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The Influence of the 73 Sects Ḥadīth on the Classification of Theological Sects in Islamic Heresiographical Literature *

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the influence of the "73 sects ḥadīth," which states that Muslims will be separated into 73 sects, when Jews had 71 and Christians had 72 sects, and that only one of them will be saved whereas the others will go to Hell, on, particularly, Islamic heresiographical works written to examine and classify theological sects and their beliefs in the Islamic community from the beginning. This ḥadīth has had a crucial and decisive role in those works' form and way to study the sects as well as their authors' perception of their own sect and the other sects. Studying the influence, not the authenticity, of the 73 sects ḥadīth, the article first mentions the famous narration of the ḥadīth, noting other different narrative versions; then

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points out some questions that would be arisen in one's mind about the implication of the ḥadīth. The article mainly discusses the attitudes of Muslim heresiographers towards 73 sects ḥadīth and describes by placing them in main three categories: 'Those who consider the 73 sects ḥadīth authentic,' 'Those who do not consider the 73 sects ḥadīth authentic,' and 'Those who do not take notice of the 73 sects ḥadīth.' Considering the ḥadīth authentic, most of heresiographers have different views about the meaning of the number 73 mentioned in the ḥadīth. Some thinks that the number is for a fact and, accordingly, divides the sects to reach up 73 with different formulas and some are of the opinion that the number is a metaphor and a mere allusion on abundance as a common usage in the Arabic language and, accordingly, do not limit the number of the sects to 73. The article ends up with a discussion of the problems of the consideration of the 73 sects ḥadīth a measure for studying and classifying theological groups.

KEYWORDS

Islamic Theological Sects, Islamic Heresiography, Sect (*Firqa*), 73 Sects Ḥadīth, Saved Sect (*al-firqa al-nājiya*)

73 Fırka Hadisinin Mezhepler Tarihi Kaynaklarında Fırkaların Tasnifine Etkisi

ÖZ

Bu makale, Yahudîler'in 71, Hıristiyanlar'ın 72, Müslümanlar'ın 73 fırkaya ayrılacağını ve bu fırkalardan yalnızca birinin kurtulup, diğerlerinin Cehennem'e gideceğini haber veren "73 fırka hadisi"nin özellikle İslam tarihi boyunca ortaya çıkan siyasî-itikadî fırkaları ve görüşlerini tasnif etmek üzere kaleme alınan fırak eserleri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Bu hadis, fırak eserlerinin gerek biçim gerekse de mezhepleri ele alış tarzında belirleyici olmuş; fırak yazarlarının kendi mensup olduğu fırkaya ve diğer fırkalara bakışına etkide bulunmuştur. 73 fırka hadisinin sıhhat durumuna dair bir soruşturmaya girmeyerek etkisini araştıran bu makale, öncelikle hadisin meşhur rivayet formunu nakletmekte; hadisin metni üzerinde düşünüldüğünde akla gelebilen birtakım problemli meselelere dikkat çekmektedir. Daha sonra 73 fırka hadisi karşısında fırak yazarlarının takındığı belli başlı üç tavra işaret etmekte ve bunları '73 fırka hadisini sahih kabul edenler', '73 fırka hadisini sahih görmeyenler' ve '73 fırka hadisini dikkate almayanlar' şeklinde gruplandırıp örnekler üzerinden incelemektedir. Fırak yazarlarının çoğu hadisi sahih kabul etmekte, fakat hadiste geçen 73 rakamının ne anlam ifade ettiği noktasında farklılaşmaktadır. Bir kısım müellif rakamı *hakiki* bir sayı olarak alıp fırkaların sayısını 73'e tamamlamaya gayret ederken bir kısmı rakamın Arap dilinde *kesretten kinaye* anlamında kullanıldığına işaret ederek fırkaların sayısını 73 ile sınırlandırmamıştır. Makale, fırkaların tasnifinde 73 fırka hadisinin bir ölçüt olarak alınmasının doğurduğu sıkıntılara işaret edip birtakım öneriler sunarak son bulmaktadır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

İtikadî İslam Mezhepleri, Fırak Geleneği, Fırka, 73 Fırka hadisi, Fırka-i Nâciye.

INTRODUCTION

The ḥadīth, which states that the Islamic community would be divided into 73 sects and only one of them would be saved from Hell, and commonly known as *73 sects ḥadīth*, has had great influence on Islamic

thought as it has determined how the followers of a sect should see the followers of other sects and how the relationship between them should be.

Although it has different narrative versions,[11] the most common version of this ḥadīth is as follows:

> "Jews were divided into 71 sects. One of them is in Heaven, seventy of them are in Hell. Christians are split into 72 sects. Seventy-one of them are in Hell, the one is in Heaven. I swear to Allah whose mighty hands hold the Muhammad's will, beyond any doubt, my umma will be divided into 73 sects. One will be in Heaven, seventy-two will be in flames.
>
> Said: 'Oh the Messenger of Allah! Who are they?'
>
> Thus he spoke: 'They are *al-jamā'a* (the community)'."[2]
>
> In another narration, the saved sect is expressed as "*The one on which path I and my companions are*."[3]

When the ḥadīth is reflected on, a set of questions come to mind. For instance, what is meant with the number 73 in this ḥadīth? Does it indicate a number adding up to reality or is it used as a figurative count implying plenitude? Besides, is this the count of major sects? If so, no writer has managed to specify the number of major sects as more than 10-12. If the ḥadīth implies major sects together with their sub-branches, then the number 73 can be easily exceeded. Furthermore, what would be the criterion for being defined as sect and who would determine the identity of these 73 sects and how would it be done? However, if the number 73 is used figuratively, what does the division of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims into 71, 72, and 73 sects refer to, respectively?

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1 Mevlüt Özler divides the different narrative versions of the 73 sects ḥadīth into four groups: 1. Narratives declaring only the number of sects into which the Muslim community will divide (al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Māja, al-Nīsābūrī, al-Bayḥakī, Ibn Ḥibbān), 2. Narratives saying that only one sect will be saved while the other will be in Hell (al-Dārimī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal), 3. Narratives explaining the exact identity of the saved sect (Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Māja, al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Nīsābūrī), 4. Narratives stating that all sects will be in Heaven except for only one (al-'Ajlūnī, al-Suyūṭī, 'Alī al-Qārī, Ibn 'Arrāq). For these narratives, see Mevlüt Özler, *İslâm Düşüncesinde 73 Fırka Kavramı* (Istanbul: Nûn, 1996), 21-28. Another researcher, Ahmet Keleş, evaluates the narratives of the 73 sects ḥadīth under five groups: 1. Narratives stating that the Islamic community will divide into various sects, 2. Narratives determining identities of sects that will go to Heaven and Hell, 3. Narratives describing the saved sect that will go to Heaven, 4. Narratives describing the sects that will go to Hell, 5. Narratives suggesting to follow the community (*al-jamā'a*). For details, see Ahmet Keleş, "73 Fırka Hadisi Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Marife* 5/3 (2005), 25-45.

None of the narratives of the 73 sects ḥadīth is mentioned in al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and al-Nasā'ī.

For further details of the different narrative versions of the 73 sects ḥadīth and the investigation of narrators, see Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-'Ajlūnī, *Kash al-khafā'* (Beirut: Dar iḥyā al-turāth al-'arabī, 1932), I: 149-151; Abdullah Eren, *İftirak Hadislerinin Tahric, Tahkik ve Yorumu* (M.A. Thesis, Uludağ University, 1998); Sayın Dalkıran, "Yetmişüç Fırka Hadisi ve Düşündürdükleri", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 1/1 (1997), 97-116.

2 Ibn Māja, "Fitan", 17

3 Al-Tirmidhī, "Īmān", 18.

The explanation for the reason why Muslims split into 73 sects while Jews and Christians were divided into 71 and 72[4] is that the Prophet wanted to express that Islam has more qualities compared to Judaism and Christianity[5] and make a comparison between three religions.[6] It has been also marked that this supremacy should be sought within the freedom of thought, which Islam features and which is entitled to Muslims.[7] However, explaining the fact that there is only one sect to be saved and all others would be in hell with the freedom of speech in Islam does not seem to be so consistent. If this is a consequence of the freedom of thought, why does only one of these thought-holders deserve to go to Heaven and others are sent to the Hell?[8] Accordingly, Watt draws attention to this issue as: "One can understand a Muslim being proud of the virtues of his religious community, but the multiplicity of sects is hardly a matter for pride. How did the tradition about seventy-three sects come to find acceptance among Muslims? Perhaps a group of extreme rigorists was happy to maintain that they belonged to the one 'saved sect' (*firqa nājiya*) while the other seventy two sects would go to Hell."[9] As a matter of fact, this ḥadīth has been used by the followers of the sect which considered itself the saved sect in the ḥadīth as a means to justify their claims and to marginalize other sects by stigmatizing them as deserving of hell, as well as Ahl al-bid'a.[10]

Narrations suggesting that the Islamic community would be divided into 73 sects, 72 of them would go to Hell while only one of them would ascend to Heaven, along with the sayings accredited to the Prophet such as *"al-Qadariyyah are the majūs of the umma,"*[11] *"al-Khawārij have abandoned the religion just as an arrow loosing from the string"*[12] brought the problem of "takfīr (declaring a Muslim as apostate)".[13] So will the followers

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4 Watt notes that the first European scholar to appreciate the importance and problematic character of the 73 sects ḥadīth is Ignaz Goldziher. See, W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (London: Oneworld, 2002), 2.

5 Goldziher states that a ḥadīth telling that Islam has 73 virtues while Judaism does 71 and Christianity does 72 has been misunderstood, so the 73 virtues were turned into 73 sects and 'this error provided the ground for enumeration of 73 sects.' See, Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, translated by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), 167. Watt affirmatively says that Goldziher plausibly argued that the 73 sects ḥadīth had been derived from another ḥadīth in which the Prophet said that "*īmān* has 70 odd branches", see *The Formative Period,* 2.

6 Bekir Topaloğlu, *Kelam İlmine Giriş* (Istanbul: Damla, 1996), 164.

7 Ethem Ruhi Fığlalı, "Çevirenin Önsözü [Preface of the Translator]", in his *Mezhepler Arasındaki Farklar (el-Fark beyne'l-fırak)* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1991), xxv.

8 Keleş, "73 Fırka Hadisi Üzerine Bir İnceleme", 43.

9 Watt, *The Formative Period,* 2.

10 Ejder, Okumuş, "Ehl-i Sünnet ve'l-Cemaat'in Bir Meşruiyet Aracı Olarak İcat ve İstihdamı", *Marife* 5/3 (2005): 56-58.

11 Abū Dāwūd, "Sunna", 17; Ibn Māja, "Muqaddima", 10.

12 Al-Bukhārī, "Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān", 36, "Manāqib", 25, "Adab", 25, "Istitāba", 5, "Tawḥīd", 23; Muslim, "Zakāt", 47; al-Tirmidhī, "Fitan", 22; Abū Dāwūd, "Sunna", 31; al-Nasā'ī, "Taḥrīm", 26, "Zakāt", 79; Ibn Māja, "Muqaddima", 12.

13 *Takfīr* is a very delicate issue due to the consequences it brings about. Although its limits differ from a scholar to another, everyone shares the idea that there are definite situations in which *takfīr* is necessary. For the necessity of justifiable *takfīr* and the danger and damages of unjustifiable *takfīr*, see Ahmet Saim Kılavuz, *İman Küfür Sınırı* (Istanbul: Marifet, 1996), 235-239, 245-252.

of these sects which the Prophet vilified to such extent be considered as believers or non-believers? At this point, as al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) states, there is disunity among juristic methodologists on the problem of *takfīr* of *ahl al-ahwā'*; while more radical and fanatic ones in terms of sectarianism lay the blame on their opponents for blasphemy and heresy, whereas tolerant ones seek to reconcile, standing clear from *takfīr*.[14] Al-Ashʿarī, for example, instead of ostracizing antagonistic sects emerging after the Prophet's demise, opted to include them into the circle of Islam by saying *"Islam unites them and draws them together!"*[15]

al-Ghazālī, who raises concerns over that *takfīr* brings forth the serious consequences both for the world and hereafter,[16] points out that *takfīr* mechanism can only be executed by denying what the Prophet brought,[17] as long as they stick to "Lā ilāh illallāh" principle and does not perform anything contradictory to it, it must be avoided to malign Ahl al-Islam and to declare the sects unbeliever no matter how diverged their paths are.[18] In his *Fayṣal al-tafriqa,* he prefers to use the narration *"My umma will split up into seventy-odd sects. They all will go to Heaven, except unbelievers (zindīqs)"* for 73 sects ḥadīth. Nevertheless, being aware of the other famed narration, he attempts to combine both forms. According to him, two ḥadīths can be reconciled as following: There is one sect among them that is certainly infernal and they have no chance to be saved. These are *zindīq*s. Yet there is another sect, whose followers will be directly sent to Heaven without passing through the Hell, and thus will be totally saved. The ones that will remain between these two will either be brought to account or will be interceded for after giving account or will stay in the Hell as much as their sentence. That is, in any case, they will not be able to escape totally and their situation will be on a shaky ground.[19] Two ḥadīths are thus reconciled.

Regarded less tolerant than Al-Ashʿarī and al-Ghazālī, al-Baghdadī argues that the followers of 72 sects -which he discusses under the title of *deviant sects*- can be considered within the Islamic community in some aspects, yet excluded in other aspects. From his view, members of these sects could be considered to belong to Islamic community in that they are allowed to be buried in Muslim grave, have a share for spoils providing they fight beside Muslims and they must not to be prevented from praying in mosque; while they are not regarded in Islamic community regarding the following aspects: they cannot be the *imām* in prayers, Sunnīs should not pray at their funeral, marry them and the animals they slaughter are not *ḥalāl.*[20]

The most convenient example touching on the fact that the narration suggesting that only one of the 73 sects would be saved has shaped the approach towards religious matters as is cited in al-Maqdisī's *Aḥsan*

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14 Abū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Amīr 'Alī Mahnā & 'Alī Ḥasan Fā'ūr (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1996), I: 240.

15 Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. İsmā'īl al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), 2.

16 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī l-i'tiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1983), 155.

17 Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1986), 120.

18 Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, 134; id., *al-Iqtiṣād*, 157.

19 Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, 145.

20 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabat dār al-turāth, nd.) 14.

al-taqāsīm. In the chapter where he mentions the views of some sects about whether 'every *mujtahid* is accurate in his ruling, or not', he notes a party from Qarrāmiyya and another group from Murji'a are in the opinion that every *mujtahid*, whether in theology (*uṣūl*) or law (*fiqh*), is accurate in his judgment except *zanādiqa* and for this argument, they adduce the Prophet's ḥadīth saying "My umma will separate into 73 sects. 72 of them will be in Heaven, only one will burn in fire." On the other hand, he states that in the opinion of the other sects only the one who consents the right can be accurate in his ruling and only one sect fits in with this, and the evidence they adduce for this is another narration suggesting '72 are in Hell and only one is in the Heaven'.[21]

1. APPROACH OF THE MUSLIM HERESIOGRAPHERS TOWARDS 73 SECTS ḤADĪTH

73 sects ḥadīth has been taken as a basis by the writers especially in the genre of heresiography which were written in an effort to classify, give information about and mostly falsify the sects that had emerged within the Islamic community. The ḥadīth has shaped Muslim heresiographers' writing purpose, tone, approach towards sects and even their mentality. Many heresiographers produced works claiming the number 73 in the ḥadīth is true and adopted different methods in an effort to designate their own sect as the saved sect that would go to the Heaven and resorted to different methods to round up the number of the other sects which would perish to 72. This effort, however, left heresiographers in a considerably difficult situation. As many of them tried hard to fix the number of the sects to 72, they could not escape from a set of contradictions.[22] Moreover, these writers sought 73 sects within the period until their time, reckoning without the possibility that the new sects could emerge after their lifetime.

73 sects ḥadīth, considered as authentic, has shaped the heresiographers' mentality and their view on other sects.[23] As stated by Keith Lewinstein, who has carried out important research on the Islamic heresiography, this ḥadīth paved the way for a schematic approach towards the tradition and history of religion, as well as supported heresiographers to perceive the Islamic doctrine in a static and stable manner, without any historical change.[24] According to al-Jābirī, heresiographers evaluated earlier sects over the debates he entered with other sects at the time; thus adopted '*an ideological and epistemological imperialism*' by imposing

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[21] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bashshārī al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālim*, ed. M. J. Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 39. Al-Maqdisī says that the second narration is more famous, however the first one is more strong in its *isnād*, although he never provide any *sanad*.

[22] For the problems resulted by the understanding of 73 sects ḥadīth, see Watt, *The Formative Period*, 3-5; Fığlalı, "Çevirenin Önsözü", xxiii-xxv; id., *Çağımızda İtikâdî İslâm Mezhepleri* (İzmir: İzmir İlahiyat Vakfı, 2004), 12; Sönmez Kutlu, "İslâm Mezhepleri Tarihinde Usûl Mes'elesi", in *İslâmî İlimlerde Metodoloji (Usûl) Mes'elesi Tartışmalı İlmî İhtisas Toplantıları* (Istanbul: Ensar, 2005), 1: 408-411; Mehmet Ali Büyükkara, "Bir Bilim Dalı Olarak İslâm Mezhepleri Tarihi ile İlgili Metodolojik Problemler", *İslâmî İlimlerde Metodoloji (Usûl) Mes'elesi*, 1: 451-453.

[23] In this point, it is discussable whether this ḥadīth gave form to the mentality or the present mentality produced this ḥadīth.

[24] Keith Lewinstein, *Studies in Islamic Heresiography: The Khawārij in Two Firaq Tradition* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1989), 4.

his time's criteria upon the past. Besides, in these works, reader is epistemologically pushed out of the history since the time and developments are left out because the sects are considered as sect from their very beginning and hence the political motives behind their views are overlooked.[25]

The heresiographers can be said to adopt broadly three different attitudes towards 73 sects ḥadīth: those who regard the ḥadīth as authentic, those who don't consider it authentic, and those who do not include the ḥadīth in their works.

1.1. Those Who Consider the 73 Sects Ḥadīth Authentic

The greater part of Muslim heresiographers agree that the ḥadīth is authentic. Based on the ḥadīth, writers claimed their own sect to be the saved one, thus the identification of the sect that would be salvaged varies as to the writer. For instance, according to Sunnī writers such as Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Malaṭī, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, Abū l-Muzaffar al-Isfarā'inī, al-Shahrastānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Saksakī, and 'Aḍuḍ al-Dīn al-Ījī, the saved sect is *Ahl al-sunna wa-l-Jamā'a*.[26] From the perspective of Ismā'īlī scholar, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, the saved sect is Ahl al-sunna wa-l-Jamā'a, yet this term refers to "*those who have embraced the Sunna of the Prophet of God, who have abandoned the innovators and their innovations who had come after him, and who are with a conglomeration gathered around an imām who is a connector and a guide through the righteous path.*"[27] According to another Ismā'īlī writer, Abū Tammām al-Khawārizmī (IV/X cent.), the saved sect is Ahl al-bāṭin, that is the Ismā'īliyya;[28] according to Ibn al-Murtaḍā, it is Zaydiyya;[29] and according to Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qalhātī, it is Ibāḍiyya.[30]

The Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, one of the important figures of Mu'tazila, attempts to interpret the saved sect as Mu'tazila and to infuse this idea. For him, "*al-Jamā'a*" which was mentioned in 73 sects ḥadīth to be the sect that will attain salvation is not those in the majority, but those who are on the right path. In fact, Allah praises the minority in many verses, yet discredits the majority. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, those

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25 Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *İslâm'da Siyasal Akıl* [orig. *al-'Aql al-siyāsī al-'Arabī*], translated into Turkish by Vecdi Akyüz (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1997), 588.

26 Among these writers, the content of *Ahl al-sunna wa-l-Jamā'a* is not the same. Al-Baghdādī classifies Ahl al-sunna under the eight groups (al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, 313-318); al-Ījī identifies it as al-Ash'ariyya and Salaf scholars of ḥadīth ('Aḍuḍ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām* [Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbi, nd.], 429); al-Saksakī regards Aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth and Ḥanbalites as Ahl al-sunna ('Abbās b. Manṣūr al-Saksakī, *al-Burhān fī ma'rifat 'aqā'id ahl al-adyān*, ed. Khalīl Aḥmad Ibrāhīm [Cairo: Dār al-turāth al-'arabī, 1980], 20.

27 Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna*, in *al-Ghuluw wa-l-firaq al-ghāliya fī l-ḥaḍārat al-Islāmiyya*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Sellūm al-Sāmarrā'ī (Cairo: Dār al-wāsiṭ, 1982), 252.

28 Abū Tammām, *Bāb al-Shayṭān*, in *An Ismā'īlī Heresiography: The 'Bāb al-Shayṭān' from Abū Tammām's* Kitâb al-Shajara, ed. Wilfred Madelung & Paul E. Walker (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 8.

29 Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1979), 29, 36.

30 Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Azdī al-Qalhātī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Sayyida Ismā'īl Kāshif (Masqat: Salṭanat 'Umān Wizārat al-turāth al-qawmī wa-l-thaqāfa, 1980), 2: 471.

who genuinely embrace the *Sunna* and *Jamā'a* are Mu'tazila.[31] He also interprets the 73 sects ḥadīth as another narrative which supports his own sect. According to this narrative,

> It is reported as follows by Sufyān al-Thawrī who related from Ibn al-Zubayr, who then related from Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, who related from the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh): *"My umma will divide into more than seventy sects. The highest (abarruhā) and most devoted (atqāhā) of them is the one that stands away (al-Fi'at al-Mu'tazila)."* After relating this ḥadīth, Sufyān al-Thawrī told his companions: "Take this name, since you have stood away from misguidance (*ḍalāla*);" when his companions told him that "'Amr ibn 'Ubayd and his companions took this name," he then never spoke of this narration, rather said "*only one sect of them is saved*".[32]

Those who agree that the 73 sect ḥadīth is authentic are divided on the matter whether the number 73 in the ḥadīth is a fact or a metaphor:

1.1.1. Those who think that the number 73 in the ḥadīth is for a fact

According to the writers in this group, the number 73 in the ḥadīth refers to a fact. As the Prophet stated, the Islamic community is divided into 73 sects. Accordingly, after the writer has found that his sect is the one that will attain salvation, it is necessary to determine 72 sects to perish. However, there is one obstacle to overcome for the writer, that is, the number of major sects is not even close to 72. To overcome this obstacle, the number of the sects was rounded up to 72 with their subsections. Of course, this led to the artificial sects and newly created sects.

Every heresiographer divided the sects to reach up 73 until his own era, and the following heresiographer needed to remove or reorganize the sects in the lists of former heresiographes in order to include new sects arisen in between the time passed.[33] For example, al-Baghdādī said that al-Najjāriyya had more than 10 sects in his era, yet they can be reduced to 3.[34] If otherwise, the number 73 will be exceeded.

The heresiographers that agree the number 73 in the ḥadīth is a fact developed various classification methods to complete the sect number up to 73. Writers such as al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), al-Ājurrī (d. 360/970), Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997), and al-Saksakī (d. 683/1284) told that the main sects apart from the saved one divide into 4 subsections, and these subsections divide into 18, thus reaching the number 72 by 4x18 formula.[35] Beside these, scholars such as Abū Mutī' al-Nasafī (d. 318/930), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and some

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[31] Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad, *Faḍl al-i'tizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila wa-mubāyanatuhum li-sā'iri'l-mukhālifīn*, in *Faḍl al-i'tizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, ed. Fu'ād Sayyid (Tunis: ed-Dāru't-Tūnisiyya, 1974), 186.

[32] Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Faḍl al-i'tizāl*, 166.

[33] Al-Jābirī, *İslâm'da Siyasal Akıl*, 587-588.

[34] Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, 25.

[35] According to this classification mostly preferred by Ḥanbalite scholars, the main sects apart from the saved one that is Aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth are Rawāfiḍ, Khawārij, Qadariyya and Murji'a each of which are divided into 18 subsects whose exact names were not generally mentioned by those scholars. This classification was traced to Yūsuf b. al-Asbat (d. 192/807) by al-Ājurrī (Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ājurrī al-Baghdādī, *al-Shari'a*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Faqiyy [Beirut: Dār al-kütüb al-'ilmiyya, 1983], 15). While Watt states that the classification was attirubuted to 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) (Watt, *The Formative Period*, 58), Lewinstein indicates to

writers who had become prominent with their Ḥanafi identities, such as [Abū Shakūr al-Sālimī] al-Kashshī (ca. V/XI. cent), al-Iraqī (ca. VII/XIII cent.), Ibn Kamāl Pāshā-zāda (d. 940/1534), al-Birgivī (d. 981/1573), reach the number 72 by dividing the main sects to 6 and their subsections to 12, thus the formula of 6x12.[36] Ismā'īlī heresiographer Abū Tammām classifies the 11 main sects, apart from the saved sect Ahl al-Bāṭin, as 24 dividends of 3 major disputed subjects, and reaches the number 73 by the formula of 3x24. There are some other heresiographers that did not use similar patterns, yet reached the number 73 by various methods. For instance, al-Malaṭī (d. 377/987) divides the sects as Zanādiqa (5), Jahmiyya (8), Qadariyya (7), Murji'a (12), Rāfiḍa (15) and Ḥarūriyya (25), thus reaching up to 72. In a statement on the 73 sects ḥadīth, al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1622) said that there is a classification dividing the sects as Rawāfiḍ (20), Khawārij (20), Qadariyya (20), Murji'a (7), Najjāriyya (1), Ḍirariyya (1), Jahmiyya (1), and Qarrāmiyya (3), along with a 6x12 formula.[37]

The first writer to state that the number of sects will reach up to number 73 in the ḥadīth by citing the 73 sects ḥadīth is -*as far as we could ascertain*- al-Nāshi' al-Akbar (d. 293/906).[38]

1.1.2. Those who agree that the number 73 in the ḥadīth is a metaphor

Some heresiographers say that the number 73 in the ḥadīth does not state a fact, yet is a mere allusion on abundance as it is highly prevalent with the numbers 7, 70, 700 in Arabic language. In his work, Ibn al-Jawzī states that, although he prefers the 6x12 formula in classification of sects which he had attributed to some (uncertain) scholars, the number of sects and their viewpoints are so many that it is not possible to comprehend them all.[39]

Another heresiographer whose opinions to be cited is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). al-Rāzī, in his work *I'tiqādāt firaq al-Muslimīn wa-l-mushrikīn* states his opinion about the seventy 73 ḥadīth by organizing an imaginary question-answer format, after classifying the sects:

> Question: If one says the sects you have counted are more than seventy-three. Yet the Prophet did not voice that there would be that many, then how should one understand this ḥadīth? The answer would be: "Here, the Prophet could have meant major sects. However, the sects we have counted are not major sects.

Yūsuf b. al-Asbat, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) (Keith Lewinstein, "Notes on Eastern Ḥanafite Heresiography", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114/4 (1994), 584, fn. 9.

[36] Al-Birgivī bases the 6x12 formula on Abū Ḥanīfa, see Meḥmed b. Pīr 'Alī al-Birgivī, *Tuḥfat al-mustarshidīn fī bayān madhāhib firaq al-Muslimīn*, ed. Avni Ilhan, *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 6 (1989), 200.

[37] Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, *Fayd al-qadīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-saghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1972), 2: 20.

[38] Pseudo-al-Nāshi' al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-imāma wa-muktatafāt min al-Kitāb al-awsaṭ fī l-maqālāt*, ed. Josef van Ess (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1971), 20. Wilferd Madelung argues that this book, *Uṣūl al-niḥal* known as *Masā'il al-imāma*, was actually Ja'far b. Ḥarb's (d. 236/850) *Kitāb al-uṣūl*, and gave evidences from the text itself to ground his argument (Wilferd Madelung, "Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie: das Kitāb al-uṣūl des Ǧaʿfar b. Ḥarb?", *Der Islam* 57 [1980]: 220-236). No matter who the author of this book is, we are not be able to determine what formula the author use to reach the number 73, since the complete version of the book has not been available for us, yet.

[39] Abū l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs al-Iblīs* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-kutub al-thaqāfiyya, 1992), 19.

> Besides, he declared that there would be no fewer than seventy-three sects. If there are more sects, it does not falsify what is meant by this ḥadīth. Given that the number 73 is exceeded even though this short work does not cite many of the famed sects, what else could be meant? If we were to mention them elaborately, there could be many more than we have assumed. In fact, as there are seventy-three sects of Imāmiyya itself, there can be as many sects in any of Rāfiḍī sects.[40]

As seen, al-Rāzī proposes two approaches on this matter: one of which is that the ones mentioned in the ḥadīth can be major sects. However, al-Rāzī himself assumes the major sects as nine, if we count Ahl al-sunna as one of them, which is not mentioned in the treatise. It is seen in other heresiographical books that the number of major sects does not exceed ten. Thus, this case indicates that the number 73 cannot refer to major sects. His second approach is that the number seventy-three can be the lowest limit, meaning that the Prophet declared that the number of sects can be 73 at least, and that it cannot be fewer but more than that. Yet, whether a coherent meaning can be deduced from the ḥadīth is up for discussion.

According to al-Dawwānī (d. 908/1502), who has a different approach with regard to the number 73, it is not necessary and groundless to think that the number is lower when attributed to major sects and higher when attributed to sub sects. The number 73 can be attributed to disputed matters between the sects or it can be thought that the sects might have reached up this number at any time.[41]

1.2. Those who do not consider the 73 sects ḥadīth as authentic

After Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) stated that some people argued that those who suggest contradictory opinions on faith can be called heretics based on the ḥadīth: "*al-Qadariyya and al-Murji'a are the Zoroastrians of the umma*" and "*This umma will divide into more than 70 sects, all of them will go to Hell, except one, which will go to Heaven*", he remarked that these two ḥadīths are not authentic in terms of narrators' chain, thus it cannot be evidence even for those who consider *al-khabar al-wāḥid* as evidence.[42] Hence, in his work entitled *al-Faṣl* which includes critical knowledge and assessments on the history of Islamic sects, Ibn Ḥazm did not appeal to a method in order to classify the sects accordingly with the number 73.

Ibn al-Wazīr al-Yamānī (d. 840/1436), the famous ḥadīth critic, states that the narrative as *My umma will divide into more than 70 sects. Except one, all of them will be in Hell* is not authentic as it has a *nāṣibī*[43] in its

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[40] Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Rāzī, *I'tiqādāt firaq al-Muslimīn wa-l-mushrikīn*, ed. Muḥammad Mu'taṣim Billāh (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1986), 101-102.

[41] Abū 'Abd Allāh Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. As'ad al-Dawwānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id 'Aḍuḍiyya (Jalāl)* (Istanbul: Sa'īd Effendi, 1291 AH), 8-9.

[42] Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1975), 3: 247-248.

[43] The concept of *nāṣibī* mostly used by Shī'a for those who do not accept 'Alī as appointed *imām* by Allāh and His Messenger, instead get (*naṣb*) a leader according to their desire (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna*, 256-257) or display enmity toward 'Alī (Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr al-Anṣārī, *Lisān al-'Arab* [Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1994], 1: 762; Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr, *Mawsū'āt al-firaq al-Islāmiyya*, translated into Arabic by 'Alī Hāshim [Beirut: Majma' al-buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1995], 513; Sharīf Yaḥyā al-Amīn, *Mu'jam al-firaq al-Islāmiyya* [Beirut: Dāru'l-Aḍvā', 1986], 243). The meaning of the word is sometimes expanded to include all theological groups except for

chain and as no conditions of validity is met in the narrative by Ibn Māja; therefore, al-Bukhārī and Muslim did not write down the ḥadīth. He also emphasizes that, in the narrative form accepted as authentic by al-Tirmidhī, there is no part stating that *except one, all of them will be in hell.*[44] Besides, he says that this is a vicious addition and has no authentic basis, that it is not certain if it is a deceit of the *mulḥid*s, and that Ibn Ḥazm also does regard this addition in the ḥadīth as fabricated.[45]

1.3. Those who do not take notice of the 73 sects ḥadīth

Some heresiographers neither mention the 73 sects ḥadīth, nor try to reach up to 73 in their classifications. Al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936) is an outstanding figure in this group. He does not make a comment on the narrations about 73 sects in his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, and does not mention this ḥadīth. He divides the major sects into 10; the number of all sects he mentions well exceeds 73 with their subsects.[46] In line with this, it can be assumed that al-Ash'arī was not informed about the 73 sects ḥadīth. On the other hand, with regards to the facts that this ḥadīth is mentioned in *Musnad*[47] of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, to whom al-Ash'arī esteemed and subjected to,[48] and that al-Ash'arī lived in Baghdād in a period when Ḥanbalis were highly active, it can be thought that al-Ash'arī knew of this ḥadīth, yet he did not deem it authentic or binding or that he did not accept it as a determinative source of information in classifying sects.

Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī (d. 573/1178), famous Zaidi scholar, does not mention 73 sects ḥadīth and pay regard to the number 73 in his heresiological classification in its work entitled *al-Ḥūr al-'īn*, which contains important knowledge on religions and sects and in which he had utilized from Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī particularly on Islamic sects.

Shī'a; after all, is generally referred to those who are hostile to 'Alī and Ahl al-bayt which is meant here. Because it is told that Adhhar b. 'Abd Allāh in the narrators' chain in the mentioned narration in Abū Dāwūd (Sunna, 1) is a *nāṣibī* maligning 'Alī (Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-i'tidāl fī naqḍ al-rijāl*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī [Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1963], 1: 173).

44 Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr al-Yamānī, *el-'Awāṣim wa-l-qawāṣim fī l-dhabb 'an sunnat Abī l-Qāsim*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risāla, 1992), 3: 170.

45 Ibn al-Wazīr, *el-'Awāṣim wa-l-qawāṣim*, 1: 186, 3: 172. Ibn al-Wazīr is of the opinion that Ibn Ḥazm argues that the narrations of the 73 sects ḥadīth including the addition "*except one, all of them will be in hell*" are not authentic. However, it is not clear in Ibn Ḥazm's statements to determine what he does not consider strong enough in terms of *isnād* and then suggests that they can not be used as evidence are all narrations of the 73 sects ḥadīth or only the narrations with the additional statement as indicated by Ibn al-Wazīr. Because Ibn Ḥazm mentions the ḥadīth without giving any narrators' chain, moreover provides the text of the ḥadīth only conceptionally. Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 3: 247-248. Mevlüt Özler thinks that it is understood that Ibn Ḥazm meant all narrations in the subject when the preceding and succeeding parts (*siyāq-sibāq*) of the text and statements are evaluated in its entirety (Özler, *İslâm Düşüncesinde 73 Fırka Kavramı*, 32).

46 Cf. the whole text of al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*.

47 Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Islāmī, nd.), 2: 332; 3: 120, 145; 4: 202.

48 Al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna 'an 'us*ūl al-diy*āna* (Medina: al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya, 1975), 8.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

The 73 sects ḥadīth had a structuring effect on both the form and content of the Islamic heresiographical works and the mentalities of the writers of these works. Especially during and after the 4th/10th century, the writers who undertook the classification of the sects, except very few, could not remain indifferent to this ḥadīth, in fact, many of them accepted this ḥadīth as the benchmark forming the classification. Thus, heresiographical works, instead of identifying the theological beliefs and groups actually existing in the Muslim society, became the works that was written in order to classify these 73 sects one by one and to show how far the other sects from the righteous path, except one, of which the writer is a follower.

The effort to identify the 73 sects surpassed the research to find whether these sects actually exist, and led writers to forced activities such as creating imaginary sects and regarding the diversity in opinions on various matters as sects to reach the desired number. Also, the perception developed out of this ḥadīth which states that only one sect will reach salvation and others will go to Hell caused the writer to see his own sect at the center of truth, to canonize it above all, to belittle, and alienate other sects. According to this perspective, other sects are not regarded as the riches of the Islamic thought and the manifestation of the importance that is given to free speech by Islam, yet as some deviant sides outside of true Islamic thought. Besides, although deserving Heaven or Hell is ought to be measured by the fulfillment of responsibilities assigned to each individual by the religion, this measure is degraded to sects formed as a result of some speculative discussions and came to be measured by whether being a member of a certain sect or not. While the followers of the sect determined by the writer to be the saved one reach salvation, followers of the other 72 sects of *bid'a*, even if they fulfill their religious obligations, deserve hell for their initiation. Therefore, one cannot imagine that followers of a sect other than his can be religious and good believer. The individual is evaluated, not by his inner situation and conduct, but by the viewpoints he bears. Besides all these, the individual justifies awarding himself with the authority to adjudge who deserves Heaven or Hell with some solutions he came up as this ḥadīth allows.

In conclusion, the 73 sects ḥadīth is not a suitable benchmark in identification and classification of religious sects that emerged within the Islamic community. Instead, a researcher, whose intent is to identify and classify the religious sects, is to process the data he obtains through observation, experiment, and studies, and to suggest explicable, internally consistent and fact-related findings.

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