AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEANING AND USAGE OF "PERFECT HADITH" TERMINOLOGY FROM IBN HAJAR'S VIEWPOINT

UMA INVESTIGAÇÃO SOBRE O SIGNIFICADO E USO DA TERMINOLOGIA "HADITH PERFEITO" DO PONTO DE VISTA DE IBN HAJAR*

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Abstract: Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (may Allah have mercy on him) is highly recognized as an eminent scholar of Hadith, particularly due to his tremendous work in the sciences of Hadith (Prophetic tradition). The scholar has made explicit efforts toward naming a variety of Hadith-related concepts and their classifications. Ibn Hajar often refers to Hadith-related terminologies with certain connotations that were not used by earlier scholars, such as the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* (perfect hadith). This term, alongside its usage, in particular, has been misunderstood by students and scholars of Hadith. As such, investigating the meaning and usage of the term becomes imperative. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as used by Ibn Hajar as well as its connotation. The study utilized an inductive-analytical method in which evidence from Hadith books and Quranic verses was considered to obtain valid outcomes. The study revealed that Ibn Hajar coined and used the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a category of Hadith. Although scholars, such as Al-Hakim, pointed to the meaning of *al-Muhkam*, they did not enumerate the term as a category of Hadith. Additionally, Ibn Hajar defined the term as any acceptable Hadith that is free from disagreement with similar narrations. To the best of our knowledge, prior studies have not investigated the usage and connotation of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* from the viewpoint of Ibn Hajar. In particular, this study could advance our understanding of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a Hadith-related terminology and its connotation.

Keywords: Al-Hadith al-Muhkam. Hadith terminology. Ibn Hajar. Prophetic tradition.

Resumo: Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (que Alá tenha piedade dele) é altamente reconhecido como um eminente estudioso de Hadith, particularmente devido a seu tremendo trabalho nas ciências de Hadith (tradição profética). O estudioso tem feito esforços explícitos para nomear uma variedade de conceitos relacionados a Hadith e suas classificações. Ibn Hajar freqüentemente se refere a terminologias relacionadas a Hadith com certas conotações que não eram usadas por estudiosos anteriores, como o termo al-Hadith al-Muhkam (hadith perfeito). Este termo,

juntamente com seu uso, em particular, tem sido mal compreendido por estudantes e estudiosos de Hadith. Como tal, a investigação do significado e do uso do termo torna-se imperativa. Portanto, este estudo procurou investigar o termo al-Hadith al-Muhkam como usado por Ibn Hajar, bem como sua conotação. O estudo utilizou um método indutivo-analítico no qual a evidência dos livros de Hadith e versos do Alcorão foi considerada para obter resultados válidos. O estudo revelou que Ibn Hajar cunhou e usou o termo al-Hadith al-Muhkam como uma categoria de Hadith. Embora estudiosos, como Al-Hakim, apontaram o significado de al-Muhkam, eles não enumeraram o termo como uma categoria de Hadith. Além disso, Ibn Hajar definiu o termo como qualquer Hadith aceitável e livre de discordâncias com narrações semelhantes. Tanto quanto sabemos, estudos anteriores não investigaram o uso e a conotação de al-Hadith al-Muhkam do ponto de vista de Ibn Hajar. Em particular, este estudo poderia avançar nosso entendimento de al-Hadith al-Muhkam como uma terminologia relacionada a Hadith- e sua conotação.

Palavras-chave: Al-Hadith al-Muhkam. Terminologia de Hadith. Ibn Hajar. Tradição profética.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, some terminologies tend to advance and change with time, while others remain constant. This phenomenon equally applies to Hadith-related terminologies. Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (may Allah have mercy on him) is renowned for being devoted to the science of Hadith (Prophetic tradition) as well as its classification and terminologies. The scholar made explicit efforts toward naming a variety of Hadith-related concepts and their classifications. He is highly recognized as an eminent scholar of Hadith, particularly due to his tremendous work in this regard. Several scholars have taken interest in Ibn Hajar's works, especially his concise book entitled "Nukhbah al-Fikr fi Mustalahi Ahl al-Athar (The Best Intellect in the Terminologies of Hadith Scholars). The scholar has demonstrated a high level of creativity in composing the book as indicated in its commentary (Ibn Hajar, 2008). It should be noted that new terminologies are often developed for existing concepts, which means earlier scholars might use certain concepts that were not regarded as Hadith-related terminologies until that time.

Particularly, Ibn Hajar often refers to Hadith-related terminologies with certain connotations that were not used by earlier scholars, such as the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* (perfect hadith). This term and its usage, in particular, has been misunderstood by students and scholars of Hadith. As such, investigating the meaning and usage of the term becomes imperative. To the best of our knowledge, prior studies have not investigated the usage and connotation of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* according to Ibn Hajar. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the meaning of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* and its usage by Ibn Hajar. Specifically, the current research aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To discover whether the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* was used by scholars who preceded Ibn Hajar.

2. To explore the meaning of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* and its usage by Ibn Hajar.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses both the literal and technical meanings of the word *al-Muhkam* (perfect). For the literal meaning, the word's connotation is discussed based on its origin and morphological interpretations. In addition, the technical meaning of the word is explained from the viewpoints of Quran exegetes and classical Islamic scholars.

Literal Meaning of Al-Muhkam

The word المحكم (perfect) is derived from احكم which has several literal connotations. For instance, the word means "bring to perfection", "do something accurately", or "do proficiently". According to Ibn Manzur (1990), احكم الامر means "he perfected something" and الحكيم refers to "a person who does things perfectly". Equally, Al-Zubaidi (1994) mentioned that احكمه means "he perfected it". In Quranic terms, سورة محكمة refers to a verse that has not been abrogated and for which the reader does not require further explanations or interpretations. Additionally, the word المحكم may be associated with منع (prevent), for instance, preventing a person from committing a transgression. Also, Al-Jarjani (1996) mentioned that المحكم refers to anything that is restricted from changes, modification, or abrogation. It is often said بناء محكم (perfect construction). According to Al-Kafawi (1998), the word المحكم means "perfect", and thus the phrase بناء محكم refers to a perfect construction without defect or fault. In essence, a perfect concept has only one connotation and does not require further explanations or interpretations.

Technical Meaning of Al-Muhkam from Exegetes' Viewpoints

Quran exegetes are the first group of scholars who referred to the concept of *al-Muhkam* which comes in the Noble Quran to describe its verses with either general or specific connotations. The general connotation is mentioned in some verses, such as كتاب أحكمت آياته ثم فصلت من لدن حكيم خبير – "[This is] a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from [one who is] Wise and Acquainted" (Quran 11, Verse 1). The Quran also mentions تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ – "These are the verses of the perfect Book [which is] full of wisdom" in Chapters 10 and 31 Verses 1 and 2 respectively. In these

verses, *al-Ihkam* (perfection) implies that Quran is a complete, inclusive, and perfect Book with no fault, defect, or falsehood in both its form and meaning. In this regard, Ibn Jarir (1954) mentioned that the meaning of these verses is that the Quran is protected from any fault, defect, or falsehood and made clear in terms of the injunction for good deeds and prohibition from wrongdoing. This explanation suggests that the entire verses of the Quran are protected from any defect or fault that could lead to criticism, which represents a great inimitability.

Regarding the specific meaning, the Quran mentions: هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِنْهُ ءَايَٰتٌ مُّحْكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٌ – "It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise; they are the foundation of the Book – and others unspecific" (Quran 3, Verse 7). Exegetes have made several interpretations of *Muhkamat* as used in the above verse. Nevertheless, there are three famous interpretations. First, the word means "perfect applicable ruling", as reported by Ibn Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud as well as some of the Prophet's companions. This is also the view of Qatadah, Ikrimah, Ma'mar, Dahhak, and Rabi' bin Anas from amongst the exegetes. Second, *al-Muhkam* is the explanation of perfect rulings concerning "lawful and forbidden", and this is the view of Ikrimah and Mujahid (Ibn Jarir, 1954). Third, *al-Muhkam* refers to any statement that has a single connotation, and thus *Muhkamat* means verses that cannot be conceivably misinterpreted, while *Mutashabihat* (similar verses) are those that can be interpreted from different viewpoints. This is the view of Muhammad bin Ja'far bin Al-Zubair, which is equally adopted by Ibn Atiyyah (1974). Also, Ibn Jarir (1954) pointed out that *al-Muhakam* may carry all of the above connotations.

Technical Meaning of Al-Muhkam from the Viewpoints of classical Islamic scholars

The term *al-Muhkam* has several connotations according to classical Islamic scholars. Nonetheless, there are two most famous viewpoints regarding the term. First, *al-Muhkam* represents a clear connotation without confusion or complication. Second, *al-Muhkam* represents a completely permanent ruling that is unabrogated. According to Al-Juwayni (2022), you can certainly say that *al-Muhkam* refers to a clear and well-structured statement that leads to a straightforward connotation without contradiction or illogicality. He also mentioned that *al-Muhkam* is any ruling whose content is clearly understood and accessed (Al-Juwayni, 1399). Also, Al-Ghazali (1994) pointed out that *al-Muhkam* has two connotations. First, the word refers to a clear statement beyond any doubt or confusion.

Second, *al-Muhakam* refers to a well-organized and structured statement that is clear and useful without any contradiction or inconsistency.

Additionally, Abu Zaid (2001) mentioned that *Al-Muhkam* is a kind of clear statement that is not abrogated. According to Al-A'madi (2004), there are two most authentic views about *al-Muhkam*. First, the term implies a statement whose meaning is obvious and does not have different interpretations. Second, *al-Muhkam* suggests a well-constructed and structured statement that is clear without the possibility of being misinterpreted, or without contradiction and discrepancy. Likewise, Abu Ya'la (1990) stated that *Al-Muhkam* is an independent statement that does not require further explanation. However, *al-Mutashabih*, unlike *al-Muhkam*, can be interpreted in different contexts. In addition, these viewpoints concur with Al-Shatibi's (1997) opinion that *al-Muhkam* has both specific and general meanings. The specific meaning refers to the lack of being abrogated, which is used by scholars in the concept of الناسخ والمنسوخ – "abrogating and abrogated" verses. Whereas, the general meaning refers to a statement that does not require further explanation. Therefore, in general terms, *al-Muhkam* represents any clear statement with a single connotation. It is also mentioned that *al-Muhkam* refers to a statement that is protected from being misinterpreted (Ibn Taymiyah, 2005).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research used an inductive-analytical technique that documents evidence from Hadith books as well as Quranic verses to investigate *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a Hadith-related terminology from the viewpoint of Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar. The inductive-analytical method aims at constructing particular themes by undertaking an exploration of raw documented data (Gasson, 2004). As mentioned by Thomas (2006), an inductive method "provides an easily used and systematic set of procedures for analyzing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings" (p. 237). There are several advantages of utilizing an inductive technique. This method, for instance, helps summarize raw documented data and define a clear connection between the study objectives and the outcomes obtained from the data. Therefore, the inductive technique is helpful in producing evidence. According to Thomas (2006), the general inductive method "provides a simple, straightforward approach for deriving findings in the context of focused evaluation questions" (p. 237).

For the above reason, this research utilized the general procedure of textual data analysis defined by Thomas (2006). First, the viewpoints of scholars, including Ibn Hajar, were gathered with evidence from Hadith books and Quran verses. Subsequently, the texts were carefully considered with the intention of discovering the viewpoints of Hadith scholars, and Ibn Hajar in particular, regarding *al-Muhkam*. Then categories were generated by multiple appraisals of the documented data. Afterward, the initial categories were utilized to generate a catalog that incorporates the most significant themes regarding the term *al-Muhakam* according to the scholars' viewpoints. Lastly, the themes were inferred based on the current research objectives.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Usage of Al-Muhkam amongst Hadith Scholars

The first objective of this study aims to discover whether the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* was used by scholars who preceded Ibn Hajar. The emerging themes suggest that scholars who preceded Ibn Hajar did not use the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a category of Hadith. Although some earlier scholars might have referred to the concept, they were not reported to have mentioned the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a Hadith category. Al-Hakim (1966) mentioned the 30th category of Hadith which is associated with statements that have a single interpretation but did not refer to the concept as *al-Hadith al-Muhkam*. He also mentioned the 29th category of *Hadith* connected with the tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him), citing examples given by scholars on the weakness and authenticity of *Hadith*, but did not call any of them *al-Hadith al-Muhkam*. Likewise, the scholar mentioned the 21st category of *Hadith* related to "abrogating and abrogated" narrations but did not refer to the concept as *al-Hadith al-Muhkam*.

Additionally, Ibn Al-Salah discussed the 26th category of *Hadith* concerning variations but did not mention the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* (Ibn Al-Salah, 2022). In essence, none of the scholars has used the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* and considered it as a Hadith category except Ibn Hajar. Other scholars only referred to the word *al-Muhkam* as well as the famous descriptions that the Hadith has to be clearly understood or unabrogated. For example, Al-Ja'bari (1988) mentioned that *al-Muhkam* is the opposite of *al-Mutashabih*, while Hadith with a firm ruling is the opposite of *al-Mansukh* (abrogated). He also mentioned two kinds of Hadith. The first kind of Hadith refers to a narration that is perfect in both its form and connotation. Whereas, the second kind of Hadith is a narration

whose meaning is abrogated. The scholar referred to *al-Muhkam* as a clearly understood narration and *al-Nasikh* as a firm narration. This point of view is similar to Al-Tibi's explanation that the intended meaning of *al-Muhkam* is any clearly understood narration, which is the opposite of *al-Mutashabih* (Al-Tibi's, 2013).

In terms of application (usage in Hadith narrations), Hadith scholars have referred to certain concepts associated with *al-Muhkam*. Some scholars referred to certain narrations as الثابت غير منسوخ (firm and unabrogated). It was, for instance, narrated in *Sahih Muslim* (Imam Muslim's collection of authentic Hadith narrations) on the authority of Ibn Shihab that "they (the companions of the Noble Prophet) followed the latest of his commands and looked upon it as one abrogating (the previous ones) and the firmest" (Abu al-Hussain, 2006). Ibn Taimiyyah also mentioned that the narration regarding the validity of *Salah* (prayer) with *Sujud* (prostration) after *Salam* (closing the prayer) is *al-Muhkam* and is not abrogated by any narration. Additionally, Abu al-Fath (2007) stated that the narration concerning who should lead a congregational prayer is well structured in presenting the person who is best versed in the recitation of the Quran, then most knowledge of the Sunnah, then the one who has emigrated (to Madinah) first, then the oldest of them in that order. According to the scholar, the ruling of *Hijrah* (migration from Makkah to Madinah) is firm and unabrogated.

Moreover, some scholars referred to certain narrations as "free from variations in meaning". For example, Al-Hakim mentioned that "I said to Abi Abdillah: How can a person distinguish *al-Muhkam* from *al-Mutashabih*? He said: *al-Mutashabih* has variations in certain contexts, while *al-Muhkam* has no variations in meaning" (2006, p. 9917). Also, Ibn Taymiyya noted that clear and well-established narrations may turn a narration that tends to contradict their meanings into *Al-Mutashabih*. However, a Quranic verse or Hadith with a single connotation is unabrogated by contradictory narrations (Taymiyya, 2005). According to Ibn Rajab, the most authentically firm narration has to supersede the rulings of the other narration in case of contrast between *Al-Muhkam* and *Al-Mutashabih* (Ibn Rajab, 2008).

Scholars also described some narrations as "clear in meaning and guidance". For instance, Ibn Abd al-Bar stated that *al-Muhkam* is any narration that has no varied connotations (Ibn Abd al-Bar, 2017). Similarly, Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that the ruling of the Hadith narration concerning calmness and validity of prayers have no varied connotations, for example, the statements made by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) "The prayer is not valid if a man does not bring his backbone to rest while bowing

and prostrating" and "Go back and pray, for you have not prayed" as well as "then bow and remain calmly in that position for a moment". Thus, this authentically firm narration overruled the *Mutashabih* narration in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned "bow and prostrate". This is because calmness, as mentioned in the first narration, is the essential ruling of the prayer.

Additionally, Ibn al-Qayyim (2008) noted that in a Hadith narration, the Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered Nu'man ibn Bashir to do justice to children in *al-Atiyyah* (donation), and this narration represents the ruling about justice which is enjoined in the Noble Quran upon which the heavens and the earth, as well as Sharia (Islamic law), are grounded. Therefore, this narration is exceptionally firm and clear as well as supportive of the Noble Quran. The *Hadith* overruled the narration that "a person has more right to his wealth than his father, his child, and all mankind". Generally, this *Mutashabih* suggests that a person can manage his wealth as he wishes and does not surpass the clear and firm narration.

Al-Hadith Al-Muhkam in the Terminologies of Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar

The second objective of this study aims to explore the meaning of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* and its usage by Ibn Hajar. The emerging themes suggest that Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (2006) mentioned the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a category of *Hadith* in his book entitled "Nukhbah al-Fikr fi Mustalahi Ahl al-Athar", stating that *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* represents an acceptable narration that is free from *Mu'aradah* (disagreement) with similar narrations. The scholar further explained the intended meaning of *Mu'aradah*, adding that if a particular *Hadith* opposes another similar *Hadith*, and both can be merged, then the narrations are considered *Mukhtalif al-Hadith* (differing narrations). Also, if the opposing narration is firmer, then the former is considered "abrogated" and the latter "abrogating", otherwise there has to be *Tarjeeh* (weighing) or *Tawaqquf* (pause). He further mentioned in a different book entitled "Nuzhah al-Nadhar fi Taudih al-Nukhbah al-Fikr fi Mustalahi Ahl al-Athar" that if a narration is free from disagreement, i.e. there is no similar opposing narration, then the *Hadith* is considered *al-Muhakam* (Ibn Hajar, 2008).

Moreover, Ibn Hajar mentioned the types of disagreement associated with *Hadith*: first, differing narrations, and second, "abrogating" and "abrogated" narrations if their dates are known, and "weighing" and "overweighed" if the dates are unknown. According to him, the opposing *Hadith* can either be acceptable or unacceptable. In this case, a weak narration cannot overweigh a firm one. If they have equal weight, then their meanings can

be merged, otherwise, their dates have to be weighed, and in this case, the most recent one is the abrogating narration while the other is abrogated. If the dates are unknown, their *Matan* (content) and *Sanad* (chain of transmission) have to be weighed. Therefore, according to Ibn Hajar, *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* is considered a narration that is free from disagreement with similar narrations in the cases of differing narrations, abrogating narration, or overweighing. This description by Hafiz Ibn Hajar regarding *al-Muhkam* is adapted from exegetes and classical Muslim scholars who view it as either being free from variations or clear guidance with one connotation.

In both of his books, Ibn Hajar did not mention the clarity of guidance within his description of *Al-Muhkam*. For this reason, perhaps, Al-Suyuti included this terminology in Verse 646 of his book "Alfiyyah al-Suyuti fi 'ilm al-Hadith" (Al-Suyuti, 2009). Thus, Al-Manawi (1999) proclaimed that *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* is a new category of *Hadith* introduced by Ibn Hajar, saying that the author added this category to those provided by earlier scholars. Additionally, this specific term was not present in the books of *Hadith* terminologies that preceded Ibn Hajar. Earlier scholars did not mention the term as a specific *Hadith* category. However, Ibn Hajar adopted some of the concepts associated with *al-Muhkam* which were provided by earlier scholars, but his specific description must be clear enough so that the terminology can easily be distinguished from similar concepts.

It is also worth mentioning that Ibn Hajar, in his book "Fath al-bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari", agreed with other scholars on the concepts associated with *al-Muhkam* mentioned in Quranic verses, such as being clear and understandable, as he quoted and confirmed their statements regarding the meaning of the term (Ibn Hajar, 1993). For instance, Ibn Hajar quoted al-Tabari mentioning that some scholars say that the verse was revealed regarding those who contended with the Prophet (peace be upon him) concerning Prophet Isah (peace be upon him) or the duration of this *Ummah* (nation). The latter is more accurate because Allah (SWT) has made the story of Isah clear to His messenger (peace be upon him), while the case of this *Ummah* is unknown to mankind. It is also said that *al-Muhkam*, in the Quranic context, is a verse with one clear connotation, and *al-Mutashabih* is its counterpart. It is called *al-Muhkam* due to its clear meaning and well-structured wording as opposed to *al-Mutashabih*. It is also said that *al-Muhkam* refers to a verse whose intended meaning is clear, either on its own or by interpretation (Ibn Hajar, 1993). Throughout his explanation, Ibn Hajar did not mention that *al-Muhkam* means being free from disagreement or variation, suggesting that he is satisfied with the description provided by

exegetes and classical scholars.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the meaning and usage of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* (perfect hadith) terminology from the viewpoints of Hafiz Ibn Hajar. According to the outcomes of this investigation, Ibn Hajar coined and used the term *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as a category of Hadith. The term, as defined in his book "Nukhbah al-Fikr fi Mustalah Ahl al-Athar", refers to any acceptable *Hadith* that is free from disagreement with similar narrations. The scholar also mentioned the types of disagreement in his book "Nuzhah al-Nadhar fi Taudih al-Nukhbah al-Fikr": "opposing narrations" as well as "abrogating and abrogated narrations". Hadith scholars who preceded Ibn Hajar did not use the term, and there was not any category of *Hadith* called *al-Hadith al-Muhkam*. Although scholars, such as Al-Hakim, pointed to the meaning of *al-Muhkam*, they did not enumerate the term as a category of *Hadith*. For this reason, Al-Hafiz al-Manawi affirmed that the term was coined by Ibn Hajar. However, Ibn Hajar agreed with the meaning of *al-Muhkam* provided by earlier scholars in his book "Fath al-bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari".

The outcomes of this investigation could help avoid confusion in the usage of the terminology with time, particularly in cases of partial or total disagreement amongst scholars or students. The research could also be useful to scholars and students by revealing how the term of *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* was coined as well as its usage and connotation. Likewise, this study could advance our understanding of Hadith-related terminologies and their connotations as used by Islamic scholars, and in particular, Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar. The knowledge of terminologies can help in making accurate clarifications of the meanings of narrations and their rulings. Nevertheless, the study is limited to *al-Hadith al-Muhkam* as used by Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him). Thus, further research may explore more Hadith-related terminologies.

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