The ‘Thulāthiyyāt’ Traditions in the Hadith – Collections

Introduction
A special, and not very well-known topic, even amongst scholars according to our teacher Mohammed Daniel ḥafiẓullah, during one of his lessons with regards to the hadith – sciences, is the topic of the so called ‘thulāthiyyāt’ traditions (aḥādīth) or narrations about the Prophet s.a.w.s.

Thulāthiyyāt traditions are those specific traditions that only have three narrators (in the chain of narration c.q. sanad/isnād) -also called ‘links’ in Orientalist hadith-literature or discourse\(^1\)- between the one who relates the tradition (in other words: the fourth person in the chain of narration) and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). These three narrators would consequently be a Saḥābi, a Tābi‘ī and a Tābi‘i at-Tābi‘i. As for the one who relates the tradition: this mainly concerns a well-known name/scholar in the field of hadith i.e. a compiler or author of a major and well-known hadith – collection (in the past) like Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and so on.

An example of this would be the following hadith that is related by imam al-Bukhārī:

It was narrated that al-Makki bin Ibrāhīm said that it was narrated that Yazīd bin Abī ‘Ubayd said on the authority of Salamah ibn al-Akwa’ (may Allah be pleased with him) that he heard the Apostle of Allah (s.a.w.s.) say: “Whoever attributes something to me that I haven’t said, then let him take his place in Hellfire.” This is the first hadith of the thulāthiyyāt of imam al-Bukhārī. So the chain of narration looks as follows:

Imam al-Bukhārī - (1) al-Makki bin Ibrāhīm - (2) Yazīd bin Abī ‘Ubayd - (3) Salamah ibn al-Akwa’ - the Prophet s.a.w.s.

\(^1\) For example G.H.A. Juynboll who uses this term in his work.
More information on al-Makki ibn Ibrāhīm\textsuperscript{2} will be given below as it is important to understand who he was.

An interesting point to add here is that this hadith is mutawātir bi‘l-lafẓī and one of the most authentic hadith there is.

A hadith that belongs to the category of thulāthiyyāt is quite unique because most of the major and well known hadith – collections contain traditions with at least between four and six narrators or more in the chains. An isnād that consists of fewer links is considered as more reliable since the possibility of error and doubt increases with every additional link in the chain. Searching for a shorter or higher isnād (by students and scholars of hadith) in preference to one that is lower is an act of merit and highly recommended\textsuperscript{3}. Closeness or proximity (qurb) of isnād indicates closeness to the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and closeness to the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) means closeness to Allah s.w.t.\textsuperscript{4}.

The well-known hadith – collections and the number of thulāthiyyāt in them

We will start with mentioning the number of thulāthiyyāt in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and will then mention some more collections which are highlighted in the sources I had available\textsuperscript{5}. There will also be a short discussion/review of the English translation of the Thulāthiyyāt of the Musnad of imam Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal rahmatullahi ‘alayhi. The article ends with an index of the thulāthiyyāt in 5 well-known hadith – collections.

- Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī : 22\textsuperscript{6}

They (the thulāthiyyāt) are called the ‘pride of imam al-Bukhārī’ by some because of the short linkage between imam al-Bukhārī and the Prophet s.a.w.s. which rendered

\textsuperscript{2} For his biography I refer to al-Mizzi’s book ‘Ibm ar-Rijāl.
\textsuperscript{3} According to Ibn as-Salah in his Muqaddimah this is a sunnah. He quotes Ahmad b. Hanbal (may Allah be pleased with him) as having related this. See pag. 183 of the English translation of the Muqaddimah.
\textsuperscript{4} See M.H. Kamali, A Textbook of Hadith Studies, pp. 183, 184.
\textsuperscript{5} For example ar-Risālah al-Mustatrafah by shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ja`far al-Kittānī. He has a chapter on the thulāthiyyāt.
\textsuperscript{6} This document can be found in the online library of Cordoba Academy alongside with an English translation.
him more close to the latter\textsuperscript{7}. These *thulāthiyāt* were compiled by imam Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī *raḥmatullahi ‘alayhi* in a separate volume\textsuperscript{8}. The contemporary shaykh Muḥammad bin ‘Abd ad-Dā‘im al-Birmāwī ash-Shāfī‘ī wrote a *sharḥ* (commentary) of these *thulāthiyāt*\textsuperscript{9} which was published in 1421 AH. Shaykh ‘Ali bin Sultān al-Qārī al-Harawi (better known as Mullah ‘Ali al-Qārī) also wrote a book with notes (*ta‘liqāt*) on the *thulāthiyāt* of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{11}. ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq ‘Aẓimabādī started writing commentary on the *thulāthiyāt* but was not able to complete it.\textsuperscript{12} The contemporary Moroccan shaykh Yusuf al-Kittāni also wrote a book on the *thulāthiyāt* of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī called “Rubā‘īyyāt al-Imām al-Bukhārī”.

An interesting fact to mention is that imam al-Bukhārī related half of the *thulāthiyāt* through his shaykh al-Makki ibn Ibrahīm *raḥimahullah*. Shaykh al-Makki ibn Ibrahīm was a student of imam Abu Ḥanīfah (may Allah be pleased with him) and one of the greatest hadith scholars of his time\textsuperscript{13}, the *musnid* of Khurāsān. He belongs to the first and highest category of teachers of imam al-Bukhārī\textsuperscript{14}. He said about imam Abu Ḥanīfah: “He was the most knowledgeable person of his time.” This relates to hadith as well of course so the argument of some people that he didn’t have knowledge of hadith or was weak in hadith is completely false\textsuperscript{15}. Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal also narrates hadith from shaykh al-Makki ibn Ibrahīm by the way, as well Yahya b. Yahya al-Laythi.

- Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim  
  The fact imam Muslim has no *thulāthiyāt* in his collection is quite striking compared to the other well-known hadith – scholars.

- Sunan ad-Dārīmi  
  : 15\textsuperscript{16}

- Sunan/Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhi  
  : 1\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{7} Some online lessons on the book can be listened here: \url{http://ar.miraath.net/audio/4514/01}
\textsuperscript{9} See: \url{http://www.arabicbookshop.net/main/details.asp?id=115-485}
\textsuperscript{10} See: \url{http://www.arabicbookshop.net/main/details.asp?id=200-291}
\textsuperscript{11} For online lessons on this book: \url{http://archive.org/details/Osaimi-tholathiat-aini}
\textsuperscript{12} See: \url{http://biosalaf.wordpress.com/2011/04/03/allamah-azimabadi/}
\textsuperscript{13} See: \url{http://www.central-mosque.com/biographies/abuhaneef_hadeeth.pdf}
\textsuperscript{14} This is mentioned in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, the commentary of imam al-Bukhārī’s collection.
\textsuperscript{15} More on this issue can be read in the English translations of *Kitāb al-Āthār* and *Muwatta Imam Muḥammad* by Turath Publishing.
\textsuperscript{16} This document can be found in the online library of Cordoba Academy.
There is a book with the takhrij of the thulāthiyyāt in these previous 5 works by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Shanuhah.

Just like imam Muslim.

His biography is in the work mentioned below by ‘Ali Riḍā ‘Abdallah and Aḥmad al-Bazrah.

A work on the thulāthiyyāt in al-Bukhārī, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Mājah, ad-Dārimi, al-Kashshī and at-Tabarānī has been compiled by ‘Ali Riḍā ‘Abdallah and Aḥmad al-Bazrah, including the biographies of these 6 imams.

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17 See: http://sunnah.org/history/Scholars/imam_tirmidhi.htm
20 According to Bilal Philips, in his book “Usool al-Hadeeth” (pag. 193), this work contains a lot of thulāthiyyāt.
21 According to Bilal Philips, in his book “Usool al-Hadeeth” (pag. 194), it is said that this work contained a lot of thulāthiyyāt. Al-Kashshi died in 895 C.E.
22 This document can be found in the online library of Cordoba Academy.
23 Sometimes written as al-Kishshī with a kasrah.
24 See: https://ia600809.us.archive.org/4/items/SOLASYAT/pdf
Musnad Imam ash-Shāfi‘ī: Some, but number unknown

English translation of Sunan Ibn Mājah by Dar-us-Salam

Musnad Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal: 332

These thulāthiyyāt were not only compiled by Imam as-Saffarini rahimahullah in a separate volume but also by Imam Muḥib ud-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar al-Maqdisi (613 AH) rahimahullah with the title “Tajrīd Thulāthiyyātihi”. The compilation of Imam as-Saffarini is a sharḥ of the book by al-Maqdisi.

The thulāthiyyāt by Imams al-Bukhārī and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal are the most well-known collections. What are some of the benefits of these short hadith – collections in our times?

Some benefits of the thulāthiyyāt – collections in our times

1. These short collections make it easy and possible for the student, interested in hadith and who doesn’t have (much) time to study large collections, to study hadith.
2. A connection with the great scholars of hadith and their works and familiarity with the lesser known texts of the hadith scholars.
3. Every student starts with the shorter collections before he reaches the large collections. This is the way and tradition of students and scholars of hadith.
4. Familiarity with the isnād – system and the importance of the isnād.
5. Familiarity with some ‘hidden’ treasures and special features of hadith – collections.

For further research

There are several other books available on the thulāthiyyāt:

- A book on the thulāthiyyāt of the so called Kutub as-Sittah and the Musnad of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal from an unknown author.

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26 In his ar-Risālah al-Mustatrafah shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kittāni says in the chapter about the thulāthiyyāt: وَلِلنَّهَاتِيِّ فِي مَسْنُودِهِ وَغَيْرِهِ مِنْ حَدِيْثِهِ وَهِيْ جَمِيلَةُ أَحْدَاثِهِ.
27 Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kittāni mentions there are 337 though.
- A book with the title “Ath-Thulāthiyyāt fi’l-Hadith an-Nabawi” by Ashraf b. ‘Abd ar-Rahīm31;
- A work with the title “Minḥat ul-Bāri fi Dhikr Asānidi ila Thulāthiyyāt al-Imam al-Bukhārī” by Abu ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Hātim bin Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Ali Shalabi al-Filāzūnī32;

The thulāthiyyāt in the Musnad of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal

As stated above the number of thulāthiyyāt in the Musnad of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal is 332 and they were compiled in separate volumes, among which the volume by al-‘allāmah shaykh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Salīm as-Saffarini al-Ḥanbali (1114 – 1188 AH)34 and he also wrote a sharḥ on these ahādīth35. A study and evaluation, by Hilmī ‘Abd ul-Hādi from An-Najah National University in Palestine, of this sharḥ can be read online here (mostly in Arabic):


Internationally known Islamic publisher Dar-us-Salam Publications36 has published an English translation of these thulāthiyyāt in 201037. This publication is hardcover and printed in a nice style, pleasing for the eye, on large pages. The sanad and matn for each hadith is given in Arabic, with the harakāt, the number of the hadith in the Musnad, followed by the English translation and with some explanatory footnotes. Underneath the grading/classification of the hadith is given as well. For this they (the
translation and editing team of Dar-us-Salam) relied (as stated in the foreword) on the work of shaykh ‘Abd ul-Qādir al-Arna’ūṭ 38 

raḥimahullah and others (like shaykh Aḥmad Shākir raḥimahullah) but that is not further clarified in footnotes or anywhere else in the book. The translation was endorsed by the Saudi shaykh and minister Sālih ‘Abd ul-‘Azīz ibn Muḥammad Āl ash-Shaykh 39, the former mufti of Saudi Arabia.

Credit has to be given to Dar-us-Salam and the people who worked to realize this translation, masha’Allah. May Allah reward them for publishing this work which is the first of its kind. No other published English translation of any of the thulāthiyyāt of the other collections mentioned above exists up until now. This publication was the forerunner of the complete English translation of the complete Musnad of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, of which three volumes already have been published so far 40.

Some remarks can be made though on this translation which pertain to possibly crucial issues. This publication brings several questions to mind.

One notices immediately the absence of a sanad in the book to transmit this text, going back to al-‘allāmah as-Saffarini and/or Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal raḥimahumullah; no sanad is mentioned or given so it remains a question on whose authority this book has been transmitted 41. The student of hadith with a keen interest in research would like to know this for sure. Can one assume the former mufti of Saudi Arabia was licensed with an ijāzah to transmit this book? What about the translator? Did he read and/or study the book with the muftī? No information about al-‘allāmah as-Saffarini (except for his date of birth and death) and his work is given either. That is a missed chance for Dar-us-Salam and disappointing for interested students of knowledge.

May be they didn’t deem this necessary, w’Allahu ‘alam, but it weakens the credibility of this publication somehow, or at least this is a lack from the side of Dar-us-Salam. Information that shaykh ‘Abd ul-Qādir al-Arna’ūṭ worked on the Musnad of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal is difficult to trace but it seems he wrote some (unpublished?) notes on the sharḥ of imam as-Saffarini. All in all, one can ask questions about the academic

38 See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Qader_Arnaoot
39 See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saleh_bin_Abdul_Aziz_Al_ash-Sheikh
40 See: http://store.dar-us-salam.com/Eng_Hadith/H21.html
41 This is not a very crucial issue though according to az-Zarkashi as related by Ibn Ḥajr al-Haythami in his al-Fatawa al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kubra. See: http://daralhadith.lefora.com/2012/07/19/relying-on-books-without-a-sanad/; and shaykh Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ said: ‘Nowadays the works of people are their ijāzāt.’
reliability of this work. Lastly, shaykh Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt⁴² ḥafiẓahullāh, though (not related to the other al-Arna‘ūt mentioned here) is known to have done some work (taḥqīq with regards to the aḥkām / rulings on each hadith) on the Musnad (in 52 vols.!), which can be downloaded from the internet here:

Cordoba Academy and the thulāthiyyāt

Until now Cordoba Academy has granted its students the blessed possibility to get acquainted with and get ijāzah in the Thulāthiyyāt of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (twice) and the Sunan ad-Darimi. Our respected teacher Mohammed Daniel has taught both of these texts online with commentary on his own asānīd and the mutūn and has provided the students with an English translation of these texts as well. I have had the opportunity to read both texts with him, alhamdulillāh. In the future a course will be done insha’Allah on the thulāthiyyāt of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal by shaykh Mohammed Daniel.

May Allah accept this from me and forgive me for my mistakes.

Harun Verstaen, Dhu’l-Hijjah 1433
student of Cordoba Academy

Index of the numbers of the thulāthiyyāt in the well-known hadith – collections

1.) Šaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī
Hadith nrs. 109, 497, 502, 561, 2007, 2289, 2960, 3041, 4206, 6891, 2477, 1924, 2295, 4272, 5569, 7208, 2703, 4499, 6894, 3546 and 7421.

2.) Sunan ad-Dārimi
Hadith nrs. 740, 1396, 1761, 1901, 1922, 1924, 2602, 2204, 2589, 2622, 1342, 2681, 2701, 2841 and 3380.

3.) Sunan/Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi
Hadith nr. 2260.

4.) Sunan Ibn Mājah
Hadith nrs. 642, 3310\textsuperscript{43}, 3355\textsuperscript{44}, al-Albānī, Šaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah, nr. 2819, and al-Albānī, Šaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah, nr. 3483 (I was not able to trace the original numbers in the book of Ibn Mājah of these last two hadith). All 5 of these hadith are narrated through the same chain.

5.) Sunan Abū Dāwūd
Hadith nr. 4749.

\textsuperscript{43} Also see al-Albānī, Daʾīf Sunan Ibn Mājah, nr. 656.
\textsuperscript{44} Also see al-Albānī, Daʾīf Sunan Ibn Mājah, nr. 670/671.