

**The Literary Narrative -An Authenticating Approach to Origin and
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Abstract: *The literary narrative in ancient Arab heritage stands as one of the most significant cultural expressions embedded within the structure of Arab consciousness prior to the advent of systematic writing and documentation. It served as the principal mode of expression, communication, and knowledge transmission across generations in a society deeply rooted in orality, one that placed high value on memory and the capacity for retention. From its earliest formation, the literary narrative fulfilled a social and cultural role that transcended mere storytelling or the relaying of events. It developed into a comprehensive communicative system that contributed to the reinforcement of values and concepts, and to the shaping of collective awareness. With the emergence of formal Arab critical thought, the narrative evolved into an intellectual medium that simultaneously embodied both critical and historical dimensions. It became a trusted resource for critics and historians in documenting events, recording perspectives, and assessing literary and poetic output.*

This study aims to reexamine the concept of the literary narrative within Arab heritage from a critical and foundational standpoint. It begins by analyzing its oral roots and follows its progression into a tool for recording and documentation in subsequent periods. The study also seeks to clarify the narrative's role in safeguarding the collective memory of the nation and to emphasize its function as a reflection of the intellectual, social, and cultural transformations experienced by Arab society. Additionally, it highlights the dual significance of the narrative, demonstrating how it merges the aesthetic dimension of literature with its historical and documentary value. This duality underscores the narrative's strong link to early Arab criticism, in which it served as a foundational source and a key element in shaping critical methodologies and conceptual frameworks. Further analysis explores the cultural functions of the literary narrative within its historical context and investigates its operative mechanisms within the early Arab environment. Such an approach enables an understanding of the narrative as a cultural and cognitive phenomenon that contributed to the formation of Arab critical identity and the establishment of the aesthetic and linguistic foundations upon which early critical practices relied.

Key words: *literary narrative, ancient Arab criticism, documentation, history.*

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1. Introduction:

The literary narrative in early Arab heritage represents a significant cultural and cognitive phenomenon that extended beyond the mere transmission of texts. Emerging within an oral environment where memory served as the primary means of preservation, it functioned as the principal channel for carrying poetry, reports, genealogies, and historical accounts across generations through memorization and direct transmission.

Literary narrative was not only a means of communication but also an essential element in poetic and critical formation. Classical critics regarded narration as a prerequisite for poetic mastery and access to the expressive and stylistic traditions of the Arabs. With the transition from orality to writing, narration entered a new phase in which codification supported, rather than replaced, oral transmission. This development raised important questions of documentation, authenticity, and textual attribution, leading to an early methodological awareness among scholars and critics.

The evolution of literary narrative was also influenced, to some extent, by the methodological rigor of ḥadīth transmission, particularly with regard to isnād and the verification of narrators. Although the two fields remained distinct, this interaction contributed to the refinement of critical practices related to textual scrutiny and documentation.

Accordingly, literary narrative played a central role in shaping historical and critical methodology in Arab thought and paved the way for the emergence of foundational critical works from the third century AH onward. This study therefore examines the concept, origin, and development of literary narrative and its contribution to the formation of Arab critical consciousness.

2. The Literary Narrative: Concept, Origin, and Development

The literary narrative functioned as one of the primary channels of communication and cognitive exchange among Arabs during the early critical period. It facilitated the transmission of literary content between individuals and across tribal communities within the broader context of early Arab society.

In pre-Islamic times, Arabs relied extensively on memory to preserve their genealogies, notable battle days, histories, and all matters pertinent to their identity and heritage. Memory served as the exclusive means of preservation and reference. Literature, particularly poetry, was encompassed within this mnemonic system, and great attention was given to its memorization and oral transmission across both spatial and temporal boundaries. Poetry, in this regard, functioned as a register and archival source for genealogies, significant events, and historical narratives.

The linguistic origin of the term *riwāyah* (narration) carries a tangible, physical dimension. Initially, it referred to an object used to carry water, such as a waterskin (*mazāda*), or to an animal used for transport, like a camel, or even to a person tasked with supplying water. Over time, the term came to signify the act of carrying in a more abstract sense. One metaphorical extension of this meaning was the carrying of ḥadīth (Prophetic traditions) and poetry. In this context, the narrator (*rāwī*) of poetry is the individual who carries the poet's verses, transmitting and spreading them among people. Al-Jāhiz (d. 255 AH) notes: "The *rāwiyah* is the camel itself, the bearer of the waterskin; the waterskin was named after its bearer. For this reason, the bearer of poetry and ḥadīth

was called a *rāwiyah*.” (Al-Jahiz, 1965, p. 333) In this statement, the concept of carrying shifts from the literal act of transporting water to the metaphorical act of transmitting poetry.

This meaning is also recorded in *Lisān al-‘Arab*: “So-and-so narrated poetry to someone when he recited it to him until he memorized it for narration from him (...). It is said: I made him narrate poetry (*rawwaytuhu al-shi‘r tarwiyah*), that is, I made him carry it for narration; and I also caused him to narrate it (*arwaytuhu*).” (Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, 2000, pp. 171-172)

Thus, the lexical meaning of narration did not depart from the concept of carrying and transmitting texts. It represented a cultural manifestation embedded in the Arab environment of that time. Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī (d. 396 AH) states: “The Arabs used to narrate and memorize, and some of them were known by their narration of the poetry of others.” (al-Jurjani, 2006, p. 23) It therefore reflects an image of the creator’s need to communicate experiences, preserve them, and transmit them to others.

Within this context, narration served as an important tool for the poet himself. Accordingly, critics emphasized its significance for the poet’s creative process. Among those who highlighted this was Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 463 AH), who conveyed the views of narrators concerning the essential role of narration in poetic composition. He wrote: “Ru’bah ibn al-‘Ajjāj was asked about the ‘stallion’ among poets, and he said: ‘He is the narrator,’ meaning that when he narrates, he gains strength.” Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb remarked: “This is because he combines the excellence of his own poetry with knowledge of the excellence of others, and thus he does not engage in composition without insight.” Al-Aṣma‘ī stated: “A poet does not become a stallion in metrical poetry until he narrates the poetry of the Arabs, listens to historical accounts, understands meanings, and allows expressions to circulate in his hearing.” (al-Qayrawani, n.d, p. 197)

This view was also cited by al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī (d. 392 AH) in his definition of poetry in relation to its foundations and characteristics. He stated: “Poetry is a branch of the sciences of the Arabs, in which natural disposition, narration, and intelligence all participate, and then practice becomes its substance.” (al-Jurjani, 2006, p. 23) Through this formulation, al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī outlined poetry as based on a combination of components, which he identified as four elements: natural talent, narration, intelligence, and practice. These, in his view, constituted the standards of poetic excellence and the foundations of creative distinction. (al-Jurjani, 2006, p. 23) Among them, narration was regarded as a critical benchmark for evaluating a poet’s competence. He wrote: “If you investigate this condition, you will find that its cause and rationale lie in the fact that the naturally gifted and intelligent individual cannot access the expressions of the Arabs except through narration, and there is no path to narration except hearing, and the cornerstone of narration is memorization. The Arabs used to narrate and memorize, and some of them were known by their narration of the poetry of others.” This view, along with other critical perspectives found throughout classical Arabic critical literature, reflects a consensus among scholars on the central importance of narration as both a prerequisite and a tool for poetic creativity.

Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī also addressed narration within the framework of the critic’s cultural competence, considering it one of the most essential qualifications required for engaging with texts. He asserted: “Some of it is reached through narration, some is grasped through knowledge, and much of it requires sharp intuition, clarity of disposition, subtle thought, and deep probing. The foundation of all this, its completeness, what unites it and governs it, is sound natural aptitude and persistent practice; for when these two are combined in a person, they never fall short of leading

their possessor to his ultimate goal, nor do they content him with less than his full potential.” (al-Jurjani, 2006, p. 413)

Thus, narration and discernment refine the critic’s capacity in accordance with the intellectual and expressive modes specific to Arab culture. Accordingly, the critic must possess a broad cultural background that enables recognition of stylistic patterns, allowing for the identification of both error and flaw, as well as the detection of moments of beauty and aesthetic achievement.

3. Narration and Documentation:

Orality represents the earliest defining feature of the literary narrative, as it initially depended on memory. This is a natural characteristic associated with the early stages of cultural traditions in any society, where orality functions as the medium for knowledge transmission and serves as the primary source of information for its recipients. With the advent of codification, the literary narrative reached a more mature phase, as writing was incorporated into the oral tradition, not as a replacement, but as a complementary cultural stream that supported the practice of narration and provided it with documentary reinforcement. (Subhi, 1984, p. 53)

Within this dual framework of narration and documentation, a critical issue emerged, prompting inquiry into the origins and authenticity of texts. The challenge of narration and documentation became a manifestation of textual verification, namely, “ascertaining a set of matters related to the text, including verifying its attribution to its author, ensuring its accuracy and freedom from distortion, alteration, addition, or omission, and establishing the history of the text or the time of its composition and the period to which it belongs.” (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 117)

The literary narrative constitutes one of the Arab traditions for communicating, transmitting, and preserving texts. It also served as a mode of cognitive engagement within the early Arab environment between men of letters and scholars. For “poets, orators, and speakers of parables and wisdom were authors and disseminators of values, and their means of conveying what they composed of metered and prose discourse was not limited to their tongues alone, for these fade as every sound fades after the death of its owner; rather, their means of dissemination were the narrators of their literature and biographies.” (Qassab, n.d, p. 514) Al-Jābirī thus identifies the narrators as the central element in this context.

Narrators functioned as the vital link between earlier and later generations; they were the channel through which knowledge and its issues were transmitted. Scholars of Arabic relied on them for the conveyance of sciences, knowledge, and literature. They also played a significant role with respect to poets, as they managed their poetic works through memorization, comprehensive retention, compilation, precision, and explanation. (al-Jabiri, 2006, p. 499) In this role, the narrators’ contribution to literary criticism becomes evident, as their critical remarks and evaluations of poetry and poets left a tangible imprint on the evolution of Arab critical discourse.

In essence, the literary narrative was characterized by orality in its role as a medium for narrative transmission and as a mechanism of interaction among narrators. This remained the case from the early stages of narration up to the late second century AH, during which communication was confined to oral means. (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 131) However, the scope of narration expanded as it entered the phase of written transmission, introducing a new medium for conveying the literary narrative.

It is important to note that the circulation of a poet's verse or the accounts and exploits of a tribe did not rely on reading from a compiled *dīwān* or book. Instead, it depended on oral narration passed from individual to individual and from one generation to the next. Such poetry was often preserved in a single written copy that served as a reference, or in a very limited number of copies transcribed by certain narrators, poets, or esteemed patrons among nobles and dignitaries. These copies were memorized and orally conveyed, allowing the poetry to spread and gain widespread recognition. (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 118)

With the rise of codification, writing gradually began to "take the place of oral transmission. Consequently, the author started to replace the narrator. However, this fact must be approached with a degree of caution and flexibility. Indeed, writing began to assume a distinct status within Arab culture in general, and within the literature of reports in particular, yet orality had not entirely faded away." (al-Asad, 1988, p. 190)

Muḥammad al-Qāḍī recognized the awareness among scholars and critics regarding the transition of the literary narrative from orality to writing. This is evident in their integration of both forms of narration within their citations, commentaries, and critical observations on matters of literature and poetry. Such awareness reflects a continuation of the narrators' own recognition of this duality, a phenomenon clearly observable in the works of literary criticism produced between the third and fifth centuries AH.

In the early third century AH, a discernible shift toward authorship within the field of literary criticism began to take form. Its initial expression appeared in the work of Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī (d. 232 AH) through his foundational compilation *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu'arā'*. This marked the beginning of a pivotal transformation in the Arab critical landscape, as some who had previously been engaged in oral narration began moving toward authorship and contributing to the formation of a new critical discourse. This development served as a foundation for the eventual establishment of criticism as an independent discipline within the broader framework of Arab intellectual heritage. (al-Qadi, 1998, p. 269)

Nonetheless, narrators faced scrutiny from critics concerning the accuracy of the poetry they transmitted and the depth of their understanding. Some critics went as far as to question their critical competence in relation to the evaluative judgments attributed to them about the poetry they relayed. This perspective is highlighted in a passage cited by Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī in his *Akhbār Abī Tammām*, in which he writes: "Narrators know the interpretation of poetry but do not know its precise wording, and only a few among them are capable of distinguishing this." (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 129) This observation indicates that the understanding and critique of poetry had become a specialized field with its own authorities, the critics, and that the insights offered by narrators, while valuable, were not sufficient to include them fully within the domain of literary criticism.

This distinction had already been articulated by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255 AH), who clearly separated the act of collecting poetry, which he attributed to narrators, from the deeper knowledge of poetry, which he regarded as the domain of critics. (al-Suli, 1980, p. 101)

In this context, Muḥammad al-Qāḍī commented on *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, stating: "One who examines *Kitāb al-Aghānī* will observe that within its covers are pre-Islamic, Islamic, Umayyad, and Abbasid texts, some of which were transmitted through writing."

What is said about *Kitāb al-Aghānī* applies similarly to many critical compilations that employed both oral and written forms of narration. These include *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu'arā'* by Ibn Sallām al-

Jumahī, Akhbār Abī Tammām and Akhbār al-Buḥturī by al-Šūlī, al-Muwašṣaḥ by al-Marzubānī, among others. Such works demonstrate the efforts of their authors to examine and trace the development of the literary narrative and the role of narrators, particularly in light of the evolving mechanisms of transmission shaped by new cultural tools, including the rise of codification, which significantly influenced the literary narrative in both its form and its impact on critical discourse.

Thus, while some narrators in the pre-codification stage relied exclusively on oral transmission in their literary practices, it is evident that by the period in which the literary narrative reached maturity, and in subsequent phases, awareness of the duality between orality and writing among certain narrators was neither absent nor marginal. (al-Qadi, 1998, p. 337)

The concern here is not to address the issue of orality and writing in isolation, but to examine their impact on the development of methodological criticism in early Arab thought. This influence is apparent in their relationship to practices of skepticism, verification, and documentation in relation to creative texts and their attribution to their respective authors. The fundamental factor driving this methodological advancement was the transition of narration from an oral to a written mode.

This critical awareness led to a closer examination and discussion of the authenticity and documentation of texts. These inquiries gave rise to significant issues at both the theoretical and applied levels, ultimately contributing to the formation of a historical method, refined in its mechanisms, within Arab critical practice.

It is also worth noting that the delay in the codification of narrations, along with uncertainties regarding the reliability of memory and the integrity of narrators, represented one of the most significant factors contributing to the development of a critical method focused on the examination, scrutiny, and verification of transmitted narrations. This situation conferred upon oral narration, later incorporated into written sources, a documentary value that, at the initial stages of codification, written documents themselves did not yet possess. At that point, another issue emerged concerning narrators, namely the question of their trustworthiness.

In addition, variations in the scholarly and cultural backgrounds of narrators influenced the diversity of the narrations transmitted by them. This feature endowed the narrated texts with a level of cognitive and methodological richness, while also generating diversity in the manner in which scholars and critics engaged with these narrations, depending on the varying statuses of their transmitters and the influence of those statuses on the evaluations of the narrated texts.

Based on such statuses, narrators may be categorized into four distinct types: the learned narrator, the poet-narrator, the critic-narrator, and the tribal narrator. (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 118)

4. The Literary Narrative and the Transmission of Ḥadīth:

Examining the literary narrative and its transmitters brings attention to a significant issue: the extent to which this critical topic was influenced by the methods and concerns surrounding narration and narrators as developed by the scholars of ḥadīth. This matter warrants detailed exploration, particularly in regard to the relationship between the two, which is central to broader research in this field and to the specific question of textual documentation.

At the outset, it is important to recognize the link between the discipline of history and the science of ḥadīth within the Arab intellectual tradition. As has been noted, “the science of ḥadīth

relies, to a large extent, on the criticism of reports and transmitted accounts according to a precise method and strict rules that lead to sound results. Criticism of the chain of transmission, which is based on the principles of *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* (impugnment and validation), is among the most important features of the science of ḥadīth.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 222)

Similarly, “the methodologies of the science of ḥadīth, and particularly those of *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, are among the tools that have demonstrated their competence and scientific reliability, especially in issues related to poets and transmitters of poetry. The approaches developed by ḥadīth scholars influenced numerous scholars of Arabic and its disciplines, including the fields of linguistics, history, and literary criticism. These methods formed an original source among the foundational resources for poetic criticism in the Arab tradition.” (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 106) This influence is especially evident among later scholars, as demonstrated by the statement of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) in the introduction to his *al-Muzhir fī 'Ulūm al-Lughā wa-Anwā'ihā*, where he declares: “This is a noble science whose arrangement I innovated and whose classification and organization I devised, concerning the sciences of language and their types, and the conditions of their transmission and reception, in imitation of the sciences of ḥadīth in their divisions and categories.” (Natuf, 2010, p. 263) This was a result of the methodological rigor that defines the sciences of ḥadīth in terms of research and classification.

Their works are thus built upon “scientific principles and foundations characterized by a high degree of precision in reliance on sources of various types, as well as in the explicit identification of sources that are accepted versus those that are rejected. It is well known that oral sources, or narration, were the most prevalent form among ḥadīth scholars, or, more precisely, the form most heavily relied upon by them.” (al-Naquri, 2006, p. 86) This reliance is precisely what aligned their methods with the historical approach.

This approach is founded on “the precise recording of events, the examination of chains of transmission, chronological comparison between reports, meticulous scrutiny of the different narrations of a single event, the provision of rational explanations for apparent contradictions between narrations, and the presentation of an understanding of the circumstances surrounding an event and the reasons that led to it.” (Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, 1986, p. 2) These practices constitute core responsibilities of the historian, and they were likewise adopted by scholars engaged in the sciences of ḥadīth.

Consequently, scholars of ḥadīth stipulated “the necessity of transmitting ḥadīth orally, such that every ḥadīth recorded in their books is preceded by a chain of narrators beginning with the author of the work and ending with its original source. This chain came to be designated as the *isnād*, which assumed a position of great significance among them.” (al-Najdi, 1978, p. 131)

Isnād represents a process undertaken by the narrator; it “consists in establishing a connecting link between the narrator and the source of the report, and this link is the *isnād*.” (Natuf, 2010, p. 263)

Accordingly, *isnād* constitutes one of the fundamental principles of narration and represents a central operation within it. “It is well known that the sciences of ḥadīth emerged earlier, because scholars of ḥadīth were more diligent than others in recording the *isnād* and regulating its stages, particularly after the Great Fitna*, and the subsequent instability in Muslim conditions resulting from their division into sects and factions. It is therefore unsurprising that the sciences of ḥadīth exerted an influence on language, literature, and criticism, both for historical reasons and for

another reason, namely that they embody the Arab-Islamic mentality and the authentic intellectual methodology of Muslims.” (Natuf, 2010, p. 131)

Most researchers indicate that the influence of the methodological principles of ḥadīth scholarship on literary narrative research is fundamentally connected to the issue of isnād, which originated within the transmission of ḥadīth. “Among the aspects of specificity in the literary narrative is that which relates to isnād. Although it belongs to the shared scholarly traditions of transmitters of literature and transmitters of ḥadīth, it remains possible to identify features that distinguish the isnād of literary narrative from that of ḥadīth transmission in several respects.” (al-Qadi, 1998, p. 227) Among these distinctions are those associated with the reception and function of isnād in both the transmission of prophetic ḥadīth and literary narrative.

This distinction becomes evident in that “the isnād in prophetic ḥadīth serves as a means of authenticating the ḥadīth, that is, of demonstrating that it genuinely originated from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him. In literary reports, by contrast, isnād functions as a means of simulation; it creates an impression for the reader or listener that the report is plausible (...) If the objective of the ḥadīth scholar in employing isnād is to establish the report’s correspondence with reality, then the objective of the transmitter of reports or the author of compilations of narratives is to convey the impression that the discourse bears a relationship to reality.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 81)

Accordingly, isnād differed across the two domains. The transmission of ḥadīth adhered to a continuous and elevated chain of transmission, a requirement rooted in religious commitment to accuracy and precision in conveying the words of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him. These words constitute part of the Sunnah, which represents one of the primary sources of Islamic legislation. For this reason, isnād formed the most essential foundation for the documentation of texts among scholars of ḥadīth, as well as for establishing their authenticity and the soundness of their attribution.

By contrast, the literary narrative generally adhered to a disconnected or mursal chain of transmission. It has been observed that “all that scholars of language and literature narrate in the third and fourth centuries is supported by chains of transmission elevated to scholars of the second century, such as Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’, Ḥammād al-Rāwiyah, Khalaf al-Aḥmar, al-Mufaḍḍal, Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī, Ibn al-Kalbī, al-Aṣma‘ī, Abū ‘Ubaydah, and Abū Zayd, or to the Bedouins who lived contemporaneously with these scholars and from whom they learned. However, this elevated chain rarely extends beyond these figures, terminating with them and not continuing further except in very rare cases (...). Hence, the chain of transmission adopted in literary narrative is considered mursal or disconnected, because it was, for the most part, transmitted from scholars who did not witness the pre-Islamic era and did not receive poetry directly from pre-Islamic poets themselves.” (al-Naquri, 2006, p. 87)

Nevertheless, it appears that the chain of transmission in literary narrative also functions as a documentary mechanism in its own right, grounded in a historical and scholarly foundation that cannot be characterized as mere illusion, given its concern with verification, precision, and its connection to recognized and authoritative scholars.

This can be attributed to the fact that narration, in general, passed through two distinct stages: “the first was confined exclusively to poetry and was limited to its preservation, transmission, and recitation, without extending to precision, verification, critical examination, or systematic scrutiny. The significance of this initial stage continued to shape the history of the literary narrative until the

end of the first century and the beginning of the second (...) When the foundations of the science of ḥadīth were firmly established, its principles clearly defined, and sustained attention directed toward isnād, and when scholars of ḥadīth began to preside over instruction in scholarly circles grounded in memorization, the designation rāwiyah likewise came to be applied to them. Thus, by the end of the second century, narrators were found among ḥadīth scholars just as poets had their narrators (...) At this juncture, the literary narrative entered its second phase, which may appropriately be described as the phase of scholarly narration. While it continued to rely on memorization, transmission, and recitation, as in its initial, purely narrative phase, it was now complemented by precision, verification, scrutiny, explanation, interpretation, and a degree of isnād.” (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 123)

There are, however, scholars who deny any relationship between the literary narrative and ḥadīth transmission and reject the assertion that the former was influenced by the latter. Among them is Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, who maintains that “the literary narrative constitutes an independent origin in its own right and existed among the Arabs since the pre-Islamic period. Pre-Islamic genealogists, as well as those who lived into the Islamic era, derived their knowledge of genealogy from the elders of this discipline who preceded them or were their contemporaries. (al-Qadi, 1998, p. 310)

The same applied to transmitters of pre-Islamic poetry and reports.” It is noteworthy that Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad here addresses the emergence and autonomous existence of the literary narrative primarily in terms of preservation and transmission, conceiving it as a communicative medium that facilitated the transfer of literary texts across eras and generations, rather than emphasizing the methodological dimension involved in carrying and regulating these texts.

Al-Rāfi‘ī, for his part, argued that poetry was not codified at an early stage and did not involve isnād, because it entailed no risk and bore no direct connection to religious matters; rather, it belonged to the realm of literature, supererogatory material, and cultural refinement. By contrast, the principal motive underlying the transmission of ḥadīth with reliance on the chain of transmission was the devotional religious imperative of safeguarding and preserving the ḥadīth (al-Asad, 1988, p. 258). Al-Rāfi‘ī is therefore counted among those who affirm the existence of an influence between the two modes of narration, identifying this influence specifically with the role of isnād in ḥadīth transmission.

All of this highlights the relationship between the two forms of narration in terms of precedence. “With regard to general historical precedence, there is scholarly consensus that the literary narrative, in terms of its historical emergence, preceded the transmission of prophetic ḥadīth, as it existed among the Arabs prior to Islam.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 255)

Within this general historical precedence, however, lies a more specific form of precedence, namely “precedence in terms of scientific and methodological codification.” This issue remains a matter of scholarly disagreement. Some scholars maintain that the transmission of prophetic ḥadīth achieved scientific and methodological precision at an earlier stage, in the sense that narration was transformed into a formal scholarly discipline. This is the position advanced by al-Rāfi‘ī, who was among the earliest proponents of this view in his work *Tārīkh Ādāb al-‘Arab*, in which he devoted a chapter entitled “Chapter Two: Narration and Narrators.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 189)

In that chapter, he noted “that the Arabs, upon embracing Islam, continued to deal with poetry, reports, genealogy, and similar matters according to the same practices they had followed in the pre-Islamic period. It follows that they attributed much of what they transmitted, yet attribution is not equivalent to isnād as defined by narrators. This distinction only becomes meaningful once

narration has been transformed into a scholarly discipline. In reality, the Arabs possessed nothing of this kind in a rigorous sense until after the establishment of the Umayyad state, when tutors were appointed for the education of princes. This period also witnessed the gradual and sequential development of the ḥadīth isnād, as its transmission routes multiplied.” (al-Rafii, 2001, p. 141)

In contrast to this view, some researchers have argued for the independence of the literary narrative from ḥadīth transmission with respect to scientific and methodological codification, assigning precedence in this regard to the literary narrative itself. This position is adopted by Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, who asserts that “narration is a natural path in every era and among every nation, even when writing becomes widespread and prevalent. By contrast, the transmission of ḥadīth was a phenomenon that emerged among the Arabs after Islam. Thus, even if the transmission of ḥadīth was not, in terms of its chronological phase, influenced by or derived from the literary narrative, the two forms of narration nonetheless constitute two independent origins that arose naturally from pressing necessity.” (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 119)

A careful examination of the preceding discussion, however, indicates that historical precedence belonged to the literary narrative, whereas scientific and methodological precision was characteristic of the transmission of prophetic ḥadīth. This heightened degree of precision is attributable to the difference in content between the two forms of narration.

The earlier statement attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī is indicative of this distinction, as is the text cited by Ibn Saʿd (d. 230 AH) in his Ṭabaqāt on the authority of Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj, in which he states: “Al-Minhāl ibn ʿAmr al-Qushayrī informed me; he said: I heard Shuʿbah say: By God, I feel safer in poetry than I do in ḥadīth. And Abū Qaṭan ʿAmr ibn al-Haytham said: Shuʿbah said: I am not distressed about anything for fear that it might lead me to Hell except it, meaning ḥadīth.” (al-Dukkan, 2014, p. 119)

This text is cited by Aḥmad Jāsim al-Najdī in his article The Influence of Ḥadīth Scholars on the Methodology of Literary Research, quoting Ibn Qutaybah and employing it as evidence to argue against the existence of an influential relationship between the two forms of narration. He comments on it by stating: “Numerous statements and texts transmitted from the early scholars explicitly indicate a clear distinction between the two disciplines in terms of study, authorship, and related scholarly matters. Among these is what Ibn Qutaybah relates about Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj (who used to say: By God, I feel safer in poetry than I do in ḥadīth; if you sought God, you would not have come to me, and if I sought God, I would not have come to you). Shuʿbah’s statement clearly signifies a fundamental methodological difference between the two disciplines; for had the methodology of narration in both fields been the same, he would not have made such a statement, nor would he have regarded himself as more precise in transmitting poetry than in transmitting ḥadīth.” (al-Rafii, 2001, p. 287)

Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad likewise maintains that “narration is a natural path in every era and among every nation until writing becomes widespread and prevalent, whereas the transmission of ḥadīth was a phenomenon that emerged among the Arabs after Islam. Thus, even if the transmission of ḥadīth was not, in terms of its temporal phase, influenced by the narration of literature or derived from it, the two forms of narration nevertheless represent two independent origins that arose naturally from an urgent necessity.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 256)

In reality, however, difference and independence between the two disciplines do not negate the existence of methodological influence between them. Influence and interaction do not, by any

means, entail the complete adoption of a methodology in its entirety, with all its mechanisms, principles, and conditions transferred and applied verbatim from one discipline to another. Rather, a careful reading suggests that Ibn Qutaybah's text points to cognitive, scholarly, and methodological specificity between the two forms of narration, instead of indicating the absence of any relationship between them. This text highlights the rigor of precision, correction, and documentation characteristic of prophetic ḥadīth, a rigor that stems from its devotional foundation*. Such strictness may be less evident in the literary narrative, owing to the differing foundations and contextual conditions governing each type of text.

Some researchers have also argued that the methodology of the literary narrative was influenced, particularly with regard to precision by the method of tracing and transmitting ḥadīth. Among them is Shawqī Dayf, who states: "Just as the ḥadīth scholars were stringent in transmitting prophetic ḥadīth and made direct encounter and oral transmission their foundation, scholars of language and poetry were likewise strict. They did not accept the transmission of poetry from a written sheet or a compiled book; rather, its foundation had to be reception from a scholar firmly established in narration and in language. They devoted great care to the chain of transmission in a manner similar to the care shown by ḥadīth scholars toward the isnād of ḥadīth." (al-Zuhri, n.d, p. 280) These scholar-narrators were those at whom the chain of transmission came to an end in the second century AH, and they were therefore regarded as reliable authorities upon whom the conditions of literary narration were established.

It is also noteworthy that "many transmitters of literature were likewise transmitters of ḥadīth, although their reputation for transmitting ḥadīth often eclipsed this aspect of their activity. For these scholars in the second century, narration, whether of ḥadīth or of literature and reports, took the form of an isnād that, in the case of ḥadīth, sometimes ascended to a Companion and to the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, and, in the case of literature and historical reports, ascended to figures around whom pre-Islamic material revolved, or to individuals who transmitted it and who had lived in the pre-Islamic period and personally experienced what they narrated. Quite often, however, the chain of transmission in both forms of narration was *mursal* and disconnected." (al-Najdi, n.d, p. 130)

Al-Rāfi'ī drew attention to this point when discussing transmitters of literature, stating: "All of them sought the transmission of literature in order to employ it in explaining what is obscure in the rare expressions of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. As a result, one does not find among them anyone who lacked narration of ḥadīth, whether little or much. The ḥadīth scholars maintained that a person could not be considered a transmitter among them if he did not narrate from the language, because the subject of ḥadīth consists of the sayings of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, who was the most eloquent of the Arabs. Consequently, they could not establish their views concerning obscure reports and ambiguous ḥadīth except by relying on poetry and Arab speech, transmitted with its chain of narration or taken from one who transmits it with a chain, in order to avoid accusations of fabrication or artificiality." (al-Asad, 1988, p. 256)

This observation is closely connected to what has been noted regarding the subtle distinction between the methodologies governing the two forms of narration, specifically the degree of precision as determined by the difference in content. In the case of ḥadīth, this content is linked to the words of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and to their devotional nature, which necessitates strict rigor in the conditions governing the chain of transmission. In the literary narrative, by contrast, this rigor is comparatively reduced, to the extent that it may be stated that "these reports and narrations fall into two broad categories: the first is directly connected to the pre-

Islamic poet himself, and the second is connected to those scholarly transmitters who lived in the second century, from whom later scholars received pre-Islamic poetry and its accounts.”

The question that arises in this context concerns the reason for fixing the historical delimitation at the second century AH. The answer lies in the fact that this century marked the period of codification and authorship, during which the literary narrative underwent a transition from orality to writing. In this phase, written narration interacted with oral narration through a shared methodological approach, such that the former drew directly upon the latter. This understanding may be further reinforced through an examination of the tracing of terminology in critical works that employed the historical method, a matter that becomes particularly evident in discussions related to narration and documentation.

“Among the indications of this within the critical heritage are what appears in Ibn Sallām’s book, especially his references to the sciences of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, and his reliance on a set of scientific tools and technical terms commonly used within those sciences.” (Dayf, n.d, p. 167)

It is also noteworthy, after affirming the influence of ḥadīth transmission on the literary narrative with respect to the issue of isnād, to underscore the distinctly Arab character of engagement with this question and its manifestations in critical readings. Isnād constitutes a purely Arab characteristic, unmatched among other nations, as attested by numerous scholarly texts. Among these is the statement of Ibn Kathīr: “There is no nation among all nations that can transmit from its prophet with a continuous chain of transmission except this nation.” (al-Asad, 1988, p. 259) Likewise, the statement attributed to Muḥammad ibn Ḥātim al-Muẓaffar declares: “God Almighty has honored, ennobled, and favored this nation with isnād. None of the nations, ancient or modern, possess isnād. Rather, they have scrolls in their hands, and they have mixed their reports into their books. They have no distinction between what was revealed of the Torah and the Gospel and brought to them by their prophets, and what they later appended to their books from reports taken from unreliable sources.” (al-Rafii, 2001, p. 288)

The purpose of citing these two texts is to emphasize that the documentation of texts, together with the methods of investigation, scrutiny, and verification, constitutes an Arab-Islamic methodology that exerted a profound influence on the development of literary studies and Arab critical perspectives from the second century AH onward. This methodology was not borrowed from other traditions. Rather, the literary narrative itself represented one of the most prominent arenas through which this methodological framework was articulated and put into practice.

Critics of the fourth century AH and the periods that followed approached the literary narrative as a methodological critical issue that contributed to the crystallization of more precise and rigorously defined forms of scholarly research, particularly at the level of critical application. Adherence to the tradition of isnād among narrators during this century became more pronounced than it had been in earlier periods. This era may therefore be regarded as a golden age in which the sciences of ḥadīth attained full maturity, coinciding with a flourishing of authorship in literary and critical studies. Evidence of this development is clearly reflected in the literary works produced by the narrators and scholars of this century, (al-Rafii, 2001, p. 261) most notably Amālī al-Qālī, al-Aghānī by Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣḥāhānī, and al-Muwaṣṣaḥ fī Ma’ākhidh al-‘Ulamā’ ‘alā al-Shu‘arā’ by al-Marzubānī (d. 384 AH).

5. Conclusion:

The literary narrative within Arab heritage is not merely a vehicle for the transmission of texts; rather, it constitutes a complex cultural and cognitive phenomenon that played an active role in shaping Arab literary and critical consciousness. It emerged within an oral environment in which memory and memorization formed the primary foundations for preserving texts, and it subsequently evolved, with the advent of codification, into an instrument of documentation, without severing its connection to oral transmission. This study has demonstrated the dual value of narrative as both a bearer of literary expression and a contributor to historical record and documentation, and it has highlighted its central role in the formation of the methodologies of ancient Arab criticism, particularly with regard to verification, isnād, and textual scrutiny.

It has also become evident that the relationship between the literary narrative and the transmission of ḥadīth, despite differences in content and purpose, contributed significantly to the consolidation of methodological awareness and critical precision. This interaction rendered the literary narrative a fundamental pillar in the development of Arab critical thought. Accordingly, this study affirms that rereading the literary narrative from an authenticating and transformative perspective opens broader horizons for understanding Arab critical heritage and reveals the depth of its methodological distinctiveness, as well as its contribution to the construction of Arab cultural identity.

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