence, the chapter headings for *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* therein were added in conformity to the existing chapter headings of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and the *Muwaṭṭa’*. See al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 24.

19 Ibid., 22–24.

20 Al-Dimashqī, *al-Ajwiba* (Riyadh: Dār al-Warrāq, 1998), 283. The editor of Abū Mas’ūd al-Dimashqī’s (d. 401 AH) *al-Ajwiba* notes that he was unable to locate this statement in al-Dāraquṭnī’s *al-Tatabbu’* and *al-‘Ilal*.

21 See, for instance, al-Māzarī, *al-Mu’lim bi-fawā’id Muslim*, (Tunis: al-Dar al-Tūnisiyya, 1988), 1:349.

22 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṣiyānat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 114.

23 Al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 118–119.

Subsequent Scholarship

If Muslim did not write the chapter headings of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, then who wrote them? With considerable differences in their number, placement, and titles, we can identify five categories of scholars who developed their own chapter headings for *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: scribes, *Mustakhraj* compilers, summarizers, editors, and commentators.²⁴

(1) Scribes added chapter headings, either in the marginalia or in the actual text, when copying manuscripts of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. A manuscript read back to Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mursī (d. 655 AH) contains chapter headings in the main text; al-Farāwī's manuscript transcribed in 559 AH contains chapter headings mostly in the margins; and Ibn Khayr al-Ishbili's manuscript (see fig. 1) contains chapter headings that separate the routes of individual Companions.²⁵ Again, the disparity in the placement and titles of the chapter headings suggests that they were based on the scribes' personal judgments.²⁶



Figure 1: Ibn Khayr's manuscript of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* transcribed in 573 AH (Fez: al-Qarawiyyin Library 345, fol. 5r.).

(2) The *Mustakhraj* genre consisted of books whose authors used an existing Ḥadīth collection as a template to narrate

24 Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUṣaymī, “Tafṣīl nafīs ḥawl tarājim Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim.” Al-ʿUṣaymī mentions only four groups. As we will see, modern editors like the editors of the al-Ṭabʿa al-ʿĀmira print did not entirely replicate al-Nawawī's chapter headings.

25 See the editors' introduction to *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo: Dār al-Ta'ṣīl, 2014), 1:236, 252.

26 Al-Muḥammadi, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 29.

ḥadīths via personal transmission until they met with the chain of the author of the template collection.²⁷ One of the earliest *Mustakhrajs* written on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* was by Abū ʿAwāna (d. 316 AH).²⁸ However, based on the poor quality, repetitive nature, and juristic focus of the chapter headings in his *Mustakhraj*, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Muḥammadī argues that they were added by later scribes.²⁹ Another *Mustakhraj* was written by Abū Nuʿaym al-Asbahānī (d. 430 AH),³⁰ whose chaptering most closely resembles the methodology of the Ḥadīth scholars, according to Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUṣaymī.³¹

(3) For nearly a millennium, the chapter headings that have gained the widest acceptance and most traction were taken from commentaries, in particular Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī’s commentary, *al-Minhāj*. In the prolegomenon to his commentary, al-Nawawī writes:

Several scholars have written chapter headings. Some of these are excellent while others are unsatisfactory due to their deficiency in expressing their contents, or the poor wording, among other reasons. God willing,

27 Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*. 2:421–427.

28 On the *Mustakhrajs* of Abū ʿAwāna and Abū Nuʿaym, see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 111–114.

29 Al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 106–107.

30 In the introduction to his *Mustakhraj*, Abū Nuʿaym writes, “We examined the primary reports that he [Muslim] cited and the chapters that he summarized. Thus, we followed him vis-à-vis his book and its *tarājim* from our teachers.” See al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Musnad al-mustakhraj* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 1:89–90. It is not clear what Abū Nuʿaym intends by the word *tarājim*, which conventionally translates as chapter headings. Is he saying that he followed the chapter headings of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in which case he is attributing their authorship to Muslim? A more plausible explanation is that in this context *tarājim* is being used in the meaning of specific chains of transmission, an equally common usage as mentioned earlier. Abū Nuʿaym is explaining that his *Mustakhraj* follows the overall structure of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, but the chains of transmission will be traced from his own teachers—which is basically the function of a *Mustakhraj*.

31 Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUṣaymī, “Tafṣīl nafīs ḥawl tarājim Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim.”

I hope to express them in a befitting manner in the relevant places.³²

Its prominence and value notwithstanding, scholars have taken issue with al-Nawawī's imposition of his Shāfi'ī-leaning jurisprudential views in formulating the chapter headings, oftentimes without support from the ḥadīths cited by Muslim.³³ The renowned polymath of the subcontinent, Shabbīr Aḥmad ʿUthmānī (d. 1949), lamented the absence of any satisfactory work on the chapter headings—including al-Nawawī's—a task he hoped to fulfill in his peerless commentary, *Fath al-mulhim*.³⁴ Unfortunately, he passed away before his aspirations could come to complete fruition.³⁵

(4) With regards to summarizers, the Andalusian Ḥadīth scholar, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Qurṭubī (d. 656 AH)—not to be confused for his student the famous exegete—abridged *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, adding his own chapter headings to organize the abridgment. He later wrote a commentary on it entitled “*al-Muḥḥim*.”³⁶ Around the same time, his Egyptian counterpart ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Mundhirī (d. 656 AH) also authored an abridgment of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, taking licenses in rearranging the sequence of the chapters

32 Al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1972), 1:21.

33 Mashhūr Ḥasan, *al-Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj*, 184; Kāmran Ajmal, “Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim key abwāb wa-tarājim,” 9. For instance, under Wāʾil b. Ḥujr's ḥadīth on placing the hands when standing in prayer, al-Nawawī adds the words “beneath the chest above the navel” in the chapter headings, but the wording of the ḥadīth does not support that qualification. See al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj*, 4:114.

34 Shabbīr ʿUthmānī, *Fath al-mulhim bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2006), 1:269.

35 Mashhūr Ḥasan, *al-Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj*, p. 185.

36 See editor's introduction in al-Qurṭubī, *al-Muḥḥim li-mā ashkala min talkhīṣ kitāb Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1996), 1:14.

and adding headings.³⁷ It is important to note that both authors were contemporaries of al-Nawawī and passed away before him.

(5) As for editors, between 1911 and 1915 CE, the Istanbul-based al-Ṭabʿa al-ʿĀmira printed an edition of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that was compared with reliable manuscripts and annotated with concise notes (see fig. 2).³⁸ Drawing on the chapter headings of al-Nawawī and those found in the manuscripts at their disposal, the editors formulated chapter headings of their own and deliberately placed them in the margins.³⁹ In his edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (d. 1968) replicated the chapter headings of al-Ṭabʿa al-ʿĀmira for the most part, but he took material from al-Nawawī and then incorporated them in the main text—an alteration that provoked the ire of many scholars.⁴⁰

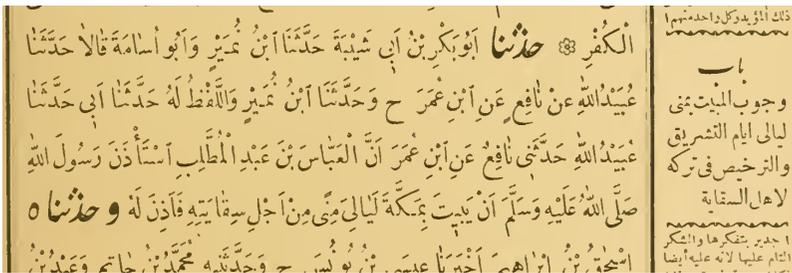


Figure 2: al-Ṭabʿa al-ʿĀmira edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (4:86).

37 See al-Albānī, “Introduction,” in *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1987), 9.

38 The text was edited by Aḥmad Rifat and Muḥammad ʿIzzat several times using reliable manuscripts. Unfortunately, a description of these manuscripts was not provided. It was then revised and annotated by Muḥammad Shukrī al-Anqarawī. See Muṣaddīq al-Dūrī, *Riwāyat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim min ṭarīq Ibn Māhān muqārana bi-riwāyat Ibn Sufyān* (M.A. diss., Tikrit University, 2010), 45–46.

39 Al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 20.

40 Ibid., 20, 43, 84.

Motivation to Omit Chapter Headings

What motivated Muslim to depart from the practice of his peers by omitting chapter headings from such an important collection? Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ postulates that they were omitted to prevent the work from becoming unnecessarily lengthy.⁴¹ However, this explanation does not pass muster as chapter headings would only negligibly increase the volume of an already extensive collection. Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571 AH) states that Muslim passed away before he was able to write the chapter headings.⁴² This explanation is problematized by the fact that Muslim finished composing the *Ṣaḥīḥ* in 250 AH and subsequently taught it for 11 years before passing away.⁴³

A number of contemporary writers proffer a more convincing answer where they contend that unlike *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* or the *Sunan* works, Muslim organized his magnum opus according to a Ḥadīth-centric model.⁴⁴ Although it may be argued that on a macro level the chapters (*kutub*) follow a somewhat juristic sequence, on a micro level Muslim is clearly concerned with extrapolating fine Ḥadīth-related points. Anyone who reads Muslim's prolegomenon (*muqaddima*) to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* will quickly realize that his focus is Ḥadīth-related and not jurisprudential. A cursory examination of the structure and presentation of ḥadīths in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* will help illustrate this phenomenon better.⁴⁵

41 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṣiyanat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 103.

42 Ḥajjī Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1941), 1:555.

43 Abū Ghuddah, "Appendix," in *al-Mūqīza fī ʿilm muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1416), 137–140; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭawālba, *al-Imām Muslim wa-manhajuhu fī Ṣaḥīḥihi* (Amman: Dār ʿAmmār, 2000), 104–105.

44 Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, *Manhaj al-naqd fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 254; Mashhūr Ḥasan, *al-Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj*, 183; al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 133.

45 Al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 131–133.

Take, for instance, the report of Anas b. Mālik, “On one occasion, I travelled with Jarīr b. ʿAbd Allāh and he served me; I asked him to refrain from doing that. He said, ‘I saw the Anṣār do something for the Prophet and I will try my best to serve them whenever I travel with them (and Jarīr was senior to Anas).” Muslim narrates the report as follows:

Naṣr b. ʿAlī al-Jahḍamī, Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā, and Ibn Bashshār all narrated to us from Ibn ʿArʿara— and the wording is al-Jahḍamī’s: Muḥammad b. ʿArʿara narrated to me, saying: Shuʿba narrated to us, from Yūnus b. ʿUbayd, from Thābit al-Bunānī, from Anas b. Mālik... Ibn al-Muthannā and Ibn Bashshār add in their transmission, “Jarīr was senior (*akbar*) to Anas,” and Ibn Bashshār said, “Jarīr was older (*asann*) than Anas.”⁴⁶

From his isolation of the original source (al-Jahḍamī) to distinguishing between each teacher’s respective wording, Muslim’s attention to detail and exposé of subtleties that often have no bearing on a report’s authenticity demonstrate a high caliber of Ḥadīth scholarship. This should not lead one to assume that such a methodology is absent from Ḥadīth anthologies besides *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. The difference, however, is that this methodology is woven into the warp and weft of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* while it remains a secondary concern for other authors.⁴⁷ Muslim seems to have inherited this trait from his teacher, Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH), who frequently highlights minute variations in the chains of transmission in the *Musnad*.⁴⁸

46 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2513.

47 Al-Muḥammadī, *Tarājim abwāb Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 140.

48 ʿAwwāma, annotations on *Tadrib al-rāwī*, 2:304; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tāʾjil al-manfaʿa bi-zawāʿid rijāl al-aʿimma al-arbaʿa* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 1:712. Interestingly, Imām Aḥmad disliked the addition of anything—even chapter headings—to ḥadīths. See *Masāʾil al-Imām Aḥmad riwāyat Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Hānī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1400), 2:244–245, no. 2368–9. It is worth exploring how much, if at all, this attitude impacted Muslim, in particular reference to his omission of chapter headings.

In the formative period, chapters in Ḥadīth literature were organized according to a juristic or ḥadīth-centric sequence. The *Sunan* genre, for instance, is organized according to chapters of jurisprudence, beginning with the subjects of purification, prayer, fasting, etc. Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī’s (d. 279 AH) usage of the phrase “and in the chapter (*wa fī al-bāb*)” is applied, for the most part, in the juristic sense.⁴⁹ On the other hand, many Ḥadīth experts organized reports based on the multiplicity of routes and to identify hidden defects. ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234 AH) famously observed, “Unless all the chains of transmission on a topic (*bāb*) are collected, its flaws will not become apparent.”⁵⁰ A Ḥadīth expert will often cite multiple chains of one text alongside its attestations (*shawāhid*) to point out hidden defects under one chapter.⁵¹ Understanding the distinction between the two types of chapters is essential to appreciate the structure of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and the nature of its “chapters.” Keeping Muslim’s methodology in mind, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) contends that the chapter headings are better left out of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁵²

Imām Muslim’s Presentation of Ḥadīths

Before concluding, a word is due on Muslim’s methodical style of presenting ḥadīths. A salient feature of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, relatively unique for that era, is the presence of a prolegomenon that outlines the author’s *modus operandi*. Some elements of Muslim’s prolegomenon have, without exaggeration, led to the production of libraries and spurred fierce academic debate.⁵³ An exhaustive

49 Mujīr al-Khaṭīb, *Maʿrifat madār al-isnād* (Riyadh: Dār al-Maymān, 2007), 1:306.

50 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmiʿ* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1983), 2:212, no. 1640.

51 Mujīr al-Khaṭīb, *Maʿrifat madār al-isnād*, 1:305; cf. ʿAwwāma, annotations on *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, 2:273–276, 282.

52 Al-Suyūṭī, “Introduction,” in *al-Dībāj*, 1:33.

53 For instance, Muslim’s observations on the issue of continuity (*ittiṣāl*) between narrators have inspired countless monographs. Shaykh Ḥātim

treatment of even the present discussion is beyond the scope of this article.⁵⁴ For our purposes, we will highlight several passages that speak of his method of presenting ḥadīths, followed by some case studies. Muslim writes:

We will examine the corpus of prophetic ḥadīths and divide them into three categories and three groups of narrators without repetition unless repetition is indispensable for additional meaning found therein or the mention of one chain next to another for a particular reason....

As for the first category, we hope to begin by presenting reports that are furthest from defects and more select because their narrators are consistent in Ḥadīth and precise in what they transmit. Additionally, severe inconsistencies and reckless confusion are not found in their reports similar to what is observed among many Ḥadīth scholars and is clear in their ḥadīths. After exhausting reports of this category, we will then present reports with chains that contain some narrators who are not recognized for memory and precision, to the extent of the previous group. Despite being inferior to those described earlier, they have the traits of concealment, truthfulness, and engagement with knowledge....

al-‘Awnī’s and Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Lāhīm’s respective treatises are examples of such works.

- 54 Shaykh Ḥamza al-Malibārī provides an early treatment of this methodology in his rejoinder to Shaykh Rabī al-Madkhalī entitled “*‘Abqariyyat al-Imām Muslim fī tartīb aḥādīth Musnadihi al-ṣaḥīḥ*” and in a subsequent publication “*Mā hākadhā tūrad yā Sa’d al-ibil*.” ‘Āshūr Dahnī’s M.A. thesis “*Manhaj al-Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj fī dhikr al-akhbār al-mu‘allal*” is also a good resource. Recently, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Awwāma wrote a booklet entitled “*Min manhaj al-Imām Muslim fī ‘arḍ al-ḥadīth al-mu‘allal fī ṣaḥīḥihi*” on this subject; his findings have been summarized in this paper. He shared part of his research over a decade earlier in the introduction to his edition of *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shayba*.

In this manner, we will compile the prophetic reports you requested.

We will not busy ourselves with transmitting the ḥadīths of those who are dubious in the sight of the Ḥadīth experts or most of them. Added to them are those who the majority of their reports are detested (*munkar*) or erroneous (*ghalat*).... God willing, we will further explain and clarify throughout the book when citing defective reports (*al-akhbār al-mu‘allala*) when we reach them in the appropriate places for clarification.⁵⁵

There a number of points to be derived from this passage vis-à-vis Muslim’s *modus operandi*. First, rigorously authenticated ḥadīths are the *Ṣaḥīḥ*’s *raison d’être*. Second, these primary ḥadīths will be followed by another category of ḥadīths that were narrated by slightly questionable transmitters for corroboration (*mutāba‘a*) and attestation (*shawāhid*).⁵⁶ The overall assessment of these narrators will not decline beneath the level of sound narrations (*ḥisān*). In the presence of the first category of intrinsically authentic narrations (*ṣaḥīḥ li-dhātihī*), these ḥadīths are ultimately elevated to the level of extrinsically authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihī*). Third, when the circumstances demand, he will cite

55 Muslim, “Introduction,” in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:4-6.

56 Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mu‘allimī (d. 1966) writes that in a situation where Muslim assembles multiple similar narrations, he will begin the section with the most authentic (*aṣaḥḥ*) ḥadīth followed by the less authentic. But Shaykh Ḥamza al-Malibārī aptly points out that a distinction needs to be made between comparing *narrators* and comparing *narrations* in determining authenticity. What is considered more reliable is not necessarily predicated on the reliability of the narrators in the chain. Hence, Muslim may well first cite a chain that has an elevated chain that is well-known and contains an accurate text before he cites a chain that contains narrators who, on a one-to-one comparison, are more reliable but overall lack other factors. This is understood from Muslim’s words “reports that are furthest from defects and more select.” See al-Mu‘allimī, *al-Anwār al-kāshifa li-mā fī kitāb Aḍwā‘ al-ā al-sunna min al-zalal wa-l-taḍlīl wa-l-mujāza‘a* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), 230; al-Malibārī, *Mā ḥākadhā tūrad yā Sa‘d al-ibil* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004), 21–22.

a ḥadīth with defective wording and will follow it with the established version, at which point he will highlight the defect.⁵⁷ In brief, when the issue relates to the chain of transmission, ḥadīths will be presented in the order of most authentic then less, and when the issue relates to the text, defective ḥadīths will be cited first followed by the sound version.⁵⁸

The first and second points are straightforward and widely accepted. The third point, however, may require explanation. By way of illustration, consider the following ḥadīth:

[Muslim states:] Zuhayr b. Ḥarb narrated to me, saying: Jarīr narrated to us—[*h*] transition—and Ishāq narrated to us, saying: Jarīr informed us, from Manṣūr, from Hilāl b. Yasāf, from Abū Yaḥyā, from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr, who said, “We returned to Medina from Mecca with the Prophet. En route we came across water, so a party hastened to pray ʿAṣr, and as a result, they rushed the ablution. When we caught up with them, their heels were dry, untouched by water. The Prophet remarked, “Woe unto the heels because of the Fire! Perform ablution thoroughly.”

And Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba narrated to us, saying: Wakīʿ narrated to us, from Sufyān—and Ibn al-Muthannā and Ibn Bashshār narrated to us, both saying: Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar narrated to us, saying: Shuʿba narrated to us. Both of them [Shuʿba and Sufyān] narrated from Manṣūr with this chain of transmission. Shuʿba's ḥadīth

57 This method of presenting defective ḥadīths in an authentic compilation is not unique to Muslim. Although Muslim employs this method more frequently than his peers, even authors like al-Bukhārī have adopted a similar approach in their works. On al-Bukhārī's method of presenting defective chains and texts in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, see Saʿīd Bāshanfar's *Manhaj al-Imām al-Bukhārī fi ʿarḍ al-ḥadīth al-maʿlūl fi al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*.

58 ʿAwwāma, *Min manhaj al-Imām Muslim fi ʿarḍ al-ḥadīth al-muʿallal fi ṣaḥīḥihi* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 21–25.

does not contain “Perform ablution thoroughly” and it contains “from Abū Yahyā *al-A‘raj*.”⁵⁹

By presenting the route with the words “Perform ablution thoroughly” and then following it with the route of Shu‘ba where those words are omitted, Muslim is subtly pointing out that the first version is defective and that the second version is sound.⁶⁰

Elsewhere, Muslim narrates a ḥadīth via two routes from Ibn Jurayj, from Muḥammad b. ‘Abbād, from Abū Salama, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ, and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Musayyab, from ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Sā‘ib. He concludes the ḥadīth by stating that the route of ‘Abd al-Razzāq names the narrator only as ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr without the addition of “b. al-‘Āṣ.”⁶¹ A number of commentators have pointed out that the addition is an error. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr mentioned here is not the famous Companion Ibn al-‘Āṣ.⁶² By mentioning the variation in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s route, it appears at first blush that Muslim is merely engaging in his customary presentation of minute variations. However, he is making a deeper observation here: the addition of “b. al-‘Āṣ” is an error.⁶³

Another method that Muslim uses to present defective ḥadīths is to truncate a lengthy report.⁶⁴ In one place, he narrates a ḥadīth from ‘Ā’isha on the Prophet’s nocturnal habits but purposely omits the words “he did not touch water until he slept” as transmitted by his teacher. Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852 AH) explains, “It appears he intentionally omitted the addition, because he pointed out its defect in *Kitāb al-Tamyīz*.”⁶⁵ In addition, although the structure of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* revolves around Ḥadīth-related concerns, Muslim

59 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 241.

60 ‘Awwāma, *Min manhaj al-Imām Muslim*, 28.

61 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 455.

62 Al-Māzarī, *al-Mu‘lim*, 1:399; al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj*, 4:177.

63 ‘Awwāma, *Min manhaj al-Imām Muslim*, 36.

64 ‘Awwāma, *Ḥadhf ṭaraf min al-ḥadīth al-wāḥid ikhtisāran aw i‘lālan* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 23.

65 Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Talkhīṣ al-ḥabīr* (Cairo: Mu‘assasat Qurṭuba, 1995), 1:245 .

still indicates his jurisprudential preferences.⁶⁶ Al-Nawawī writes, “This is the practice of Muslim and other Ḥadīth experts: they mention the ḥadīths they believe to be abrogated first and then follow it with the abrogator.”⁶⁷ On the issue of which prayer is intended in the verse “and the middle prayer,” the exegete Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH) writes, “This is the view of Muslim because he presents it in the ending of the chapter.”⁶⁸

Conclusion

Although the main chapters (*kutub*) of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* were more than likely titled by Imām Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj himself, evidence suggests that he did not add sub chapter headings (*tarājim al-abwāb*). To understand why he omitted such an integral component of authorship, one needs to appreciate the aim of Muslim in presenting ḥadīths: unlike books structured around jurisprudential concerns, Muslim set out to assemble ḥadīths in a manner suited for Ḥadīth scholarship. From scribes to commentators to editors, scholars later added chapter headings that they deemed most appropriate. It can safely be said that al-Nawawī’s chapter headings have gained the most traction but, as many have pointed out, much work remains in developing more robust chapter headings fit for such a monumental collection. Al-Suyūṭī observes, however, that Muslim purposely omitted chapter headings from his magnum opus; it is, therefore, better off left in the form its compiler originally intended and envisioned—because sometimes less is more.

66 ‘Awwāma, *Min manhaj al-Imām Muslim*, 14–15.

67 Al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj*, 4:42–43.

68 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur‘ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964), 3:212–213.

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Chapter headings are a useful way for authors to guide their readers. They provide clarity on their contents, operate as a platform to respond to interlocutors, and present the authors' personal views. From this angle, chapter headings serve as the earliest instance of textual commentaries by the compilers themselves. Although *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*'s astonishing structure and systematic presentation of ḥadīths are unparalleled, there is considerable scholarly debate on the authorship of its chapter headings. This paper explores the authorship of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*'s chapter headings and outlines Imām Muslim's method of presenting and critically examining ḥadīths in his magnum opus.

