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## Khabar al-wāhīd

***Khabar al-wāhīd***, *khabar al-āhād*, *khabar al-khāssa*, and *khabar al-infrād* are technical terms for an isolated or uncorroborated *ḥadīth* ("tradition"), that is, a report which in one or more generations was transmitted by only one or a few transmitters. It is defined negatively as the opposite of *mutawātir* (also *khabar al-amma*), a predicate used for traditions transmitted by multiple, independent transmitters in every successive generation. It is usually understood to include *mashhūr* (well-known) traditions, which go back to one Companion or Successor authority but are transmitted by increasingly larger numbers of transmitters in each successive generation. The vast majority of *ḥadīth* traditions, including those in the canonical collections, are of this type.

The accepted Sunnī view of the *khabar al-wāhīd* crystallised in the fifth/eleventh century and was articulated by the Ash'arī theologian al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) as follows: "it necessitates action but not knowledge" (*al-mūjiba lil-'amal dūna l-'ilm*; al-Baghdādī), meaning that such *akhbār* yield probability (*ẓann*) rather than certainty (*'ilm al-yaqīn*, *'ilm darūrī*), but still constitute valid legal arguments or precedents (Khalidi, 142–51; Hallaq). Before this consensus was reached, the status of the *khabar al-wāhīd* in Islamic law and theology was a subject of debate between rationalists and traditionists, the same loosely

defined parties that disagreed on the value of the *ḥadīth* in general (Melchert).

Al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820)—founder of the eponymous Shāfi'ī legal school—was the first to argue strongly and at length in favour of isolated Prophetic reports, both in his *al-Risāla* and in his *Kitāb jimā' al-'ilm (al-Umm*, 9:19–42). He holds that, under certain conditions, isolated reports are a source of knowledge on equal footing with the Qur'ān and may serve as legal proof or precedent. The conditions are that (a) the transmitters are trustworthy, pious men or women; (b) they have good memories, are meticulous in their use of written notes, and transmit verbatim; (c) they comprehend the meaning, context, and consequence of what they transmit; and (d) they have not been associated previously with the fabrication or alteration of traditions.

Others, however, staunchly disagreed with the traditionist view. Jurists from the more rationalist schools of law preferred legal reasoning (*ra'y*) over Prophetic traditions as a source of law and attached little probative value to the *khabar al-wāhīd*, emphasising the stark contrast to the Qur'ān and the practical *Sunna* (the uninterrupted practice of the Muslim community, which includes the acts of worship), both of which were considered *mutawātir*. Rationalist theologians, and first and foremost the Mu'tazila, objected to the use of isolated reports—or any tradition whatsoever (e.g., al-Nazzām, d. c.225/840)—because to them, the way the report was transmitted did not in and of itself constitute evidence for its credibility (Schacht, 40–52; Khalidi, 139–42).

Despite the controversy over the status of the *khabar al-wāhīd* in the formative period of Islam, the fifth/eleventh-century