

# A Critical Analysis of Abū Balj's Long Ḥadīth in 'Alī's Merits

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**Abstract**—This paper evaluates the historical authenticity of a prominent ḥadīth that is regularly cited amidst Sunnī-Shi'ite polemical discussions, the long ḥadīth of Abū Balj regarding 'Alī's merits. The significance of this Prophetic tradition stems from several clauses within it that are perceived to be aligned with Shi'ite theology and relevant to debates on the successorship of the Prophet. A careful study of this tradition, however, will demonstrate the presence of various defects in its transmission that ultimately undermine and dispel its historical authenticity.

**Index Terms**— Ḥadīth Analysis, Merits of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Abū Balj, Imāmah, Textual Criticism.

## 1 Introduction

The ḥadīth of Abū Balj is an extensive tradition ascribed to the Prophet which embodies ten alleged merits of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The reason why it is labeled as Abū Balj's ḥadīth simply is for ease of reference: Abū Balj is a pivotal transmitter in its isnād, and much of the discussions pertaining to the ḥadīth's authenticity revolve around his reliability as a transmitter of ḥadīth.

### 1.1 The *Matn* of the Ḥadīth:

This ḥadīth outlines ten alleged merits of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and I have numbered them for ease of reference. Some of these merits can be found relayed independently as individual reports with the same isnād as this ḥadīth, but they are, in reality, fragments of this longer tradition. The transmitter of this ḥadīth, Abū 'Awānah, said: Abū Balj informed us, he said: 'Amr b. Maymūn informed us, he said:

I was once sitting with Ibn 'Abbās, and nine people approached him. They said: "O Abū 'Abbās, either you will come with us or these individuals will leave the gathering [for us to speak in private]." Ibn 'Abbās thus said:

"Rather, I shall come with you," and he was able to see at the time prior to when he went blind.

They thus spoke first, and we do not know what they said. Ibn 'Abbās then returned, brushing his *thawb* and saying, "*uff! uff!* They have reviled a man who has ten [merits]! They have reviled a man to whom the Prophet had said: '(1) I shall dispatch a man who Allah shall never humiliate. He loves Allah and His Messenger.' Those who had desired [that role] for themselves thus presented themselves. The Prophet then asked: 'Where is 'Alī?' They replied: 'He is in the tents milling.' The Prophet thus said: 'Could not any of you do the milling?!' 'Alī thus came, and he had an eye infection and could barely see. The Prophet thus blew into his eyes waved the banner three times and then handed it to him. 'Alī thus returned [victorious] with Ṣafīyyah b. Ḥuayy.

(2) The Prophet then sent *fulān* with Sūrah al-Tawbah, and he then sent 'Alī in his trail, and he took it from him. The Prophet said: 'No man shall go with it except a man who is from and I am from him.'

(3) The Prophet once told his cousins, 'Which of you shall befriend me (*yuwālīnī*) in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*?' 'Alī was seated with him, and they refrained from answering. 'Alī thus said: 'I shall befriend you in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet thus said: 'You are my friend in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet then left him, and he approached another man among them and asked: 'Which of you shall befriend me in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*?' They refrained from responding, and 'Alī said: 'I shall befriend you in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet thus told him: 'You are my friend in the *Dunyā*

and the *Ākhirah*.'

(4) He was the first of all people to accept Islam after Khadijah.

(5) The Messenger of Allah took his cloak and layed it on 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, He then said: 'Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity, O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification. [al-Aḥzāb:33]'

(6) 'Alī ransomed himself [for the Messenger of Allah]. He wore his garment(s) and slept in place. The *Mushrikūn* were throwing at the Messenger of Allah. Abū Bakr thus came, thinking that he ('Alī) was the Messenger of Allah, and he said: 'O Prophet of Allah!' 'Alī thus told him: 'The Prophet Allah has departed towards the vicinity of Bi'r Maymūn, so join him.' Abū Bakr thus departed and joined him in the cave. 'Alī had stones thrown at him as the Messenger of Allah used to be targeted. 'Alī was squirming, and he wrapped his head with the garment. He did not take it out of the garment until the morning, and he then took his head out. The *Mushrikūn* thus said: 'We used to throw stones at your companion, and he would not squirm; however, you squirmed, and we denounced that.'

(7) The Prophet departed with the people in the expedition of Tabūk, and 'Alī told him: 'Shall I depart with you?' The Prophet told him, 'no,' and 'Alī cried. The Prophet thus told him, 'Are you not pleased that you are unto me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā? except that you are not a prophet. I should not depart except that you are my successor.'

(8) The Prophet told him, 'You are my *walī* in every believer after me.'

(9) The Prophet also said: 'Seal all doors of the mosque except 'Alī's door.' Alī would thus enter the mosque in a state of *janābah*, and it would be part of his path, since he had no other path.

(10) The Prophet said: 'Whoever I am his *mawlā*, then his *mawlā* is 'Alī.'

Allah also informed us in the Quran that He is pleased with them, the people of the tree, and He has known what is in their hearts. Did He ever inform us that he became discontended with them? The Messenger of Allah had told

'Umar when 'Umar had said, 'give me permission to strike his head!, 'would you have done that? How would you know: perhaps Allah had glanced at the people of Badr and said: do whatever you wish''

This tradition was relayed with the aforementioned isnād by Aḥmed in his Musnad (5/178-179), al-Ṭabarānī in al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr (12/97-98) and others.

## 2 Preliminary Isnād Analysis

This isnād is *gharīb*: it was exclusively relayed by Abū 'Awānah, who exclusively relayed it from Abū Balj, who exclusively relayed it from 'Amr b. Maymūn, who exclusively relayed it from Ibn 'Abbās. The transmission of a report through a *gharīb* isnād is not necessarily sufficient grounds to dismiss its authenticity; however, exclusivity increasingly becomes a more relevant variable when the reliability of a report's sole transmitter is put into question.

### 2.1 Abū 'Awānah's Reliability

Abū 'Awānah, al-Waḍḍāḥ b. 'Abdillāh al-Yashkurī (d. 176), was a prominent, renowned and reliable Baṣran traditionist. Some ḥadīth critics noted that he used to err when transmitting by memory; however, his transmission when he read from his books was agreeably sound.

Aḥmed b. Ḥanbal was once asked, "Is Abū 'Awānah more reliable than Sharīk [or is Sharīk more reliable]?" He replied, "If Abū 'Awānah transmitted from his book, then he is more reliable. However if he transmitted from other than his book, then perhaps he may err."<sup>1</sup>

Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī said, "His books are sound, but if he transmits by memory, then he errs a lot. He is a truthful reliable transmitter, and he has better retention than Ḥammād b. Salamah."<sup>2</sup> Abū Zur'ah al-Rāzī said, "He is reliable if he transmits from his book."<sup>3</sup>

Otherwise, Abū 'Awānah was a reliable transmitter who received overwhelming praise from the ḥadīth critics.

### 2.2 Abū Balj's Reliability

Abū Balj, Yaḥyā b. Sulaym al-Fazārī, was a transmitter of contended status who was praised by some critics and criticized by others.

<sup>1</sup>Al-Ma'rifah wal-Tārīkh by al-Fasawī (2/168)

<sup>2</sup>al-Jarḥ wal-Ta'dīl (9/40)

<sup>3</sup>Al-Jarḥ wal-Ta'dīl (9/41)

Al-Sa'dī said: "He is not a reliable transmitter."<sup>4</sup> Abū Aḥmed al-Ḥākim said: "Aḥmed b. Ḥanbal weakened him."<sup>5</sup> Al-Bukhārī said, "*ḥīn nazar*,"<sup>6</sup> which entails that he is weak according to al-Bukhārī. Ibn Ḥibbān said, "He was from those who used to err. His error in transmission was not severe such that he deserved to be abandoned, and he did not merely err in that which is inevitable to all humans such that he could be treated like the reliable transmitters. I thus see that whatever he exclusively transmitted should not be relied upon, and he is among those for whom I pray *istikhārah* [when assessing their transmission.]"<sup>7</sup> Al-Azdī said: "He was not a reliable transmitter."<sup>8</sup>

Abū Balj's perceived unreliability among the ḥadīthists is further observed in the fact that his transmission was fully excluded from the two Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. In one instance, al-Ḥākim claimed that Muslim had relied upon Abū Balj; however, al-Dahabī rightfully objected saying, "Abū Balj is not relied upon."<sup>9</sup>

Some ḥadīthists praised Abū Balj. Ibn Ma'īn said, "Abū Balj is a reliable transmitter." Ibn Sa'd said, "He was reliable, *in shā'a Allah*."<sup>10</sup> Abū Ḥātim said, "He is decent. Nothing is wrong in him."<sup>11</sup> Al-Fasawī said, "A Kūfan. There is nothing wrong in him."<sup>12</sup> Al-Nasā'ī endorsed him as well.<sup>13</sup> Ibn 'Adiyy said: "The people, such as Shu'bah, Abū 'Awānah and Hushaym, have transmitted from Abū Balj, and there is nothing wrong in his ḥadīth."<sup>14</sup> Al-Dāraquṭnī said: "A reliable transmitter from Wāsiṭ."<sup>15</sup>

The aforementioned statements from the ḥadīth critics revolve around a certain theme: Abū Balj was a truthful (and perhaps pious) individual who demonstrated a degree of incompetence as a transmitter of ḥadīth, which consequently led to his criticism by some ḥadīth critics. More will come on Abū Balj's status and its implications on this ḥadīth's authenticity.

There are some notable errors of Abū Balj noted by the ḥadīth critics, which even span his transmission of other ḥadīths from 'Amr b. Maymūn. In 'Ilal al-Ḥadīth,

Ibn Abī Ḥātim said:

I asked my father and Abū Zur'ah about a ḥadīth Shu'bah relayed from Abū Balj, from 'Amr b. Maymūn, from Abū Hurayrah, from the Prophet about *lā ḥawla wa-lā Quwwata illā billāh*, and Ibn 'Uyaynah relayed it from Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib b. Barakah, from 'Amr b. Maymūn, from Abū Darr, from the Prophet.

My father said, "Ibn 'Uyaynah's ḥadīth is more authentic," and Abū Zur'ah said, "from Abū Hurayrah is strange."<sup>16</sup>

The aforementioned example demonstrates that Abū Balj, despite his relatively scarce transmission, errs in his transmission from 'Amr b. Maymūn. Other examples demonstrate him diverging in transmission from sources other than 'Amr b. Maymūn, and Aḥmed b. Ḥanbal is even quoted weakening Abū Balj's ḥadīth in question today. Ibn al-Jawzī said: Aḥmed said: "Abū Balj transmitted a disapproved (*munkar*) ḥadīth: 'Seal the doors!...'"<sup>17</sup>

## 2.3 'Amr b. Maymūn's Reliability

'Amr b. Maymūn (d. 75) was an agreeably reliable *tābi'ī* who authentically relayed ḥadīth from several companions of the Prophet, such as 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, and Mu'ād b. Jabal etc.

## 3 Detailed Criticism of the Ḥadīth

The aforementioned criticism Abū Balj had received may be sufficient to dismiss this ḥadīth's authenticity. However, a careful analysis of this tradition will further substantiate the criticism Abū Balj and this ḥadīth had received, demonstrating their defectiveness.

### 3.1 Abū Balj's Exclusive Transmission from 'Amr b. Maymūn

As stated earlier, exclusivity in an isnād is not necessarily a sufficient reason to dismiss the authenticity of a ḥadīth. However, its significance and relevance as a factor increasingly grow depending on a set of variables. As an example, an incompetent transmitter's exclusive transmission is understandably held to greater scrutiny

<sup>4</sup>Aḥwāl al-Rijāl (p. 198)

<sup>5</sup>Al-Asāmī wal-Kunā by Abū Aḥmed al-Ḥākim (2/56)

<sup>6</sup>Al-Kāmil fī Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl (9/80)

<sup>7</sup>Al-Majrūḥīn (3/113)

<sup>8</sup>Al-Ḍu'afā' wal-Matrūkūn by Ibn al-Jawzī (3/196)

<sup>9</sup>Al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn (1/44)

<sup>10</sup>Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā by Ibn Sa'd (7/311)

<sup>11</sup>Al-Jarḥ wal-Ta'dīl by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (9/153)

<sup>12</sup>Al-Ma'rifa wal-Tārīkh (3/106)

<sup>13</sup>Tahdīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl (33/162)

<sup>14</sup>Al-Kāmil fī Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl (9/81)

<sup>15</sup>Su'ālāt Abī Bakr al-Burqānī li-Abī al-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī (p. 143)

<sup>16</sup>'Ilal al-Ḥadīth by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (5/304)

<sup>17</sup>Al-Mawḍū'āt al-Kubrā (1/366)

than that of a meticulous *ḥāfiẓ*. The exclusive transmission of earlier sources, for various reasons, tends to be more palatable than that of later transmitters.

Abū Balj exclusively relayed this enormous ḥadīth from 'Amr b. Maymūn. Asides from Abū Balj's aforementioned incompetence as a transmitter, it is noteworthy that many transmitters relayed traditions from 'Amr b. Maymūn, including some Kūfan Shi'ite-leaning transmitters. It is indeed noteworthy that a criticized transmitter, such as Abū Balj, would exclusively relay from 'Amr b. Maymūn such a large tradition in 'Alī's merits which other transmitters would be incentivized to acquire and transmit as well, especially considering that 'Amr b. Maymūn had other Shi'ite and Kūfan students.

### 3.2 'Amr b. Maymūn's Exclusive and Inorganic Transmission from Ibn 'Abbās

An additionally noteworthy point pertaining to the transmission of this tradition is 'Amr b. Maymūn's exclusive transmission of this report from Ibn 'Abbās. This tradition is the only ḥadīth 'Amr b. Maymūn allegedly relayed from Ibn 'Abbās, and he is otherwise not known to authentically transmit anything else from him.

Considering the fact that 'Amr b. Maymūn's transmission from Ibn 'Abbās is only known through Abū Balj's exclusive transmission from 'Amr and that 'Amr only relayed this single ḥadīth from Ibn 'Abbās, there seem to be valid grounds to cast doubts on the organicness of 'Amr's alleged transmission. What further supports these suspicions is the fact that none of Ibn 'Abbās' intimate companions, who were much more acquainted with Ibn 'Abbās than 'Amr b. Maymūn, relayed this tradition from him.

'Alī b. al-Madīnī said:

The companions of Ibn 'Abbās who espouse his madhāb and follow his way [are]: 'Aṭā', Ṭāwūs, Mujāhid, Jābir b. Zayd, Ikrimah and Sa'd b. Jubayr."<sup>18</sup>

These men intimately accompanied Ibn 'Abbās and prolifically transmitted his ḥadīths and opinions, yet none of them relayed this large tradition from him. If these suspicions prove to be true, then it would be that 'Amr b. Maymūn never relayed this tradition from Ibn 'Abbās, but this report was rather misattributed to

'Amr by Abū Balj. Aḥmed b. Ḥanbal seemed to have alluded to this reality. Ibn Rajab said:

Abū Balj al-Wāsiṭī. He transmits from 'Amr b. Maymūn, from Ibn 'Abbās, from the Prophet ḥadīths, one of them is a long ḥadīth in 'Alī's merits to which Aḥmed objected as in the riwāyah of al-Athram.

He (Aḥmed) was told, "Amr b. Maymūn transmits from Ibn 'Abbās?" He replied: "I do not know. I do not know it."<sup>19</sup>

The aforementioned quote speaks to the obscurity of 'Amr b. Maymūn's alleged transmission from Ibn 'Abbās, considering that it simply consists of one report which was exclusively relayed by a criticized transmitter.

### 3.3 Abū Balj's Bizarre Accretions

As evident, some of the merits listed in Abū Balj's ḥadīth, such as merits 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, have authentic parallels which are relayed through other sources. What is noteworthy, however, is that Abū Balj's redaction of these established traditions often includes bizarre accretions that cannot be found relayed elsewhere. One example is merit 7, where Ibn 'Abbās is quoted saying:

The Prophet departed with the people in the expedition of Tabūk, and 'Alī told him: 'Shall I depart with you?' The Prophet told him, 'no,' and 'Alī cried. The Prophet thus told him, 'Are you not pleased that you are unto me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā? except that you are not a prophet. **I should not depart except that you are my successor.**"

The event described in this ḥadīth is an event that can be found mentioned in several authentic ḥadīths. However, the boldened clause from the aforementioned ḥadīth is an accretion that was exclusively relayed by Abū Balj: none of the transmitters who relayed this ḥadīth ever mentioned that additional clause, as shall be demonstrated:

1. Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ relayed that the Messenger of Allah departed to Tabūk, and he left 'Alī behind as his deputy. 'Alī thus said, "Do you leave me behind with the children and women?" The Messenger of Allah said, "Are you not pleased that you are unto

<sup>18</sup>Al-'Ilal wa-Ma'rifat al-Rijāl by Ibn al-Madīnī (p. 69)

<sup>19</sup>Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidī (2/821-822)

me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā, except that there shall be no prophet after me?"<sup>20</sup>

2. Sharīk narrated on the authority of 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl, from Jābir b. 'Abdillāh that the Messenger of Allah told 'Alī, "You are unto me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā, except that there shall be no prophet after me."<sup>21</sup>
3. Fuḍayl b. Marzūq narrated on the authority of 'Aṭīyyah, who said: Abū Sa'īd informed us, he said, "The Messenger of Allah went on the expedition of Tabūk, and he left 'Alī behind with his family. Some people thus said, 'He did not prohibit him from departing except because he disliked his company.' That was mentioned to the Prophet, and he thus said, 'O son of Abū Ṭālib, are you not pleased that you shall be to me as Hārūn was to Mūsā?'"<sup>22</sup>
4. Mūsā al-Juhanī said: Fāṭimah b. 'Alī informed me, she said: Asmā' b. 'Umays informed me, she said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah tell 'Alī, 'you are unto me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā, except that there shall be no prophet after me."<sup>23</sup>

These are various authentic and weak renditions of the event that was described in Abū Balj's ḥadīth, and none of its transmitters mentioned the accretion Abū Balj had added at the end of the ḥadīth. What is further noteworthy is that some of these reports were relayed through Shi'ite transmitters and individuals from Ahlul-bait, yet none of them included this additional clause, which is perceived as evidence for 'Alī's successorship.

In this case, there are two possibilities: Abū Balj is either (1) adding his own accretions to the report, which were never part of the original tradition, or (2) mis-attributing different clauses he acquired from different (unreliable) sources to 'Amr b. Maymūn. Either way, both would render his transmission defective. More will come on this point later in this paper.

### 3.4 Unfounded Stories and Events in Abū Balj's Ḥadīth

As stated earlier, some of the merits cited in Abū Balj's ḥadīth have authentic parallels through other sources.

<sup>20</sup>Musnad Aḥmed (3/114), Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (5/19), Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (6/249), Jāmi' al-Tirmidī (6/83)

<sup>21</sup>Musnad Aḥmed (9/23), Jāmi' al-Tirmidī (6/88)

<sup>22</sup>Musnad Ibn al-Ja'd (p. 301), Musnad Aḥmed (17/373)

<sup>23</sup>Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah (17/100), Musnad Ishāq b. Rāhūyah (5/36)

There are merits in his ḥadīth, however, that strangely cannot be found mentioned elsewhere.

An example is merit 3 in Abū Balj's ḥadīth, where Ibn 'Abbās is quoted saying:

The Prophet once told his cousins, 'Which of you shall befriend (*yuwālīnī*) me in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*?' 'Alī was seated with him, and they refrained from answering. 'Alī thus said: 'I shall befriend you in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet thus said: 'You are my friend in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet then left him, and he approached another man among them and asked: 'Which of you shall befriend me in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*?' They refrained from responding, and 'Alī said: 'I shall befriend you in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.' The Prophet thus told him: 'You are my friend in the *Dunyā* and the *Ākhirah*.'

This alleged incident between the Prophet and his cousins is an event that is known nowhere except in Abū Balj's ḥadīth, and it is an unfounded event. Other examples of this phenomenon can be cited in this context; however, this example shall suffice for now.

### 3.5 'Amr b. Maymūn or Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh?

The past points should be sufficient to demonstrate the defective nature of this ḥadīth's transmission. Nevertheless, the fourth century ḥadīthist, 'AbdulGhanī b. Sa'īd al-Miṣrī (d. 409) provided in an interesting explanation behind the origins of this defective ḥadīth. Ibn Rajab said:

'AbdulGhanī b. Sa'īd al-Miṣrī al-Ḥāfiẓ mentioned that Abū Balj erred in the name of 'Amr b. Maymūn and that he is not the renowned 'Amr b. Maymūn. Rather, he is Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh, the *mawlā* of 'Abdurrahmān b. Samurah, and he is weak.

[Ibn Rajab said:] and this is not far-fetched, and Allah knows best.<sup>24</sup>

What 'AbdulGhanī b. Sa'īd stated was that Abū Balj originally acquired this ḥadīth from a weak transmitter, Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh, and he then misattributed it to the reliable, 'Amr b. Maymūn (probably due to their names' similarity.)

<sup>24</sup>Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidī (2/821-822)

There are good reasons to believe that 'AbdulGhanī b. Sa'īd's claim accurately describes the origin of this report, especially considering the fact that various clauses in Abū Balj's ḥadīth can be found similarly relayed by Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh elsewhere.

A good example is merit 7 from Abū Balj's ḥadīth. In it, the Prophet is quoted telling 'Alī, "Are you not pleased that you are unto me as Hārūn was unto Mūsā? **except that you are not a prophet.**" The boldened clause in this quote closely mirrors Maymūn's redaction of the ḥadīth in meaning and arrangement.<sup>25</sup>

'Awf al-A'rabī narrated on the authority of **Maymūn**, from al-Barā' b. 'Āzib, from Zayd b. Arqam, from the Prophet that he said, "Are you not pleased that you are unto me as Hārūn was to Mūsā? **except that you are not a prophet.**"<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the two boldened clauses in Abū Balj and Maymūn's ḥadīths closely mirror each other in arrangement and meaning: they quote the Prophet addressing 'Alī in first person as opposed to the majority of the report which merely quote the Prophet saying in third person, 'except that there shall be no prophet after me.' The major renditions of this tradition have been previously listed in the past subsection, "Abū Balj's Bizarre Accretions."

Another example of this phenomenon is merit 9, where the Messenger of Allah is quoted saying, "Seal all doors of the mosque except 'Alī's door." Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh quoted the Prophet saying a very similar thing: Muḥammad b. Ja'far said, 'Awf informed us, on the authority of **Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh**, from Zayd b. Arqam that he said: "Some companions of the Prophet had doors into the masjid, and so the Prophet said one day, 'seal these doors except 'Alī's door.'"<sup>27</sup>

This phenomenon can be further observed in merit 10, where the Prophet is quoted saying, "Whoever I am his *mawlā*, then his *mawlā* is 'Alī." This report can also be found relayed by Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh: Abū 'Awānah relayed on the authority of al-Mughīrah, from Abū 'Ubayd, from **Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh**, from Zayd b. Arqam, from the Prophet that he said, "So whoever I am his *mawlā*, then 'Alī is his *mawlā*."<sup>28</sup> Abū Balj and Maymūn's wordings share some similarity, such as the usage of *fa-inna* in their clauses, but these points are more readily observable by Arabic speakers.

Another example of this phenomenon is merit 4,

<sup>25</sup>This point was brought to my attention by Farid al-Bahraini.

<sup>26</sup>Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr (3/24), Ansāb al-Ashraf (2/96)

<sup>27</sup>Musnad Aḥmed (32/41), al-Sunan al-Kubrā of al-Nasā'ī (7/423)

<sup>28</sup>Musnad Aḥmed (32/73)

where the Prophet is quoted saying, "He was the first of all people to accept Islam after Khadījah." A similar statement can be found ascribed to Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh in Shi'ite sources. Al-Ṭūsī in his Amālī relayed a report with his isnād to 'Abdurrahmān b. **Maymūn**, from his **father** that he said, I heard Ibn 'Abbās say, "The first to believe in the Messenger of Allah from the men was 'Alī and from the women was Khadījah."<sup>29</sup>

In the previous examples, we can see that at least four of the ten merits cited in Abū Balj's ḥadīth can be seen elsewhere ascribed to Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh. That, along with the past observations on Abū Balj's defective transmission of this ḥadīth, lend credence to 'AbdulGhanī b. Sa'īd's conclusion. Indeed, it seems more likely that Abū Balj acquired this tradition from Maymūn than from 'Amr b. Maymūn, and the similarity between their names along with Abū Balj's incompetence probably is what led him to make this error. Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh evidently was a weak transmitter,<sup>30</sup> and his weakness further compounds the weakness of this report.

## 4 Conclusion

All-in-all, it is quite evident that Abū Balj's transmission of this ḥadīth is multifacetedly defective. The defectiveness of this tradition can be observed from several angles (1) the criticism Abū Balj received as a transmitter, (2) 'Amr b. Maymūn's bizarre transmission from Ibn 'Abbās, (3) Abū Balj's inauthentic accretions in the ḥadīth, (4) Abū Balj's unfounded stories and events in the ḥadīth, and (5) Abū Balj's likely acquisition of this report from the weak transmitter, Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh, not 'Amr b. Maymūn.

The cumulative result of the aforementioned observations is that this entire ḥadīth is a giant mistake carried out by Abū Balj: 'Amr b. Maymūn has nothing to do with this report. Rather, it likely was originally uttered by the weak Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh. The alternative explanation is that Abū Balj simply acquired this report's contents from his unidentified source(s) and then misattributed it to 'Amr b. Maymūn. Indeed, the fact that this tradition is a compilation of 'Alī's merits that can (mostly) be found in other ḥadīths may suggest that Abū Balj may have acquired its contents from multiple sources, including Maymūn Abū 'Abdillāh.

<sup>29</sup>Amālī al-Ṭūsī (p. 394)

<sup>30</sup>Tahḏīb al-Kamāl (29/231)

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