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## Hadith as an Epistemic Tradition: Toward a Dialogue between Classical Criticism and Modern Academic Inquiry

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### Abstract

This article examines Hadith as an epistemic tradition and proposes a dialogical framework for relating classical Hadith criticism to modern academic inquiry. The study responds to a persistent methodological tension in Hadith studies: classical criticism has often been associated with authentication, transmission reliability, and normative authority, while modern academic inquiry has emphasized historicity, textual variation, social memory, and the formation of religious authority. Rather than treating these approaches as mutually exclusive, this article investigates how they may be placed into critical and non-reductive dialogue. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative textual and conceptual design, combining close textual analysis, comparative methodological inquiry, and hermeneutical interpretation. Its primary sources include classical Hadith collections and methodological works such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *al-Risālah*, *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*, *al-'Ilal*, *Nukhbat al-Fikar*, *Fath al-Bārī*, and *al-Minhāj*. The findings show that Hadith functioned not merely as a corpus of reports, but as a structured system of knowledge production involving transmission, validation, classification, criticism, and interpretation. Classical Hadith criticism operated as an internal epistemic practice, while modern inquiry reframes Hadith through questions of historicity, textual formation, and social authority. The article contributes to Hadith studies by formulating a dialogical model based on epistemic mapping, methodological translation, critical reciprocity, and contextual application, thereby moving beyond the binary of apologetic traditionalism and sceptical historicism.

**Keywords:** Hadith studies; epistemic tradition; classical Hadith criticism; modern academic inquiry; Islamic epistemology

### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji hadis sebagai tradisi epistemik dan menawarkan kerangka dialogis untuk menghubungkan kritik hadis klasik dengan penyelidikan akademik modern. Kajian ini merespons ketegangan metodologis yang terus berlangsung dalam studi hadis: kritik klasik sering dikaitkan dengan autentikasi, reliabilitas transmisi, dan otoritas normatif, sedangkan penyelidikan akademik modern lebih menekankan historisitas, variasi tekstual, memori sosial, dan pembentukan otoritas keagamaan. Alih-alih memperlakukan kedua pendekatan tersebut sebagai sesuatu yang saling bertentangan, artikel ini menelaah bagaimana keduanya dapat ditempatkan dalam dialog yang kritis dan non-reduktif. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif tekstual dan konseptual dengan memadukan analisis tekstual mendalam, penyelidikan metodologis komparatif, dan interpretasi hermeneutik. Sumber primer yang digunakan mencakup koleksi hadis klasik dan karya metodologis seperti *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *al-Risālah*, *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*, *al-'Ilal*, *Nukhbat al-Fikar*, *Fath al-Bārī*, dan *al-Minhāj*. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hadis tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai kumpulan riwayat, tetapi sebagai sistem produksi pengetahuan yang terstruktur melalui transmisi, validasi, klasifikasi, kritik, dan interpretasi. Kritik hadis klasik beroperasi sebagai praktik epistemik internal, sementara penyelidikan modern membingkai ulang hadis melalui persoalan historisitas, pembentukan tekstual, dan otoritas sosial. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada studi hadis dengan merumuskan model dialogis berbasis pemetaan epistemik, translasi metodologis, resiprositas kritis, dan aplikasi kontekstual, sehingga melampaui dikotomi antara tradisionalisme apologetik dan historisisme skeptis.

**Kata kunci:** studi hadis; trades' epistemik; kritik hadis klasik; penyelidikan academics modern; epistemologi Isla

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## INTRODUCTION

Hadith occupies a foundational position in Islamic intellectual history, not only as a corpus of transmitted prophetic reports but also as a major epistemic medium through which Muslims have constructed religious authority, legal reasoning, theological argumentation, ethical norms, ritual practice, and communal identity. Although the Qur'an remains the supreme scriptural source in Islam, Hadith has historically functioned as a primary interpretive framework through which Qur'anic meaning, Prophetic normativity, and legal-moral guidance are elaborated across Muslim scholarly traditions. Its significance therefore cannot be reduced to textual content alone. Hadith also represents a complex tradition of transmission, authentication, classification, criticism, interpretation, and authorization. In this sense, Hadith may be approached not merely as a collection of reports but as a historically developed tradition of knowledge through which Muslim scholars formulated criteria for religious validity and epistemic authority.<sup>1</sup>

The contemporary relevance of Hadith studies has become increasingly visible in a socio-intellectual context marked by transnational Islamic education, digital religious authority, renewed debates over tradition and reform, and the contestation of religious interpretation in public life. Hadith continues to shape discussions on public ethics, family law, gender relations, religious authority, legal reasoning, and communal identity across diverse Muslim societies. At the same time, its circulation through online platforms, popular preaching, institutional fatwas, academic research, and public controversies has intensified methodological questions concerning authenticity, authority, contextualization, and interpretation. These developments require a more rigorous framework capable of addressing both the internal logic of classical Hadith criticism and the analytical demands of modern academic inquiry.

Within the classical Islamic tradition, Hadith criticism developed into a sophisticated system of knowledge validation. Muslim scholars did not treat transmitted reports as self-evidently authoritative; they constructed elaborate procedures to evaluate the reliability of transmission, the credibility of narrators, the continuity of *isnād*, the coherence of *matn*, and the presence of hidden defects. Disciplines such as *ilm al-rijāl*, *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, *ʿilal al-ḥadīth*, *muṣṭalah al-ḥadīth*, and *naqd al-matn* demonstrate that classical Hadith scholarship was not a passive act of preservation but an active epistemic enterprise. Classical critics developed normative and technical mechanisms for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable reports, thereby regulating the production and circulation of religious knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Early theoretical discussions of Hadith criticism, particularly in the writings of al-Shāfi'ī and Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, also show that the foundations of Hadith methodology emerged through complex debates over transmission, reliability, and interpretive authority.<sup>3</sup>

Recent scholarship has further complicated the assumption that classical Hadith criticism was concerned only with formal *isnād* evaluation. Studies on classical criticism indicate that both *isnād* and *matn* were subjected to critical scrutiny, especially when reports appeared to conflict with Qur'anic teachings, established legal principles, or stronger transmitted evidence. Discussions of defective narrations in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, including those associated with Qāḍī al-Muhallab and later addressed by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, reveal that classical Hadith criticism involved debate, revision, and methodological continuity rather than simple canonical closure.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, comparative studies of Ibn

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan A C Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Scott C Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad Muṣṭafā A'zamī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977); Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*; Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

<sup>3</sup> Belal Abu-Alabbas, Christopher Melchert, and Michael Dann, *Modern Hadith Studies: Continuing Debates and New Approaches* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> İ Çınar and M Günerigök, "Early and Late Period Approaches to Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī in Ḥadīth Criticism: The Case of Al-Muhallab and Ibn Ḥajar," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 66, no. 2 (2025): 1097–1126, <https://doi.org/10.33227/auifd.1727610>; S F Abbas and M A Rawabdeh, "The Concept of Munkar in Al-Dhahabī's

al-Qayyim and Mullā al-Qārī show that scholars from different theological and spiritual orientations shared certain principles of *matn* criticism, such as rejecting reports that contradict the Qur'an or more authoritative Hadith, while differing on the role of reason in evaluating transmitted texts.<sup>5</sup> These studies are important because they demonstrate that classical Hadith criticism was internally diverse and theoretically contested.

A further development in recent scholarship is the recovery of gendered contributions to Hadith criticism. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's corrections of reports transmitted by male Companions have been read as evidence of an early critical practice that examined the coherence of transmitted reports against Prophetic conduct, Qur'anic principles, and experiential knowledge of the Prophet's household.<sup>6</sup> This line of research expands the scope of classical Hadith criticism by showing that epistemic authority was not exercised only through formal male scholarly institutions, but also through early interpretive interventions by authoritative female transmitters. It also challenges readings of the Hadith tradition that overlook the role of women in shaping criteria of textual correction, interpretive balance, and ethical meaning.

Modern academic inquiry, however, has approached Hadith from a different set of questions and assumptions. Rather than asking only whether a report is authentic according to classical criteria, modern scholars have often asked how reports emerged, circulated, acquired authority, and became embedded within legal, theological, social, and political formations. Since the foundational works of Goldziher and Schacht, Western academic scholarship has frequently examined Hadith as a source for reconstructing early Islamic history, legal development, communal memory, and discursive authority.<sup>7</sup> Later scholarship complicated this skeptical paradigm by introducing more nuanced approaches to transmission, dating, and textual formation. Juynboll developed common-link analysis, Motzki advanced *isnād-cum-matn* analysis as a more historically sensitive method, and Schoeler demonstrated the complex interaction between oral and written transmission in early Islam.<sup>8</sup> These studies show that modern Hadith scholarship has moved beyond simple dismissal or acceptance of Hadith reports and has developed a spectrum of historical, philological, textual, and sociological methods.

The emergence of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis illustrates the continuing methodological vitality of Hadith studies. This method compares patterns of transmission with textual variants in order to reconstruct probable layers of transmission and assess the historical development of reports. It has been used to challenge overly skeptical assumptions about the late fabrication of Hadith while also avoiding uncritical acceptance of classical authentication categories.<sup>9</sup> In recent decades, such approaches have encouraged scholars to examine Hadith not merely as isolated texts but as transmitted traditions shaped by networks of narrators, textual variants, legal debates, and social contexts. This development

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Critique of Al-Hākīm's Hadith Authentication in Al-Mustadrak," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 545–68, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6267>.

<sup>5</sup> N.M.A.M. Razak et al., "Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism: From Classical to Contemporary Approaches," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 2025, 15–29, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJATSI122025-2>.

<sup>6</sup> H Afifah et al., "Re-Examining Prophetic Traditions: A Feminist Theological Analysis of Gender Construction in Islamic Hadith Literature," *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.58256/90size568>; Y Rahman and E Nurtawab, "WESTERN QUR'ANIC STUDIES IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES Responses, Contestations, and Curriculum Politics," *Al-Jami'ah* 62, no. 2 (2024): 337–61, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.622.337-361>.

<sup>7</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1890); Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

<sup>8</sup> G H A Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, *Die Ältesten Berichte Über Das Leben Muḥammads: Das Korpus 'Urwa Ibn Az-Zubair* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2011); Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

indicates that Hadith studies remain a dynamic intellectual arena in which classical Islamic methods and modern academic approaches continue to be contested, revised, and reconfigured.

Contemporary scholarship has also begun to explore hybrid approaches that combine classical Hadith tools with modern contextual analysis. Some studies incorporate *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, linguistic analysis, and social contextualization in order to broaden the scope of Hadith interpretation beyond formal authentication alone.<sup>10</sup> In Southeast Asian contexts, institutional adaptations by organizations such as *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* illustrate how classical methodologies may be reworked through contextual *ijtihād*, thematic analysis, and responses to contemporary socio-religious problems.<sup>11</sup> These developments show that Hadith studies is not limited to the reconstruction of early transmission history; it is also implicated in living interpretive communities that negotiate continuity, reform, authority, and public relevance.

Another emerging trend is the use of computational and digital methods in Hadith studies. Recent studies have explored AI-enhanced *isnād* and *matn* analysis, including the use of BERT-based models and other computational tools to encode aspects of classical principles in digital form.<sup>12</sup> This development has methodological significance because it reveals both the possibilities and limitations of digitizing classical Hadith criticism. On the one hand, computational approaches may help process large corpora, detect transmission patterns, and identify textual similarities. On the other hand, they risk reproducing structural imbalances if they privilege *isnād*-based data while neglecting semantic, hermeneutical, juridical, and contextual dimensions of Hadith interpretation. The rise of digital Hadith analysis therefore intensifies rather than resolves the need for an explicit epistemological framework.

Despite these scholarly advances, a persistent theoretical tension remains. Classical Hadith criticism and modern academic inquiry often operate according to different epistemic assumptions. Classical criticism is primarily concerned with the acceptability of reports within an Islamic normative framework, using criteria such as narrator reliability, continuity of transmission, absence of contradiction, and freedom from hidden defects. Modern academic inquiry, by contrast, often treats Hadith as historical data, textual tradition, social memory, legal discourse, or constructed authority, using tools such as source criticism, historical criticism, textual criticism, discourse analysis, and sociology of knowledge. The difference between these approaches is therefore not merely technical but epistemological. Classical criticism asks how transmitted knowledge may be validated within a tradition of religious authority, whereas modern inquiry asks how transmitted knowledge may be historically situated, critically reconstructed, and analytically explained.

Previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding this tension, but they have often moved within separate scholarly trajectories. One trend has emphasized the internal sophistication of classical Hadith criticism, defending the methodological rigor of Muslim scholars against the assumption that premodern authentication was merely credulous or uncritical.<sup>13</sup> A second

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<sup>10</sup> K H Bin Jamil, "Between Traditionalising and Futuring: Applying The Broader Maqasid Paradigm to Hadith Studies," *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education* 39, no. 2 (2024): 183–96, <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2024.39.2.10>; N.M.A.M. Razak, M A Nazri, and L A Majid, "Textual Criticism of Hadith in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Comparative Analysis of Salafi and Sufi Approaches," *AlBayan* 23, no. 3 (2025): 578–601, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12342309>.

<sup>11</sup> A Ahmad, E Hafid, and A B Fatmal, "The Development of Hadith Studies in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 15, no. 2 (2025): 227–55, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v15i2.227-255>; R M Fatkhi and H Firdausy, "Stagnant Textualism and Epistemological Crisis: Revisiting Hadith Scholarship in Indonesia's Islamic Universities," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 27, no. 1 (2026): 303–26, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v27i1.6727>.

<sup>12</sup> N Afifi Alit et al., "Exploring Trends and Themes of Hadith Authentication Research: A Bibliometric Analysis and Future Agenda," *AlBayan* 24, no. 1 (2026): 127–61, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12342317>; A M Azmi, A O Al-Qabbany, and A Hussain, "Computational and Natural Language Processing Based Studies of Hadith Literature: A Survey," *Artificial Intelligence Review* 52, no. 2 (2019): 1369–1414, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-019-09692-w>.

<sup>13</sup> A'zamī, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*; Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*; Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

trend has focused on the historical formation of Hadith, examining oral and written transmission, dating, common links, legal projection, and the relationship between Hadith and early Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>14</sup> A third trend has sought to move beyond the binary of traditional acceptance and radical skepticism through more integrated tools, especially *isnād-cum-matn* analysis.<sup>15</sup> A fourth and more recent trend examines contextual, institutional, gendered, and computational developments in Hadith studies.<sup>16</sup> Although these bodies of scholarship have advanced the field, they have not sufficiently theorized Hadith itself as an epistemic tradition capable of mediating between internal Islamic criticism and modern academic inquiry.

The unresolved problem, therefore, is not simply whether classical or modern approaches are more reliable, but how their respective epistemic assumptions can be made explicit and brought into critical relation. Modernist approaches often emphasize rational criticism, contextual interpretation, and re-authentication, while traditionalist approaches tend to preserve inherited categories of authenticity and authority. Emerging proposals such as Critical Hadith Studies attempt to move beyond descriptive narration by integrating epistemic, juridical, and contemporary analytical concerns. Yet a systematic dialogical framework remains underdeveloped. Without such a framework, classical criticism may be reduced to apologetic preservation, while modern inquiry may be reduced to skeptical reconstruction. Both reductions obscure the fact that tradition itself contains critical procedures and that modern critique also operates within historically situated assumptions.

This study identifies a conceptual and methodological gap in contemporary Hadith scholarship. Existing literature has extensively examined classical authentication methods, modern historical-critical approaches, contextual readings, institutional adaptations, gendered interventions, and computational tools. However, relatively limited attention has been given to conceptualizing Hadith as an epistemic tradition in which transmission, criticism, authority, classification, interpretation, and contextual application operate as interconnected modes of knowledge production. The gap is therefore not the absence of studies on Hadith criticism, but the absence of a sufficiently articulated theoretical model that explains how classical criticism and modern academic inquiry can engage each other without reducing one to the other.

The theoretical foundation of this article rests on the concept of Hadith as an epistemic tradition. By epistemic tradition, this study refers to a historically developed system through which a scholarly community produces, transmits, validates, contests, classifies, and interprets knowledge. This concept draws on three interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, Islamic epistemology provides a framework for understanding Hadith criticism as a discipline concerned with knowledge validation, authority, reliability, and transmission.<sup>17</sup> Second, hermeneutics helps explain how Hadith meaning is

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<sup>14</sup> Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith*; Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*; Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*.

<sup>15</sup> Görke and Schoeler, *Die Ältesten Berichte Über Das Leben Muhammads: Das Korpus 'Urwa Ibn Az-Zubair*; Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

<sup>16</sup> Azmi, Al-Qabbany, and Hussain, "Computational and Natural Language Processing Based Studies of Hadith Literature: A Survey"; S Rehman, *Gendering the Hadith Tradition: Recentring the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers*, *Gendering the Hadith Tradition: Recentring the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192865984.001.0001>; Afifah et al., "Re-Examining Prophetic Traditions: A Feminist Theological Analysis of Gender Construction in Islamic Hadith Literature"; Ahmad, Hafid, and Fatmal, "The Development of Hadith Studies in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama"; Fatkhi and Firdausy, "Stagnant Textualism and Epistemological Crisis: Revisiting Hadith Scholarship in Indonesia's Islamic Universities"; Afifi Alit et al., "Exploring Trends and Themes of Hadith Authentication Research: A Bibliometric Analysis and Future Agenda."

<sup>17</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993); Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Brill, 2007).

shaped through the interaction between text, transmitter, interpreter, context, and tradition.<sup>18</sup> Third, the sociology of knowledge enables the study to situate Hadith transmission and criticism within broader networks of scholarly authority, institutional formation, communal memory, and discursive power.<sup>19</sup> These perspectives are appropriate because the central problem of the article concerns not merely authentication, but the production, validation, interpretation, and circulation of religious knowledge.

Based on this framework, the article addresses three research questions. First, how can Hadith be conceptualized as an epistemic tradition rather than merely a corpus of transmitted reports? Second, what epistemic assumptions and critical procedures underlie classical Hadith criticism? Third, how can classical Hadith criticism and modern academic inquiry be placed in a productive and non-reductive dialogue for contemporary Hadith studies? These questions are designed to move the discussion beyond the conventional authenticity debate and toward a broader methodological reflection on Hadith as a tradition of knowledge.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to conceptualize Hadith as an epistemic tradition that includes mechanisms of transmission, validation, classification, criticism, interpretation, and contextual application. Second, it seeks to analyze the epistemic logic of classical Hadith criticism, especially its concern with *isnād*, narrator reliability, hidden defects, *matn* coherence, and the regulation of religious authority. Third, it formulates a dialogical framework through which classical criticism and modern academic inquiry may interact without reducing either tradition to the assumptions of the other. This framework does not propose a simple synthesis between Islamic tradition and modern scholarship; rather, it clarifies the conditions under which both may engage in critical reciprocity.

This study lies in its attempt to reframe Hadith studies beyond two dominant but limited paradigms: apologetic traditionalism and skeptical historicism. Its theoretical contribution is the conceptualization of Hadith as an epistemic tradition, rather than merely as a textual corpus or an object of authenticity debates. Its methodological novelty lies in proposing a dialogical model that connects classical Hadith criticism with modern academic inquiry through epistemic mapping, methodological translation, critical reciprocity, and contextual application. By doing so, the article contributes to international scholarship in Hadith studies, Islamic hermeneutics, Qur'anic studies, and interdisciplinary Islamic textual studies by offering a non-reductive framework for studying the transmission, authority, historicity, and interpretation of Hadith in both classical and modern scholarly contexts.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual and conceptual research design that combines textual analysis, comparative methodological inquiry, and hermeneutical interpretation. This design is appropriate because the article aims to conceptualize Hadith as an epistemic tradition and to formulate a dialogical framework between classical Hadith criticism and modern academic inquiry. The study does not examine statistical variables, but analyzes textual evidence, methodological concepts, epistemic assumptions, and interpretive structures embedded in classical and modern Hadith scholarship. Qualitative inquiry is therefore suitable because it emphasizes meaning, context, interpretation, and conceptual depth.<sup>20</sup>

The primary sources consist of classical Hadith collections and methodological works, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risālah*, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī's *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*, al-Dāraquṭnī's *al-'Ilal*, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *Nukhbat al-Fikar* and *Fath al-Bārī*, and al-Nawawī's *al-Minhāj*. These sources were

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<sup>18</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>19</sup> Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Anchor Books, 1966); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018); Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, 2018).

selected because they contain foundational discussions on transmission, narrator evaluation, textual criticism, hidden defects, classification, and interpretive authority in classical Hadith scholarship. Secondary sources are used to situate the analysis within modern academic debates on Hadith authenticity, historicity, transmission, and interpretation. These include works by Goldziher, Schacht, Juynboll, Motzki, Schoeler, A'zamī, Lucas, and Brown, as well as theoretical works on Islamic epistemology, hermeneutics, and sociology of knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

The analytical framework consists of three perspectives. Islamic epistemology is used to examine how classical Hadith criticism constructs valid knowledge through transmission, reliability, authority, and classification.<sup>22</sup> Hermeneutics is used to analyze how Hadith meaning is shaped through the interaction between text, transmitter, interpreter, tradition, and context.<sup>23</sup> Sociology of knowledge is used to situate Hadith transmission within scholarly networks, institutions, and authority structures.<sup>24</sup> Data were collected through purposive textual sampling. The selected texts were chosen because they are directly relevant to the study's focus on *isnād*, *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, *ilm al-rijāl*, *ilal al-ḥadīth*, *naqd al-matn*, Hadith classification, and reports concerning the writing of Hadith. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research when sources are selected for their relevance and information-rich character.<sup>25</sup>

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, conceptual mapping was used to identify the epistemic assumptions of classical Hadith criticism. Second, close textual analysis was applied to selected primary sources. Third, comparative methodological analysis examined the relationship between classical criticism and modern academic inquiry. Fourth, a dialogical framework was formulated through epistemic mapping, methodological translation, critical reciprocity, and contextual application. This modification is justified because the study seeks to move beyond the separation between classical authentication and modern historical criticism. The study has several limitations. It does not survey the entire Hadith corpus, does not conduct a full *isnād-cum-matn* reconstruction, and does not employ digital corpus analysis. Its contribution is primarily conceptual and methodological: to propose a non-reductive framework for understanding Hadith as an epistemic tradition and for placing classical criticism and modern academic inquiry into productive dialogue.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hadith as an Epistemic Tradition: Transmission, Authority, and Knowledge Validation

The principal finding of this section is that Hadith should be understood not merely as a corpus of transmitted prophetic reports, but as an epistemic tradition through which Muslim scholars developed structured mechanisms for producing, transmitting, validating, contesting, and interpreting religious knowledge. This finding is fundamental to the article because it shifts the analytical focus from Hadith as a static textual archive to Hadith as a historically organized system of knowledge. In the classical Islamic tradition, Hadith functioned simultaneously as text, memory, authority, method, and communal discipline. Its epistemic significance lies not only in what was transmitted, but also in how transmission was regulated, who was authorized to transmit, what counted as reliable knowledge, and how transmitted reports were evaluated before entering the domain of religious normativity.

The primary textual evidence for this claim appears clearly in the introduction to *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, where Muslim records the famous statement "*al-isnād min al-dīn*", that the chain of transmission is part of religion. Muslim also transmits reports from Ibn Sīrīn and Ibn al-Mubārak indicating that early

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<sup>21</sup> Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*; Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith*; Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*; Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*; Görke and Schoeler, *Die Ältesten Berichte Über Das Leben Muḥammads: Das Korpus 'Urwa Ibn Az-Zubair*; Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

<sup>22</sup> Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*; Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*; Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*.

<sup>24</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Sage Publications, 2015).

Muslim scholars intensified their scrutiny of transmitters after the emergence of civil strife, asking narrators to identify their authorities before reports could be accepted.<sup>26</sup> This evidence shows that transmission was not treated as a neutral act of communication. It was an epistemically regulated process. A report was not accepted merely because it circulated within the community; it had to pass through a recognized structure of attribution, scrutiny, and validation. The central question was therefore not only whether a statement existed, but whether its route of transmission could sustain religious authority.

This pattern corresponds to broader studies of religious knowledge transmission, which show that religious traditions often rely on hierarchical, oral, textual, and institutional mechanisms to regulate authority. In Islamic contexts, the transmission of *turāth* through *pesantren* education, for example, demonstrates how religious reasoning is validated through institutionalized pedagogy, textual management, and chains of scholarly authority.<sup>27</sup> More broadly, traditional Islamic knowledge systems have historically attached authority to oral transmission, ritualized learning, and sacred textual reference, especially the Qur'an and Hadith.<sup>28</sup> The Hadith tradition therefore represents a particularly refined case of religious epistemology: it did not merely preserve inherited material, but developed procedures for determining which transmissions could become authoritative knowledge.

The epistemic orientation of Hadith is also visible in al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risālah*, where the authority of Prophetic reports is linked to reliable transmission and to the binding function of the Sunnah in legal reasoning.<sup>29</sup> Al-Shāfi'ī's discussion indicates that Hadith was already embedded within a broader theory of knowledge, law, and normativity. He was not concerned simply with collecting reports, but with establishing the conditions under which transmitted knowledge could function as legal proof. This is crucial for understanding Hadith as an epistemic tradition: narration, authority, interpretation, and normativity were not separate elements but interdependent components of a single scholarly system.

A similar structure appears in al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī's *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, which organizes Hadith knowledge into multiple branches, including knowledge of the Companions, Successors, narrator reliability, modes of transmission, hidden defects, unusual reports, and classifications of authenticity.<sup>30</sup> The organization of this work is itself a significant piece of evidence. It demonstrates that classical Hadith scholarship did not regard Hadith as a simple archive of sayings, but as a field requiring specialized competence, technical classification, and methodological discipline. The classification of Hadith knowledge into distinct sciences reflects a systematic effort to transform transmitted memory into regulated knowledge.

This finding refines previous scholarship on Hadith authority. Brown argues that Hadith became one of the central institutions of Islamic normativity because it mediated the relationship between Prophetic memory and later Muslim legal, theological, and ethical life.<sup>31</sup> Lucas similarly emphasizes that early Sunni Hadith critics were not passive transmitters but constructive agents in the articulation of Sunni Islam.<sup>32</sup> The primary data from Muslim, al-Shāfi'ī, and al-Ḥākim support these arguments, but they also extend them by showing that the epistemic function of Hadith lies in the integration of transmission, validation, classification, contestation, and interpretation. Hadith authority

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<sup>26</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1955).

<sup>27</sup> S A Widodo, M N Mubin, and T Pransiska, "Reproducing Islamic Knowledge in Indonesian Pesantren: Turāt, Textual Tradition, and Epistemic Continuity," *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2026.2659837>.

<sup>28</sup> B S Turner, "Religious Authority and the New Media," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 117–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001>.

<sup>29</sup> Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *Al-Risālah*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1940).

<sup>30</sup> Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm Al-Ḥadīth* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

<sup>32</sup> Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*.

was not produced by transmission alone; it emerged through disciplined procedures that distinguished reliable knowledge from unreliable circulation.

The issue of validation also reveals why Hadith criticism should be read as a form of religious epistemology rather than merely as a technical apparatus. Religious knowledge traditions often face the problem of maintaining epistemic integrity while navigating internal tensions, competing authorities, and divergent claims to truth. Greco's discussion of rational faith and superstition highlights how religious traditions may transmit both rationally disciplined belief and problematic inherited assumptions within the same communal framework, thereby requiring mechanisms of internal correction.<sup>33</sup> In Hadith studies, the sciences of transmission, narrator evaluation, and textual criticism served precisely this corrective function. They were designed to prevent all inherited speech from being treated as equally authoritative.

The question of epistemic authority is therefore central. In long-standing religious communities, deference to tradition may function as a form of intellectual humility because later interpreters recognize that they inherit knowledge from disciplined communities of transmission.<sup>34</sup> Yet such deference may also produce epistemic risks when it excludes alternative voices or marginalizes certain knowers from interpretive authority.<sup>35</sup> This tension is relevant to Hadith because classical transmission systems generated authority through chains of narrators, scholarly recognition, and institutional continuity. At the same time, the tradition also contains internal mechanisms of contestation, including criticism of transmitters, rejection of defective reports, disagreement over classification, and debate over interpretation. Hadith as an epistemic tradition is therefore neither a closed authority structure nor an unregulated archive; it is a contested system of knowledge validation.

This point can be further clarified through contemporary discussions of epistemic goods and reliable sources of knowledge. Jäger argues that epistemic authority involves identifying reliable sources and explaining the mechanisms through which epistemic goods such as truth, understanding, and justification are transmitted.<sup>36</sup> Classical Hadith criticism may be understood in this sense as a tradition concerned with the transmission of epistemic goods. Its focus on *isnād*, narrator reliability, precision, continuity, corroboration, and defect detection reflects an attempt to secure the conditions under which transmitted reports could be treated as religiously meaningful and epistemically warranted.

However, this epistemic structure also raises questions of exclusion, credibility, and justice. Contemporary theories of epistemic injustice show that certain groups may be denied credibility as knowers because of social, cultural, institutional, or interpretive biases.<sup>37</sup> In religious traditions, such exclusions may occur when dominant structures of authority suppress alternative epistemologies or marginalize non-dominant voices.<sup>38</sup> Although this article does not treat Hadith criticism primarily as a study of epistemic injustice, the concept is analytically useful because it reminds us that systems of

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<sup>33</sup> J Greco, "Transmitting Faith (And Garbage)," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (2018): 85–104, <https://doi.org/10.24204/EJPR.V10I3.2604>.

<sup>34</sup> T Merrick, "Non-Deference to Religious Authority: Epistemic Arrogance or Justice?," in *Voices from the Edge: Centring Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*, 2020, 97–118, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198848844.003.0005>.

<sup>35</sup> Merrick; P Carlisle, "Mental Health and Spirituality—through the Lens of Epistemic Injustice," *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2026.2615282>.

<sup>36</sup> C Jäger, "Epistemic Authority," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology*, 2025, 63–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190949945.013.4>.

<sup>37</sup> K Bennett, "Towards an Epistemological Monoculture: Mechanisms of Epistemicide in European Research Publication," in *English as a Scientific and Research Language: Debates and Discourses: English in Europe, Volume 2, vol. 3, 2015, 9–35*, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84957940417&partnerID=40&md5=8c497566245713c3ab3866057cc43dfe>; J Medina, "Epistemic Injustice and Epistemologies of Ignorance," in *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race*, 2017, 247–60, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315884424>.

<sup>38</sup> Merrick, "Non-Deference to Religious Authority: Epistemic Arrogance or Justice?"; Carlisle, "Mental Health and Spirituality—through the Lens of Epistemic Injustice."

religious knowledge validation do not simply transmit truth; they also organize credibility, hierarchy, and access to authority. This is why Hadith must be studied not only as text but also as an epistemic field in which authority is produced, contested, and regulated.

From the perspective of Islamic epistemology, this finding is especially important. Islamic intellectual traditions historically sought to integrate religious, rational, ethical, and sometimes natural forms of knowledge within a cohesive metaphysical order, even though modern readings often fragment these dimensions.<sup>39</sup> Hadith criticism belongs to this broader epistemic landscape because it connects transmitted reports with legal reasoning, theological coherence, ethical normativity, communal practice, and interpretive authority. Its function is not reducible to archival preservation. Rather, it organizes a mode of knowing in which truth claims are mediated through transmission, discipline, and communal verification.

The sociology of knowledge further explains why Hadith authority depended on institutions, networks, and practices of legitimation. Berger and Luckmann argue that knowledge becomes socially authoritative through processes of institutionalization, transmission, and legitimation.<sup>40</sup> Applied to Hadith, this means that the authority of a report was not produced solely by its content, but also by the recognized structures through which it was transmitted, taught, classified, and interpreted. Turner's analysis of religious authority and global knowledge networks is also relevant here: while traditional religious systems depend on structured modes of transmission, digital platforms have increasingly disrupted older forms of authority by democratizing access to religious knowledge and weakening established mechanisms of validation.<sup>41</sup> This contemporary disruption makes the classical Hadith model of epistemic regulation newly significant, not because it can be mechanically reproduced, but because it demonstrates the necessity of disciplined validation in conditions of uncontrolled circulation.

The finding also has implications for debates on faith, reason, and the validation of religious knowledge. Chen's study of Sino-Christian theology shows that religious epistemic frameworks often seek to balance personal belief with disciplinary knowledge and scholarly accountability.<sup>42</sup> Maslov similarly points to the problem of epistemic disagreement among religious communities and the difficulty of verifying religious truth claims from an outsider's perspective.<sup>43</sup> Hadith studies faces a comparable challenge: classical criticism validates reports within an internal Islamic framework, while modern academic inquiry often evaluates them through historical, textual, or sociological criteria. Recognizing Hadith as an epistemic tradition helps clarify this tension because it shows that Hadith criticism is neither merely subjective belief nor purely external historical data. It is a disciplined tradition of knowledge with its own criteria of reliability, authority, and validation.

These finding answers part of the article's first research question: how can Hadith be conceptualized as an epistemic tradition rather than merely a corpus of transmitted reports? The evidence indicates that Hadith became authoritative through a structured ecology of transmission, classification, criticism, and interpretation. Muslim's emphasis on *isnād*, al-Shāfi'ī's theory of transmitted legal proof, and al-Ḥākim's systematization of Hadith sciences all point to the same pattern: Hadith was constituted as knowledge through regulated procedures. This pattern also explains why modern academic inquiry should not treat Hadith merely as isolated textual data. To study Hadith adequately, one must examine the procedures, assumptions, institutions, hierarchies, and classifications through which transmitted reports became religiously and intellectually authoritative.

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<sup>39</sup> J E B Lombard, "Islam and the Challenge of Epistemic Sovereignty," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040406>.

<sup>40</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

<sup>41</sup> Turner, "Religious Authority and the New Media."

<sup>42</sup> Y Chen, "Sino-Christian Theology's Epistemological Position," *Logos and Pneuma - Chinese Journal of Theology*, no. 39 (2013): 239–60, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84882242484&partnerID=40&md5=ec506ce00dd1faf264da8000445a0dc7>.

<sup>43</sup> D Maslov, "Critique of the Testimonial Knowledge from the Outsider's Point of View: The Luck Argument and the Problem of Disagreement," *Epistemology and Philosophy of Science* 53, no. 3 (2017): 76–82, <https://doi.org/10.5840/eps201753348>.

The methodological implication is therefore substantial. If Hadith is approached as an epistemic tradition, then the study of Hadith requires more than authentication, more than historical reconstruction, and more than textual interpretation in isolation. It requires a framework capable of analyzing the interaction between transmission, authority, validation, institutional memory, and interpretive contestation. Hadith is best understood as an epistemic tradition because it embodies a historically developed system for regulating religious knowledge: a system in which transmission is never merely communication, authority is never merely inheritance, and validation is never merely classification, but part of a broader intellectual process through which Muslim scholars determined what could count as reliable religious knowledge.

### **Classical Hadith Criticism as Internal Epistemic Practice**

The central debate addressed in this section concerns whether classical Hadith criticism should be understood primarily as an *isnād*-centered mechanism of preservation or as a broader internal epistemic practice that combined transmitter evaluation, textual scrutiny, defect analysis, and interpretive judgment. The findings of this study support the second position. Classical Hadith criticism did not merely protect inherited reports through formal chains of transmission; it developed a layered system of epistemic accountability through which transmitted knowledge was examined before it could function as authoritative religious knowledge. This argument challenges reductive readings that portray classical Hadith scholarship as mechanically dependent on *isnād* continuity alone and instead situates it as a complex practice of validation involving both persons and texts.

A major trend in previous scholarship has emphasized the centrality of *isnād* as the defining feature of Hadith criticism. This position is justified to the extent that chains of transmission were indispensable to early Hadith authentication and became one of the most distinctive features of Islamic scholarly culture.<sup>44</sup> The importance of *isnād* is evident in the structure of canonical collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, where reports are transmitted through carefully selected chains. The opening report of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, “*innamā al-a‘māl bi al-niyyāt*,” transmitted from ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, is methodologically significant not simply because of its ethical content, but because its placement foregrounds the relationship between intention, transmission discipline, and epistemic responsibility.<sup>45</sup> Al-Bukhārī’s arrangement suggests that Hadith knowledge begins with disciplined transmission, but it also implies that transmission itself must be embedded within a moral and scholarly order.

Yet the findings also refine the *isnād*-centered trend by showing that classical criticism cannot be reduced to chain analysis alone. Muslim’s *Muqaddimah* explicitly warns against careless transmission and insists on distinguishing trustworthy narrators from unreliable ones (Muslim, 1955). This indicates that the chain was not treated as a merely formal sequence of names. It required evaluation of the transmitters’ moral integrity, memory, precision, and transmission conduct. The science of *jarḥ wa ta‘dīl* therefore functioned as an epistemic mechanism for determining whether a narrator could serve as a reliable carrier of religious knowledge. Studies on narrator criticism confirm that classical scholars assessed transmitters through criteria such as uprightness (*‘adāla*) and precision (*dabt*), while also developing technical vocabularies for degrees of reliability and weakness.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> J A C Brown, “How We Know Early Hadīth Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It’s so Hard to Find,” *Islamic Law and Society* 15, no. 2 (2008): 143–84, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851908X290574>; U M Noor and M N Sahad, “The Salafis and the Preservation of Isnād Tradition,” *Kemanusiaan* 27, no. 2 (2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.21315/KAJH2020.27.2.1>; M A M Ali et al., “Al-Jarh Wa Al-Ta‘dīl (Criticism and Praise): It’s Significant in the Science of Hadith,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 2S1 (2015): 284–92, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n2s1p284>.

<sup>45</sup> Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ Al-Musnad Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> M S S Salih and M M Ibrahim, “Examples of Errant Narrators According to Ibn Ḥibbān in His Work Al-Majrūḥīn: A Comparative Study,” *Dragoman* 2025, no. 17 (2025): 459–87, <https://doi.org/10.63132/ati.2025.exempl.43328934>; M Mehfooz, “Women and Hadith Transmission: Prolific Role of Aisha in Validation and Impugnment of Prophetic Traditions,” *AlBayan* 19, no. 2 (2021): 200–227, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340099>; M Amin Abdullah, “Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated,

The biographical evidence preserved in Ibn Abī Hātim's *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl* reinforces this point. The work records extensive evaluations of transmitters, including judgments such as trustworthy, weak, unknown, abandoned, confused, or reliable under certain conditions. This reveals a form of source criticism rooted in personal reliability, ethical credibility, and transmission accuracy. However, it differs from modern source criticism because its purpose was not merely to reconstruct historical origins but to protect the normative reliability of transmitted religious knowledge. Recent studies on the terminology of narrator criticism, including discussions of terms such as *wahm* and *tālif* in the works of Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Dhahabī, show that classical critics worked with a nuanced evaluative vocabulary rather than a simple binary of reliable and unreliable narrators.<sup>47</sup>

Another scholarly trend has stressed the need to recover *matn* criticism as an essential dimension of classical Hadith methodology. This trend responds to the assumption that Muslim critics privileged external transmission over internal textual coherence. The findings of this study support that corrective position. Classical scholars did not evaluate Hadith solely by asking whether the chain appeared continuous; they also considered whether the report's content cohered with the Qur'an, stronger Hadith evidence, established legal principles, reason, historical plausibility, and broader theological meaning.<sup>48</sup> This is why *matn* criticism should not be treated as an external modern addition to Hadith studies. It was already present within the classical tradition, even if it was sometimes expressed through the language of *isnād*, narrator error, contradiction, anomaly, or hidden defect.

The role of *matn* criticism is particularly important because it clarifies the hermeneutical dimension of classical Hadith evaluation. Reports were not assessed as isolated units of language; they were interpreted in relation to a wider scriptural and normative field. Studies on Ibn al-Qayyim and Mullā al-Qārī show that scholars from different intellectual orientations could share principles such as rejecting narrations that contradict the Qur'an or stronger Hadith evidence, while differing over the extent to which reason should function as a criterion of criticism.<sup>49</sup> This indicates that classical *matn* criticism was not a single uniform method but a contested interpretive practice. It also helps explain why modern discussions of Hadith criticism cannot simply oppose "traditional transmission" to "rational analysis." Rational evaluation, textual coherence, and normative consistency were already part of internal debates, although they were framed through classical categories.

The contribution of female authorities further complicates the assumption that classical Hadith criticism was exclusively institutional, male, or transmitter centered. Reports of 'Ā'ishah's corrections of male Companions' narrations have been interpreted as early examples of critical engagement with transmitted material, especially where reports appeared to conflict with Qur'anic principles, Prophetic practice, or her direct knowledge of the Prophet's household.<sup>50</sup> This evidence expands the meaning of internal epistemic practice. It suggests that Hadith criticism involved not only formal chains and later technical classifications, but also embodied knowledge, proximity to Prophetic practice, interpretive

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Interconnected Paradigm of Science," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012): 175–203, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2012.501.175-203>; P Pavlovitch, "The Life and Works of Abū Al-Ḥusayn 'Abd Al-Bāqī b. Qānī'," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 1 (2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.141.1.0001>; P Pavlovitch, "Inna Hādhā 'L-'ilma Dīnun Fa-'Nzurū 'amman Ta'khudhūna-Hu: Religion, Knowledge Of Transmitters, And The Tyranny Of The High Isnād," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2022, no. 52 (2022): 211–71, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85153743314&partnerID=40&md5=9ebe5da0c6a3f0fe6997d4d369632306>.

<sup>47</sup> 'Alī ibn 'Umar al-Dāraqūṭnī, *Al-'Ilal Al-Wāridah Fī Al-Aḥādīth Al-Nabawīyyah* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1985); Salih and Ibrahim, "Examples of Errant Narrators According to Ibn Ḥibbān in His Work Al-Majrūhīn: A Comparative Study."

<sup>48</sup> Razak et al., "Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism: From Classical to Contemporary Approaches"; M A Çalgan, "Analysis of Ibn Kathīr's Content Criticism of Some of the Sahīhayn Ḥadīths in the Sīra Section of Al-Bidāya Wan Nihāya," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 28, no. 1 (2024): 303–24, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1430992>.

<sup>49</sup> Razak et al., "Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism: From Classical to Contemporary Approaches."

<sup>50</sup> Mehfooz, "Women and Hadith Transmission: Prolific Role of Aisha in Validation and Impugment of Prophetic Traditions"; Rehman, *Gendering the Hadith Tradition: Recentring the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers*.

competence, and corrective authority. The findings therefore refine scholarship on *jarḥ wa ta'dīl* and *matn* criticism by showing that credibility in the Hadith tradition was negotiated through multiple forms of knowledge, not solely through institutionalized male scholarly transmission.

The discipline of *'ilal al-ḥadīth* provides the strongest evidence against the claim that classical Hadith criticism was mechanically formalist. Al-Dāraquṭnī's *al-'Ilal* investigates subtle flaws in reports whose outward chains may appear sound, including interrupted transmission, mistaken attribution, narrator confusion, textual variation, and hidden inconsistencies.<sup>51</sup> The very existence of this discipline demonstrates that a formally acceptable *isnād* did not automatically guarantee epistemic security. Recent scholarship similarly emphasizes that *'ilal* analysis addresses subtle defects in both *isnād* and *matn*, and that scholars such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Muhallab identified problems even in narrations associated with major canonical collections.<sup>52</sup> This pattern shows that classical criticism preserved a space for post-canonical scrutiny and internal debate, rather than treating canonization as the end of critical evaluation.

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's systematic classification in *Nukhbat al-Fikar* and its explanatory tradition further demonstrates that classical Hadith criticism operated through a sophisticated epistemic grammar. Categories such as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *ḍa'īf*, *mutawātir*, *āḥād*, *shādhdh*, *munkar*, *mu'allal*, *mudraj*, *maqlūb*, and *muḍṭarib* indicate that Hadith evaluation involved multiple degrees of probability, reliability, anomaly, textual interference, and transmission instability.<sup>53</sup> A report was not judged by a single criterion, but through the combined assessment of continuity, narrator credibility, precision, corroboration, contradiction, anomaly, and hidden defect. This classificatory structure supports the argument that classical Hadith criticism was a disciplined epistemic practice rather than a simple mechanism of preservation.

The findings also nuance contemporary debates over the strengths and limitations of *isnād*-based approaches. Recent computational studies have attempted to model *isnād* networks through AI, fuzzy logic, and other digital tools to assess narrator reliability and transmission patterns.<sup>54</sup> These developments show that *isnād* remains analytically productive even in modern research environments. However, they also expose the danger of over-reliance on structural chain analysis without adequate attention to *matn*, context, hermeneutics, and legal-theological function.<sup>55</sup> The article's findings therefore support the continued importance of *isnād* analysis, but only when it is situated within a broader epistemic framework that includes narrator criticism, textual scrutiny, defect analysis, and interpretive judgment.

The same point applies to debates over compiler selectivity and narrator inclusion. Studies of narrator reliability show that some transmitters judged reliable in one context may be excluded from major collections because of the selective methodologies of specific compilers, while works such as Ibn Mājah's collection may include controversial narrators in ways that reflect a more complex balance between transmission scrutiny and social-historical realities.<sup>56</sup> This evidence challenges the assumption

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<sup>51</sup> al-Dāraquṭnī, *Al-'Ilal Al-Wāridah Fī Al-Aḥādīth Al-Nabawīyah*.

<sup>52</sup> Çalgan, "Analysis of Ibn Kathīr's Content Criticism of Some of the Saḥīḥayn Ḥadīths in the Sīra Section of Al-Bidāya Wan Nihāya"; Bin Jamil, "Between Traditionalising and Futuring: Applying The Broader Maqasid Paradigm to Hadith Studies"; Çinar and Günerigök, "Early and Late Period Approaches to Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī in Hadīth Criticism: The Case of Al-Muhallab and Ibn Ḥajar."

<sup>53</sup> Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Nukhbat Al-Fikar Fī Muṣṭalah Ahl Al-Athar* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> M Yüceer, "Rethinking Hadith Methodology in the Light of Fuzzy Logic and Artificial Intelligence," *Hitit Theology Journal* 24, no. 2 (2025): 533–63, <https://doi.org/10.14395/hid.1741754>; Afifi Alit et al., "Exploring Trends and Themes of Hadith Authentication Research: A Bibliometric Analysis and Future Agenda."

<sup>55</sup> M Abdullah et al., "Quranic Exegesis Studies in Malaysia: Realities, Challenges and Future Direction," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5779>; Brown, "How We Know Early Hadīth Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It's so Hard to Find."

<sup>56</sup> Z R Tahseen and A K Abdulrazzaq, "A Study of Waki' Ibn Al-Jarrāḥ's Students Absent from the Six Canonical Ḥadīth Works," *Dragoman* 2025, no. 19 (2025): 166–201, <https://doi.org/10.63132/ati.2025.thestu.4505>; K Anam, I Abror, and A 'Ubaydi Hasbillah, "Beyond Al-Jarḥ Wa at-Ta'dīl: A Critical Study of the Narrators Accused

that classical Hadith criticism operated according to a fixed and universally applied formula. Instead, it suggests that Hadith evaluation involved scholarly discretion, institutional preference, genre expectations, and methodological hierarchy. Classical criticism was rigorous, but not mechanically uniform.

These findings support A'zamī's argument that early Muslim scholars developed serious mechanisms for preserving and scrutinizing Hadith transmission.<sup>57</sup> They also support Lucas's view that Hadith critics played a formative role in constructing Sunni religious authority.<sup>58</sup> However, the findings refine both positions by emphasizing that classical Hadith criticism should be understood not merely as a defensive apparatus for preserving tradition, but as an internal epistemic practice for producing warranted religious knowledge. Its procedures were not limited to preservation; they included criticism, exclusion, ranking, comparison, correction, and interpretive judgment.

Theoretically, this debate strengthens the article's concept of Hadith as an epistemic tradition. Islamic epistemology explains why reliability, moral integrity, precision, continuity, and corroboration became central to the validation of transmitted knowledge. Hermeneutics clarifies why *matn* criticism cannot be reduced to textual authenticity alone, since reports were assessed in relation to scriptural coherence, legal meaning, and interpretive context. Sociology of knowledge explains how scholarly authority was institutionalized through networks of transmitters, teachers, students, regional centers, technical vocabularies, and classificatory norms. The findings therefore show that classical Hadith criticism was neither purely textual nor purely social; it was an epistemic practice in which knowledge, authority, method, and community were mutually constituted.

The originality of this subsection lies in its critical positioning between two insufficient interpretations: the view that classical Hadith criticism was simply an *isnād*-formalism, and the view that it was merely a traditional defense of inherited authority. The evidence from al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Dāraquṭnī, and Ibn Ḥajar demonstrates a more complex reality: classical Hadith criticism functioned as an internal system of epistemic accountability. This debate strengthens the article's broader argument by showing that any dialogue between classical criticism and modern academic inquiry must begin by recognizing the internal critical intelligence of the Hadith tradition itself.

### **Modern Academic Inquiry and the Reframing of Hadith Historicity**

The method used in this article produces a distinctive insight by reading Hadith reports not only as units of authentication but as transmitted traditions whose historicity emerges through the interaction of textual variation, transmission practice, social memory, and scholarly authorization. This approach does not displace classical Hadith criticism; rather, it expands the analytical question. Instead of asking only whether a report is acceptable according to inherited criteria, the analysis asks how a report circulated, varied, acquired authority, and became meaningful within Muslim intellectual history. In this sense, modern academic inquiry reframes Hadith historicity by shifting attention from the isolated status of a report to the historical processes through which reports were produced, transmitted, interpreted, and stabilized.

The value of this method becomes especially clear in the cluster of reports concerning the writing of Hadith. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, a report attributed to Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī states: "Do not write from me, and whoever has written from me other than the Qur'an should erase it".<sup>59</sup> Yet other reports indicate permission to write. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet is reported to have instructed that a statement be written for Abū Shāh after the conquest of Mecca: "Write it for Abū Shāh".<sup>60</sup> A further report in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* presents 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr as writing what he heard from the Prophet

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of Lying in Sunan Ibn Mājah," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025): 241–76, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5736>.

<sup>57</sup> A'zamī, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*.

<sup>58</sup> Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*.

<sup>59</sup> al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

<sup>60</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' Al-Musnad Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.

with prophetic approval, on the ground that only truth came from him.<sup>61</sup> Read through classical categories alone, these reports pose a question of reconciliation. Read through modern academic inquiry, however, they disclose a broader historical problem: the transition from oral authority to written preservation, the boundary between Qur'anic revelation and Prophetic instruction, and the later construction of transmission memory.

Classical scholars generally resolved this tension through harmonization. The prohibition of writing was often interpreted as contextual, intended to prevent confusion between the Qur'an and non-Qur'anic Prophetic reports in an early phase of revelation, while permission to write was understood as applying when such confusion was no longer likely or when writing served preservation.<sup>62</sup> This interpretive strategy demonstrates the internal hermeneutic of classical Hadith scholarship: when apparently conflicting reports were both treated as authoritative, the task was not to discard one prematurely but to identify their respective conditions, contexts, and legal-theological functions. The finding is important because it shows that classical scholarship already possessed a method for managing textual tension, though its primary aim remained normative coherence rather than historical reconstruction.

Modern academic inquiry reveals something different from the same evidence. By comparing reports of prohibition and permission, the analysis shows that the early transmission of Hadith cannot be adequately described through a simple binary between orality and writing. Schoeler argues that early Islamic transmission involved a complex interaction between oral and written practices rather than a linear movement from memory to documentation. Motzki likewise challenges radical skeptical assumptions by showing that early transmission materials may preserve historically meaningful layers when examined through combined *isnād* and *matn* evidence.<sup>63</sup> The Writing-Hadith cluster supports this insight: the reports do not simply preserve a contradiction; they preserve competing memories of how Prophetic authority was mediated, protected, and eventually textualized.

The article's method is productive because it treats contradiction not as an obstacle to analysis but as evidence of historical layering. In the study of historicity, the past is not approached only as factual sequence, but as a culturally mediated field in which communities construct, remember, and represent earlier events.<sup>64</sup> This is particularly relevant to Hadith studies because transmitted reports often preserve not only what a community remembered, but also how it organized that memory into authoritative forms. Philosophical discussions of historicity have also shown that temporality, myth, narrative, and human existence are often intertwined in the representation of the past.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, structuralist critiques caution against excessive subjective layering by emphasizing the need to identify systemic and semiotic structures within historical representation.<sup>66</sup> Applied to the Hadith writing reports, this means that the analysis must avoid both naïve factualism and unrestricted

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<sup>61</sup> Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath Al-Bārī Bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959); Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Ibn Al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1972).

<sup>63</sup> Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

<sup>64</sup> C Stewart, "Historicity and Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45 (2016): 79–94, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100249>; E R Cruz, "The Human and Beyond: Transhumanism, Historicity, Humanness," *Theology and Science* 19, no. 4 (2021): 363–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2021.1982249>.

<sup>65</sup> T Dutoit, "Mythic Derrida," *Mosaic* 39, no. 3 (2006): 103–32, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-77954567843&partnerID=40&md5=8c954ecf85cd16a34c212caacc3182b3>; M Popa, "Becoming versus Historicity in Constantin Noica's Philosophy," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie* 61, no. 2 (2017): 279–86, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85037849903&partnerID=40&md5=fdd53d33538581ceef6e4b5195a7fec>.

<sup>66</sup> H Trüper, "THE FLATNESS OF HISTORICITY," *History and Theory* 58, no. 1 (2019): 23–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12098>.

interpretive speculation. The reports should be read as historically situated transmissions whose meanings are structured by textual form, communal memory, and institutional authority.

Source criticism further clarifies the methodological contribution of this analysis. As a historical method, source criticism evaluates reliability, authorship, context, transmission, and the conditions under which a source becomes usable for historical reconstruction.<sup>67</sup> Its value in Hadith studies lies not in replacing classical criticism, but in asking additional questions about provenance, function, and context. The reports on the writing of Hadith become analytically significant because they are not merely isolated statements about writing; they are sources for reconstructing debates over documentation, scriptural distinction, and the legitimacy of preserving Prophetic speech. As studies in historical ecology, digital history, and archival reconstruction show, source criticism is especially useful when evidence is fragmented, mediated, or altered through transmission and preservation.<sup>68</sup> This relevance is heightened in religious textual traditions, where sources may be shaped by theological authority, communal memory, and later institutional interests. Such critical evaluation is essential in contexts vulnerable to misinformation, ideological manipulation, or unexamined inherited assumptions.<sup>69</sup>

Textual variation is another area where the method reveals dimensions that classical harmonization alone does not fully capture. The reports prohibiting and permitting writing do not merely differ in legal implication; they reflect different textual emphases, narrative settings, and modes of authorization. Studies of textual variation show that differences across versions, genres, and contexts often reveal linguistic, cultural, social, and ideological dynamics.<sup>70</sup> Historical sociolinguistics has shown that variation can illuminate shifts in style, register, and communicative practice across time,<sup>71</sup> while literary approaches emphasize how variation may disclose authorial intention, intertextuality, and social influence.<sup>72</sup> In Hadith studies, textual variation requires careful contextual and comparative

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<sup>67</sup> C Backerra, "Source Criticism for Cultural History," *Rethinking History* 28, no. 2 (2024): 194–216, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2024.2361214>; K Ali, "Towards Digital Historiography: Epistemological Transformations in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *Revue d'Histoire Méditerranéenne* 7, no. 2 (2025): 92–103, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105029968402&partnerID=40&md5=a8a331303b4f9a0ad0a998bb75ad02a8>.

<sup>68</sup> A M Santana-Cordero and P Szabó, "Exploring Qualitative Methods of Historical Ecology and Their Links With Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919872112>; T I Khorkhordina, "Oriental Studies: Archival Heuristics of Historical and Documentary Heritage," *Oriental Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1259–66, <https://doi.org/10.22162/2619-0990-2021-58-6-1259-1266>; M V Faassen and R Hoekstra, "Migrant Visibility: Digitization and Heritage Policies," *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2022.908456>; O Lakhno, "Ethnographic Documentation of the Primitive Beliefs of the Slavs in the Archives of the 18th-20th Centuries: Methodology, Representation, Problems of Interpretation," *Society. Document. Communication* 10, no. 2 (2025): 32–45, <https://doi.org/10.69587/sdc/2.2025.32>.

<sup>69</sup> Y Kalakura and T Bilushchak, "Source And Information Potential Of Social Networks About The Russian War Against Ukraine: Research Methodology And Classification Of Sources," *East European Historical Bulletin* 2025, no. 37 (2025): 207–19, <https://doi.org/10.24919/2519-058X.37.346051>; P Bennesved and A Lövström Svedin, "Lessons Learned from Ukraine? Applying Historical Source Criticism Methodology to the Study of Contemporary Conflicts," *Critical Military Studies*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2026.2648160>.

<sup>70</sup> W Ayres-Bennett, "Historical Sociolinguistics and Tracking Language Change: Sources, Text Types and Genres," in *Manual of Romance Sociolinguistics*, 2018, 253–79, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110365955-010>; J L Blas Arroyo and J González-Martínez, "Writing, Orality and Variation: New Data on the Allí/Allá Variation in the Light of an Epistolary Corpus of the 16th Century," *Zeitschrift Fur Romanische Philologie* 135, no. 4 (2019): 971–1006, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zrp-2019-0058>.

<sup>71</sup> Ayres-Bennett, "Historical Sociolinguistics and Tracking Language Change: Sources, Text Types and Genres"; J M Hernández-Campoy and T García-Vidal, "Style-Shifting and Accommodative Competence in Late Middle English Written Correspondence: Putting Audience Design to the Test of Time," *Folia Linguistica Historica* 52, no. s39-2 (2018): 383–420, <https://doi.org/10.1515/flih-2018-0014>.

<sup>72</sup> J Meyer, "Editing Textual Synergies: New Historicism and 'New Textualism,'" *Poetics Today* 35, no. 4 (2014): 591–613 and 733, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2873503>.

analysis because variation may indicate oral performance, scribal transmission, legal adaptation, regional circulation, or retrospective framing.<sup>73</sup> The article's method therefore treats variation not as mere textual noise, but as evidence for the historical life of a report.

The method also benefits from the analytical discipline of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis. This approach combines the study of transmission chains and textual content to evaluate the development and possible dating of Hadith traditions.<sup>74</sup> Its strength lies in its capacity to compare transmission patterns with textual variants, thereby identifying possible layers of formation, points of convergence, and signs of later reworking. This is why *isnād-cum-matn* analysis has been used to identify forgeries, date early Islamic texts, and distinguish historically plausible materials from later interpretive accretions.<sup>75</sup> Yet the method also has limits. Its formal attention to chains and variants may not fully capture the broader intellectual, social, and institutional processes through which Hadith traditions acquired authority.<sup>76</sup> The present article therefore uses the logic of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis without reducing Hadith historicity to formal reconstruction alone.

The concept of social memory helps explain why the writing-Hadith cluster is historically significant beyond the question of authenticity. Social memory refers to the collective ways communities remember, reinterpret, and authorize their pasts through texts, rituals, narratives, and institutional practices.<sup>77</sup> Hadith reports function within such mnemonic systems because they mediate Prophetic memory and later scholarly authority. The reports on writing Hadith are therefore not simply evidence for whether writing was prohibited or permitted; they are also evidence for how Muslim communities remembered the relationship between revelation, Prophetic speech, documentation, and religious authority. Since social memory is dynamic and contested, different communities may mobilize remembered pasts to assert, negotiate, or resist power.<sup>78</sup> This insight helps explain why the same cluster of reports could support both caution toward documentation and later authorization of written preservation.

This methodological reading refines rather than rejects major positions in modern Hadith scholarship. It supports Motzki's critique of radical skepticism by showing that transmitted reports can be studied historically without dismissing them as late fabrications.<sup>79</sup> It also qualifies Schacht's thesis

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<sup>73</sup> Blas Arroyo and González-Martínez, "Writing, Orality and Variation: New Data on the Allí/Allá Variation in the Light of an Epistolary Corpus of the 16th Century."

<sup>74</sup> T Nagel, "'Authenticity' in the Research about Muhammad's Life," *Arabica* 60, no. 5 (2013): 516–68, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-12341276>; B A Qureshi, "The Isnad Cum Matn Analysis Ofzakat Al-Fitr Traditions: An Analysis Of Harald Motzkps Method," *Hamdard Islamicus* 44, no. 4 (2021): 59–76, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85136977163&partnerID=40&md5=17ddd187054adb0e611a2baed8e91ea4>; S Kara, *The Integrity of the Qur'an: Sunni and Shi'i Historical Narratives*, *The Integrity of the Qur'an: Sunni and Shi'i Historical Narratives*, 2024, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85213523729&partnerID=40&md5=2db7deb1fb15e1337f8a543953b0c670>.

<sup>75</sup> Qureshi, "The Isnad Cum Matn Analysis Ofzakat Al-Fitr Traditions: An Analysis Of Harald Motzkps Method"; Kara, *Integr. Qur'an Sunni Shi'i Hist. Narrat.*

<sup>76</sup> Nagel, "'Authenticity' in the Research about Muhammad's Life."

<sup>77</sup> M Achugar, "Rethinking Social Memory through Vygotsky and Halliday: The Transmission of Contested Memories of the Recent Past in Uruguay," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 27, no. 3 (2020): 249–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2020.1743320>; J V Wertsch, "Comparing National Narratives," in *Cognition, Culture, and Political Momentum: Breaking down the Silos in Collective Memory Research*, 2025, 129–40, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197788332.003.0010>; E B Zvi, *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud*, *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110547146>.

<sup>78</sup> E Schortman and P Urban, "Power, Memory, and Prehistory: Constructing and Erasing Political Landscapes in the Naco Valley, Northwestern Honduras," *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 1 (2011): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01303.x>; L Isurin, *Collective Remembering: Memory in the World and in the Mind*, *Collective Remembering: Memory in the World and in the Mind*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316809600>; Achugar, "Rethinking Social Memory through Vygotsky and Halliday: The Transmission of Contested Memories of the Recent Past in Uruguay."

<sup>79</sup> Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

that many legal Hadith reports reflect later projection, because the writing-Hadith cluster suggests a more complex situation in which early Islamic transmission preserved layered and competing memories rather than a simple pattern of retrospective invention.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the analysis expands classical harmonization by showing that reconciliation does not exhaust the historical significance of textual tension. A report may be normatively reconciled and remain historically revealing.

The strength of this approach lies in its ability to hold together dimensions that are often separated: authenticity, textual variation, historical layering, social memory, and authority formation. Classical criticism provides disciplined criteria for evaluating transmission integrity; modern academic inquiry expands the field of analysis by examining how reports function within historical and social processes. The limitation of the approach is that it does not produce final certainty about every stage of transmission. Nor does it claim that historical reconstruction can replace classical categories of acceptance. Its value lies instead in showing how Hadith reports can be read simultaneously as transmitted religious knowledge and as historically mediated textual traditions.

This sub-section therefore advances the article's contribution by demonstrating that modern academic inquiry reframes Hadith historicity without making classical criticism obsolete. By applying source criticism, attention to textual variation, *isnād-cum-matn* reasoning, and social memory analysis to the writing-Hadith cluster, the study shows that Hadith reports are not only objects of authentication but also sites where oral authority, written preservation, communal memory, and scholarly authorization intersect. This methodological expansion strengthens the article's broader argument that a dialogical approach can produce a richer and less reductive account of Hadith as an epistemic tradition.

### **Toward a Dialogical Framework: Critical Reciprocity between Classical Criticism and Modern Inquiry**

The main theoretical implication of this study is that Hadith studies can move beyond the binary opposition between classical authentication and modern skepticism by adopting a dialogical framework grounded in critical reciprocity, epistemic mapping, methodological translation, and non-reductionism. The findings from the previous sections show that classical Hadith criticism possesses an internal critical logic, while modern academic inquiry offers tools for analyzing historicity, textual variation, social memory, and authority formation. The issue, therefore, is not whether one approach should replace the other, but how both can be placed into a structured relationship without collapsing their distinct epistemic assumptions.

The first theoretical contribution of the framework lies in redefining dialogue as more than methodological combination. Dialogue is not simply the juxtaposition of classical and modern methods, nor is it the selective borrowing of concepts from one tradition to strengthen the other. In dialogical theory, dialogue involves reciprocity, co-construction of meaning, ethical responsiveness, and mutual transformation.<sup>81</sup> Applied to Hadith studies, this means that classical criticism and modern inquiry should not be treated as fixed blocs of authority and critique. Rather, each must be examined as a knowledge system capable of clarifying the limits and possibilities of the other. This conception of

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<sup>80</sup> Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.

<sup>81</sup> G Martínez-Camino, "Dialogicality and Dialogue: An Analysis of Complexity and Dynamics of Fictitious Dialogues in Spanish and Mexican Television Advertising," *Pragmatics* 22, no. 4 (2012): 615–50, <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.22.4.04mar>; I Marková, "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," in *Verbal Communication*, 2016, 181–201, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85047528976&partnerID=40&md5=a4c698ed5edfd470599862b1a98950f8>; J Žilionis, "Dialog in the Process of Education," *Pedagogika* 90 (2008): 7–11, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-56549112158&partnerID=40&md5=4e82d63db8ec42afbc019206efc82f7e>.

dialogue also resonates with intercultural and educational discussions in which dialogical engagement is understood as a process of contact, transformation, relational learning, and moral responsibility.<sup>82</sup>

The second contribution is the concept of epistemic mapping. A dialogical approach requires identifying what each tradition counts as evidence, authority, reliability, and valid interpretation. In classical Hadith criticism, evidence includes *isnād* continuity, narrator reliability, precision, corroboration, absence of contradiction, and freedom from hidden defects.<sup>83</sup> In modern academic inquiry, evidence may include textual variants, transmission patterns, historical context, source layers, social function, legal usage, and discursive formation.<sup>84</sup> Epistemic mapping prevents methodological confusion because it makes explicit that classical and modern approaches frequently ask different questions, operate with different standards of evidence, and pursue different forms of explanation.

This mapping also connects Hadith studies to broader debates about the plurality of knowledge systems. Recent work on epistemic mapping emphasizes the need to examine how knowledge is transferred, translated, and negotiated between dominant and marginalized epistemologies, often through an “ecology of knowledges” rather than a single hierarchy of valid knowledge.<sup>85</sup> Participatory mapping practices in other fields similarly show how different forms of knowledge can be brought into structured dialogue without erasing their distinctiveness, as in the integration of local and scientific knowledge in disaster risk reduction.<sup>86</sup> For Hadith studies, this means that classical Islamic criticism should not be treated merely as raw data for modern theory, nor should modern inquiry be dismissed as external intrusion. Both require explicit epistemic positioning.

The third contribution is methodological translation. Classical categories must be made intelligible within modern academic discourse without being reduced to modern equivalents. *Jarḥ wa ta’dīl*, for example, may be compared to source criticism because both assess reliability, but the comparison has limits. *Jarḥ wa ta’dīl* evaluates narrators within a moral, religious, pedagogical, and scholarly framework, while modern source criticism often evaluates provenance, authorship, historical plausibility, documentary layers, and ideological interest. Similarly, *‘ilal al-ḥadīth* may be compared to textual and transmission criticism because it investigates hidden problems, but it remains embedded in a distinct Islamic epistemic universe concerned with the integrity of transmitted religious knowledge.<sup>87</sup> Methodological translation therefore requires both conceptual proximity and conceptual restraint.

Translation studies further clarify this point. Methodological translation is not the mechanical transfer of terms across disciplines; it involves cultural, semiotic, and epistemic repackaging for different audiences and intellectual settings.<sup>88</sup> In educational theory, similar forms of translation allow dialogical and phenomenological approaches to be brought together without erasing their distinctive

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<sup>82</sup> L Kalmanson, “Diversifying the Dialogue: Meta-Philosophical Reflections on Teaching Our Core Methodology,” *Teaching Philosophy* 47, no. 3 (2024): 397–408, <https://doi.org/10.5840/teachphil2024723206>; F Mansouri, “Interculturalism: Reimagining Dialogue and Connectedness in Super-Diverse Realities,” in *Contested Concepts in Migration Studies*, 2021, 149–66, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003119333-10>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Nukhbat Al-Fikar Fi Muṣṭalah Ahl Al-Athar*.

<sup>84</sup> Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith*; Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

<sup>85</sup> K Bennett, “Epistemic Translation: Towards an Ecology of Knowledges,” *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* 34, no. 1 (2026): 16–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2023.2294123>.

<sup>86</sup> J R D Cadag and J C Gaillard, “Integrating Knowledge and Actions in Disaster Risk Reduction: The Contribution of Participatory Mapping,” *Area* 44, no. 1 (2012): 100–109, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2011.01065.x>.

<sup>87</sup> al-Dāraqutnī, *Al-‘Ilal Al-Wāridah Fi Al-Aḥādīth Al-Nabawīyyah*.

<sup>88</sup> Bennett, “Epistemic Translation: Towards an Ecology of Knowledges”; S V de Camargo Grillo, “The Translation Between Dialogism, Culture And Comparison,” *Cadernos de Tradução* 43, no. 1 (2023): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7968.2023.e90321>.

assumptions about learning, communication, and subjectivity.<sup>89</sup> Applied to Hadith studies, this means that terms such as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *ʿilal*, *shādhdh*, *munkar*, and *tawātur* should not be forced into modern categories such as “historically factual,” “unreliable,” or “source layer” without careful explanation. The framework proposed here therefore treats translation as an analytical discipline, not as a rhetorical bridge.

The fourth contribution is critical reciprocity. Classical Hadith criticism can challenge modern academic inquiry when historical reconstruction becomes speculative, insufficiently grounded in transmission data, or dismissive of internal Muslim critical practices. Conversely, modern academic inquiry can challenge classical criticism when authenticity judgments overlook broader questions of textual variation, social context, historical function, and interpretive reception. Reciprocity in dialogue involves mutual influence, interdependence, and the co-construction of meaning rather than one-way evaluation.<sup>90</sup> In intercultural contexts, such reciprocity helps generate trust and understanding across difference without requiring uniformity.<sup>91</sup> For Hadith studies, critical reciprocity enables a more disciplined exchange: classical criticism offers internally developed criteria of reliability, while modern inquiry opens the analysis to history, textuality, social memory, and institutional formation.

The fifth contribution is the framework’s non-reductive character. Non-reductionism is crucial because both apologetic traditionalism and skeptical historicism tend to simplify the object of study. The former may treat classical categories as self-sufficient and immune from critique, while the latter may treat them as merely ideological or pre-critical. A non-reductive approach resists both moves. In broader debates on science and religion, non-reductive models such as “non-reductive intelligibility” have been proposed to account for complexity without collapsing one explanatory domain into another.<sup>92</sup> Intercultural and interdisciplinary approaches likewise resist reductionism by recognizing the plurality and interdependence of sociocultural knowledge systems.<sup>93</sup> In this article, non-reductionism means that classical Hadith criticism is neither absorbed into modern historical criticism nor insulated from it.

The writing-Hadith cluster illustrates how the framework works in practice without repeating the earlier analysis. Classical criticism examines the authenticity, reconciliation, and normative implications of reports prohibiting and permitting the writing of Hadith.<sup>94</sup> Modern academic inquiry examines oral-written transmission, textual stabilization, historical memory, and the formation of scholarly authority.<sup>95</sup> A dialogical framework does not force these readings into artificial agreement. Instead, it allows each to illuminate a different dimension of the same primary material. Classical criticism clarifies the internal logic of acceptance and reconciliation, while modern inquiry clarifies the historical and sociological processes through which writing became authorized as a legitimate medium of Prophetic knowledge.

This synthesis extends existing scholarship in several ways. It supports Brown’s argument that Hadith must be understood within both medieval and modern contexts of authority,<sup>96</sup> and it builds upon Lucas’s view of Hadith critics as constructive agents in Sunni intellectual formation.<sup>97</sup> Yet it goes beyond both by proposing an explicit methodological model for placing classical and modern approaches into critical relation. It also refines Motzki’s *isnād-cum-matn* approach by situating it within

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<sup>89</sup> Žilionis, “Dialog in the Process of Education”; Kalmanson, “Diversifying the Dialogue: Meta-Philosophical Reflections on Teaching Our Core Methodology.”

<sup>90</sup> Martínez-Camino, “Dialogicality and Dialogue: An Analysis of Complexity and Dynamics of Fictitious Dialogues in Spanish and Mexican Television Advertising”; Marková, “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding.”

<sup>91</sup> Mansouri, “Interculturalism: Reimagining Dialogue and Connectedness in Super-Diverse Realities.”

<sup>92</sup> R Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>93</sup> N Glenn-Levin Rodriguez, “Translating ‘Best Interest’: Child Welfare Decisions at the US–México Border,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 39 (2016): 154–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12177>.

<sup>94</sup> al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*; al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ Al-Musnad Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*.

<sup>95</sup> Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*; Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

<sup>97</sup> Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*.

a broader epistemological discussion that includes hermeneutics, sociology of knowledge, and Islamic theories of authority.<sup>98</sup> The framework therefore does not merely add another method to Hadith studies; it clarifies how different methods can be related without conceptual confusion.

The broader relevance of the framework extends beyond the specific case of Hadith writing. It can be applied to other areas of Hadith studies where authenticity, historicity, and interpretation intersect, such as reports on law, gender, politics, ritual practice, sectarian identity, and ethical formation. It is also relevant to Qur'anic studies and Islamic hermeneutics more broadly, especially where classical interpretive traditions encounter modern historical, literary, sociological, or digital methods. In each case, the framework requires scholars to state explicitly whether they are asking questions of authenticity, historical formation, legal authority, interpretive reception, social function, or epistemic validity. Without such clarification, studies risk conflating normative acceptance with historical explanation, or textual meaning with institutional authority.

The theoretical implication, therefore, is that tradition and critique should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories. The findings of this article show that tradition itself contains critical procedures, while critique itself operates within assumptions that require examination. Classical Hadith criticism is not simply inherited authority; it is an internally differentiated epistemic practice. Modern academic inquiry is not simply neutral analysis; it is also shaped by methodological premises, disciplinary histories, and interpretive aims. A dialogical framework makes these conditions visible and turns them into the basis for critical engagement.

The academic contribution of this framework lies in its capacity to transform a long-standing opposition into a productive field of inquiry. By combining epistemic mapping, methodological translation, critical reciprocity, and non-reductionism, the article offers a model for studying Hadith as an epistemic tradition rather than as either a closed religious archive or a merely historical artifact. This synthesis reinforces the article's originality: it shows that the future of Hadith studies does not depend on choosing between classical authentication and modern skepticism, but on developing a disciplined dialogical method capable of explaining how transmission, authority, historicity, and interpretation interact within the production of religious knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Hadith should be understood not merely as a corpus of transmitted prophetic reports, but as an epistemic tradition through which Muslim scholars developed systematic procedures for transmitting, validating, classifying, contesting, and interpreting religious knowledge. In response to the first research objective, the study shows that Hadith functioned historically as a structured system of knowledge production. Its authority did not arise from transmission alone, but from regulated scholarly practices involving *isnād*, narrator evaluation, textual scrutiny, classification, and interpretive discipline.

In response to the second objective, the article demonstrates that classical Hadith criticism operated as an internal epistemic practice rather than a mechanical system of preservation. Classical critics did not rely exclusively on external chains of transmission; they also examined narrator credibility, textual coherence, hidden defects, contradiction, corroboration, and the broader normative meaning of reports. These findings challenge reductive assumptions that classical Hadith criticism was merely *isnād*-formalism. It shows instead that classical Hadith scholarship contained its own forms of critical reasoning, methodological refinement, and epistemic accountability.

In response to the third objective, the article proposes a dialogical framework for relating classical Hadith criticism and modern academic inquiry. This framework does not merge the two approaches into a single method, nor does it subordinate one to the other. Rather, it places them in critical reciprocity through four analytical steps: epistemic mapping, methodological translation, critical reciprocity, and contextual application. Through this framework, classical criticism clarifies the internal logic of transmission, authenticity, and normative authority, while modern inquiry expands

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<sup>98</sup> Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

the analysis toward historicity, textual variation, social memory, institutional formation, and interpretive reception.

The principal contribution of this study is theoretical and methodological. Theoretically, it reframes Hadith as an epistemic tradition, thereby moving beyond the narrow opposition between apologetic traditionalism and sceptical historicism. Methodologically, it offers a non-reductive model for studying Hadith that recognizes the critical sophistication of classical Islamic scholarship while also affirming the analytical value of modern historical, textual, hermeneutical, and sociological approaches. This contribution is significant for Hadith studies, Islamic hermeneutics, Qur'anic studies, and interdisciplinary Islamic textual studies because it clarifies how inherited scholarly traditions and modern academic methods may interact without conceptual confusion or methodological domination.

The broader implication of the study is that future research on Hadith should state more explicitly which question it seeks to answer authenticity, historicity, textual formation, legal authority, interpretive reception, social function, or epistemic validity. Without such clarification, Hadith studies risks conflating normative acceptance with historical explanation or reducing complex transmitted traditions to isolated textual data. A dialogical framework enables scholars to examine Hadith as both religiously authoritative discourse and historically mediated knowledge.

Future research may develop this framework through more focused case studies, including specific Hadith clusters related to law, gender, ritual practice, politics, ethics, or sectarian identity. Further studies may also apply *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, manuscript comparison, digital corpus methods, or reception history to test how the proposed framework operates across different textual and historical contexts. In this way, the study opens a path for Hadith scholarship that is at once critically rigorous, theoretically reflective, and attentive to the epistemic complexity of the Islamic tradition.

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