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The Epistemology of Hadith Authenticity: The Construction of Sanad from a Muslim-Western Perspective

Taufiki Ali Ilhami
UIN Prof. Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia
taufikiali3@gmail.com
A'azliansyah Farizil Anam
UIN Prof. Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia
aazliansyahfarizilanammm@gmail.com
Munawir
UIN Prof. Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia
munawir.0510@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari problem akademik seputar otentisitas hadis yang memunculkan perdebatan tajam antara epistemologi Islam dan epistemologi Barat modern. Dalam tradisi Islam, hadis diyakini memiliki validitas absolut yang dijaga melalui sistem sanad sebagai mekanisme ilmiah dan spiritual untuk memastikan kesinambungan kebenaran dari Nabi kepada umat. Sebaliknya, para sarjana Barat memandang sanad sebagai konstruksi sosial-historis yang dibentuk secara retrospektif guna melegitimasi otoritas keagamaan tertentu, sehingga menimbulkan keraguan terhadap keaslian hadis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis bagaimana konstruksi sanad memengaruhi penilaian terhadap otentisitas hadis dengan membandingkan kerangka epistemologis Muslim dan Barat. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis kepustakaan (*library research*) berbasis komparatif-analitis terhadap karya-karya klasik dan modern, baik dari ulama hadis maupun orientalis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi sanad bukan hanya alat historis untuk menelusuri periwayatan, tetapi juga merupakan fondasi epistemik yang mengukuhkan otoritas wahyu dalam tradisi Islam. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa otentisitas hadis hanya dapat dinilai secara utuh apabila sistem sanad dipahami dalam konteks epistemologi Islam yang berorientasi pada kebenaran transendental, bukan sekadar pada validitas historis sebagaimana perspektif Barat.

Keywords: Otentisitas Hadis; Epistemologi Hadis; Kritik Sanad; Orientalisme.

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Abstract

This research stems from an academic problem surrounding the authenticity of hadith, which has sparked a heated debate between Islamic epistemology and modern Western epistemology. In Islamic tradition, hadith is believed to have absolute validity, which is maintained through the sanad system as a scientific and spiritual mechanism to ensure the continuity of truth from the Prophet to the ummah. Conversely, Western scholars view sanad as a socio-historical construct formed retrospectively to legitimize certain religious authorities, thus raising doubts about the authenticity of hadith. This study aims to critically analyze how the construction of sanad influences the assessment of hadith authenticity by comparing Muslim and Western epistemological frameworks. The method used is a qualitative approach with comparative-analytical library research of classical and modern works, both from hadith scholars and Orientalists. The results show that the construction of sanad is not only a historical tool for tracing transmission, but also an epistemic foundation that confirms the authority of revelation in the Islamic tradition. Thus, this study confirms that the authenticity of hadith can only be fully assessed if the sanad system is understood in the context of Islamic epistemology, which is oriented towards transcendental truth, rather than merely historical validity as in the Western perspective.

Keywords: *Hadith Authenticity; Hadith Epistemology; Criticism of Sanad; Orientalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad cannot be separated from its historical context. Between contemporary readers and the Prophet lies a gap of approximately fourteen centuries, which has epistemological implications for how hadith are understood and treated. Early generations of Muslims, who lived during the Prophet's lifetime, understood the hadith directly through empirical experience and prophetic authority without having to engage in historical reconstruction. In contrast, Muslims today cannot avoid the historical dimension in understanding the hadith, because every modern reading always involves a process of interpretation and reinterpretation of religious texts.

Kuntowijoyo asserts that history is essentially the result of a re-narrative that always involves the interpretation of historians.[1] Thus, the understanding of hadith as a historical product cannot be separated from the human construction of meaning based on historical *evidence*. In this context, modern hadith studies require a scientific approach that is able to balance fidelity to religious sources and openness to critical research methods.

Studies on the origins of hadith in contemporary scientific discourse have developed through three main approaches. First, the scientific-objective approach, which is generally developed by Orientalists, both non-Muslim and modern Muslim, such as Jonathan Brown. This approach places hadith as an object of historical research, while researchers are positioned as detached observers, with an epistemological basis that relies on Western scientific traditions.

[1] Rudy Gunawan and Huriah Rachmah, "Historiography of Historical Novels," *Indonesian History Journal* 8, no. 1 (2025): 14–26, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31947/jsi.v8i1.33050.

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Second, the apologetic approach, which is widely used by traditional hadith scholars. This approach was born in response to Orientalist findings that were considered to cast doubt on the authenticity of hadith. The arguments tend to be defensive and normative, with the main objective of preserving the purity of hadith from criticism that is considered to undermine the authority of Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, this approach has made an important contribution to maintaining the continuity and legitimacy of classical Islamic scholarship amid modern academic challenges.[2]

Third, the synthetic-objective approach seeks to combine scientific findings from both poles while still considering rationality and objectivity. This approach has been developed by progressive Muslim scholars who seek to build an epistemological bridge between the Islamic scientific tradition and Western critical methodology. This research explicitly departs from this synthetic framework.

The central issue debated between Muslim scholars and Orientalists is the authenticity of hadith. Orientalists such as Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, and G.H.A. Juynboll argue that most hadith were produced in the third generation or around the second century Hijri. This conclusion is based on three main arguments: first, the increase in the number of hadith during that period; second, the *common link* theory, which indicates a branching point in the sanad; and third, the alleged process *of projecting back*, which is the retrospective tracing of the sanad to attribute the hadith to the Prophet.[3]

This view drew harsh criticism from traditional hadith scholars. They asserted that the practice of narrating and recording hadith began during the Prophet's lifetime. In addition, hadith scholars emphasized that hadith research cannot be separated from the integration of sanad and matn. Criticism of the sanad is not only intended to assess the continuity of the chain of narrators, but also serves to maintain the truth of the substance of the hadith through systematic analysis of the matn.

In the contemporary academic context, one Muslim scholar who has attempted to open a methodological dialogue between the two traditions is Kamaruddin Amin. Through the *isnād cum matn* method, Amin proposes an approach to hadith analysis that combines the study of sanad and matn simultaneously in order to test the validity of hadith. This approach is seen as capable of overcoming the weaknesses of the classical method, which often strictly separates sanad criticism and matn criticism.

Sitti's research shows that the *isnad cum matn* method developed by Kamaruddin Amin offers a new and more comprehensive

[2] Lutfiah Adhwa et al., "Orientalist Studies on the Hadith of the Prophet (Ignaz Goldziher's Concept of Thought on the Hadith of the Prophet)," *Cerdika: Indonesian Scientific Journal* 5, no. 6 (June 21, 2025): 1588–97, https://doi.org/10.59141/cerdika.v5i6.2642.

[3] Ryan Arief Rahman, Chandra Dwisetyo Widodo, and Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, "Orientalist Studies on the Authenticity of Prophetic Hadiths," *Al-Bukhari: Journal of Hadith Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 13, 2023): 194–211, https://doi.org/10.32505/al-bukhari.v6i2.6856.

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way of critiquing hadith. However, the research does not elaborate on the practical application of this method to specific hadith.[4] Meanwhile, Maliki and Hidayati's study assesses this method as effective in reconstructing the historicity of hadith, but also emphasizes the need for technical clarity in the application of combined analysis between sanad and matan.[5]

According to Kamaruddin Amin, the debate regarding the authenticity of hadith and the reliability of authentication methodologies is a fundamental aspect of hadith studies. If authentication methods have epistemological weaknesses, then the results of assessments of hadith also need to be re-examined historically. This view emphasizes the urgency of integrating the tradition of Islamic sanad criticism and the historical-critical methodologies that have developed in Western academia.

The issue of hadith authenticity has actually existed since the early days of Islam, especially after the *fitnah kubra* incident involving the Mu'āwiyyah, 'Ali, and Khawārij groups. Since that period, Muslims have begun to question the authenticity of the circulating accounts, mainly due to the emergence of hadiths that were politicized for the interests of certain groups. This awareness gave rise to the tradition of sanad and matan criticism in classical Islamic scholarship.

In Western academic tradition, Orientalists such as Sprenger, Goldziher, Montgomery Watt, Schacht, and Juynboll highlighted the phenomenon of hadith falsification from a historical perspective. They assumed that hadith falsification occurred on a massive scale for various motives, whether political, theological, or social. This view gave rise to deep skepticism about hadith as an authoritative source of Islamic teachings.[6]

In contrast, Muslim scholars from the classical to modern periods have taken a more moderate epistemological position. They do not consider all hadiths to be authentic, but neither do they conclude that all hadiths are the result of falsification. This principle of balance became the epistemological foundation of the science of hadith, in which each account is assessed using strict criteria that cover both the sanad and the matn. Therefore, the construction of the sanad occupies a central position in determining the level of authenticity of a hadith.[7]

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[4] Muh. Ilham R. Kurniawan, "Theory Dating and Isnad Cum Matn Harald Motzki in Revealing The Authenticity of The Prophet Hadith," *Al-Bukhari: Journal of Hadith Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 100–115, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32505/al-bukhari.v4i2.3228; La Ode Ismail Ahmad, St. Magfirah Nasir, and Abustani Ilyas, "Critique of Kamaruddin Amin's Critique: (Re-examining the Accuracy of) the Hadith Critique Method," *Ihyaussunnah: Journal of Ulumul Hadith and Living Sunnah* 1, no. 2 (2022): 104–15, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24252/ihyaussunnah.v1i2.29453.

[5] Hi Hidayati and Maliki, "Kamarudin Amin's Hadith Thought," *El-Umdah; Journal of Al-Qur'an and Tafsir Studies*, 2019, 1.

[6] Muhammad Sholikhin, *Authentic Hadith and* (Yogyakarta: Garudhawaca, 2012), 1; Syamsuddin Arief, *Orientalists and the Diabolism of Thought* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008), 27.

[7] Erwin Hafid and Mahmuddin Mahmuddin, "CRITICISM OF HADITH AUTHENTICITY ON CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THINKERS," *Journal of Islam and Science* 9, no. 2 (2022): 119–26, https://doi.org/10.24252/jis.v9i2.31696.

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Based on this description, the study of the epistemology of hadith authenticity is not only related to historical validity, but also concerns the epistemological framework that underlies the thinking of Muslim scholars and Orientalists. This study aims to examine in depth the construction of sanad in both scientific traditions in order to find possible common ground between the normative Islamic approach and the Western historical-critical approach in understanding the authenticity of the Prophet's hadith.

Until now, research has tended to be stuck in a dichotomy between Orientalist criticism and Muslim refutation, without adequately exploring the internal dynamics of Islam itself. This gap has prompted the need for integrative analysis that takes into account the current horizon, the tension between mainstream Islam, which maintains classical authority, and critical Islam, which offers a progressive reading, and examines it hermeneutically in the context of academic discourse and contemporary Orientalist propaganda.

This research is qualitative-descriptive in design and falls under the category of normative research (*library research*). The approaches applied are historical critical analysis and hermeneutic studies. The research framework uses historical studies to holistically trace the historical aspects of the hadith[8] , while hermeneutic studies are used to assimilate the various horizons found, presenting fresh interpretations that can be applied (*The Application*).[9] This research uses primary sources from various *Qur'anic* literature, secondary sources utilizing scientific articles, books, websites, and various other valid references. The data collection technique applies documentation techniques, focusing on utilizing textual data.[10]

This research is classified as qualitative research based on literature review, utilizing various literature, such as hadith books, scientific articles, books, and other credible sources. The validity of the findings is maintained through triangulation of sources, methods, and peer review, while audit trails and reference management tools are used to ensure transparency and repeatability of the process. (. The data collection technique applied is documentation, a systematic process of collecting and interpreting various written documents to produce a representative mapping of arguments. (. All of these steps were integrated with the principles of academic ethics in interpreting texts, so that this study was able to present a critical and comprehensive reconstruction of the debate on the authenticity of hadith through the reconstruction of sanad

[8] Adam Dodds, "Creating the Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Study," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 89–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2143231.

[9] A'azliansyah Farizil Anam et al., "Reinterpreting Coercive Begging in Islam through the Tafsir of Wahbah Al-Zuḥaili," *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 49–69, https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v10i1.31428.

[10] Asmaa M. Aubaid and Alok Mishra, "A Rule-Based Approach to Embedding Techniques for Text Document Classification," *Applied Sciences* 10, no. 11 (June 10, 2020): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.3390/app10114009.

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DISCUSSION

Historical Chronology of Hadith

Hadith, as the second source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an, has a long and gradual history. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, hadith has served as the main guideline for Muslims in understanding and practicing religious teachings. During the prophetic period (610-632 AD), hadith was conveyed directly by the Prophet through three main forms, namely words (*qauliyah*), deeds (*fi'liyah*), and approval (*taqrīriyyah*). The companions received hadith through memorization and direct practice in their daily lives, without an institutionalized writing system. However, some companions, such as 'Abdullāh bin 'Amr bin al-'Āṣ, wrote down hadith in the form of Ṣaḥīfah Ṣādiqah, which shows that the activity of writing hadith had begun on a limited scale since the time of the Prophet.[11]

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the process of hadith narration continued during the time of the companions. At this stage, caution in narrating hadith became very prominent in order to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings so that they would not be mixed with the Qur'an. During the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab, a strict mechanism for verifying hadith was implemented, whereby a narrator was often asked to present witnesses or swear to the truth of his narration. Awareness of the importance of verifying the sanad began to form as the initial foundation of hadith criticism. Key companions such as Abu Hurairah, Ibn 'Abbas, and 'Aisha ( ) then became centers of hadith narration in various Islamic regions such as Medina, Kufa, and Basra.[12]

Entering the tābi'īn period (around 100-150 AH), hadith transmission underwent significant development. The tābi'īn not only memorized hadith, but also began to write and compile them more systematically. The main impetus for this codification movement was concern over the loss of hadith due to the death of many senior narrators and the emergence of false hadith (*mawḍū'*). Caliph 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz (99-101 AH) played an important role by instructing the official collection of hadith, which was then carried out by scholars such as Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī in response to the socio-religious situation at that time.[13]

In the 2nd to 3rd centuries AH (150-300 AH), the science of hadith reached its peak of codification. Great scholars such as Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Bukhari, and Muslim compiled monumental works of hadith based on legal classifications and the level of authenticity of the sanad. This period is known as the era

[11] Andi Nurul Muhaimin et al., "HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH SCIENCE," *ICAIS: International Conference on Actual Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 547–55.

[12] Ria Regita, Nur Fadhilah, and Mutia Izzatun Nurul Imamah, "Historical Study of the Codification and Transmission of Hadith as a Means of Preserving the Development of Hadith Literature," *Journal of Religion, Society, and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2025): 209–15, https://doi.org/doi.org/10.63822/16488a58.

[13] Muhaimin et al., "HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH SCIENCE."

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of tadwīn al-kabīr, marked by the emergence of major books such as *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, *Musnad Ahmad*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. At the same time, branches of hadith science flourished, such as 'ilm al-rijal, jarḥ wa ta'dil, and 'ilal al-hadith.[14]

The post-classical period (4th to 9th centuries AH) was marked by the development of the traditions of syarḥ (hadith explanation), ikhtiar (summary), and takhrij (sanad tracing). Scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani through *Fatḥ al-Bārī* and Imam al-Nawawi through *Sharh Sahih Muslim* deepened the understanding of hadith systematically. During this period, matn criticism was further strengthened by assessing the conformity of the meaning of hadith with the Qur'an and historical reality. The hadith education system in classical madrasas also became more established.[15]

In the modern era (19th century to present), the study of hadith has experienced a new revival by utilizing scientific approaches and digital technology. Hadith is not only studied from a legal perspective, but also through historical, philological, and sociological approaches. Digitalization projects such as *al-Maktabah al-Syāmilah* and *Sunnah.com* facilitate quick and systematic searches of sanad and matan. In addition, a *living hadith* approach has emerged, which examines how hadiths live and are practiced in the social and cultural realities of contemporary Muslims.[16]

Thus, the history of hadith shows an epistemological evolution from oral tradition to written scientific tradition. Each phase marks a paradigm shift, starting from spontaneous narration during the Prophet's time, the caution of the companions, formal codification during the tābi'īn period, to the development of critical methodology in the modern era. This confirms that hadith is not merely a static text, but an intellectual heritage that continues to evolve without losing its principles of authenticity.[17]

Muslim-Orientalist Epistemic Reasoning

Conceptually, epistemic reasoning refers to the way humans think in acquiring, understanding, and assessing knowledge. In Islamic studies, Muslim epistemic reasoning reflects a mindset that places revelation as the main source of truth, which is then understood through reason and religious experience. Conversely, Orientalist epistemic reasoning describes the way of thinking of non-Muslim Western scholars who study Islam using modern scientific approaches, mainly through historical, linguistic, and empirical rationality methods. Therefore, the term Muslim-Orientalist epistemic reasoning represents two major paradigms in understanding religious texts,

[14] Mohammad Fattah and Matsna Afwi Nadia, "The Codification of the Qur'an and Hadith from a Historical Perspective," *Reflektika Journal* 14, no. 1 (2019): 101–37, https://doi.org/10.28944/reflektika.v14i1.898.

[15] Mohamad S Rahman, "A Study of the Matan and Sanad of Hadith in the Historical Method," *Jurnal Al-Syir'ah* 8, no. 2 (2010): 425–36.

[16] Regita, Fadhilah, and Imamah, "Historical Study of Hadith Codification and Transmission as a Means of Preserving the Development of Ria Hadith Literature."

[17] Rahman, "A Study of the Text and Chain of Transmission of Hadith in the Historical Method."

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especially hadith: the faith-based paradigm and the reason-based paradigm.[18]

In the classical Islamic scientific tradition, revelation is seen as the highest and absolute source of knowledge. The Qur'an and hadith are believed to be guidelines for life that must be accepted with faith and understood through reason. Epistemologically, Islam recognizes three main sources of knowledge, namely revelation (naql) as an absolute source, reason ('aql) as an instrument of understanding, and experience (tajrībah) as a reinforcement of knowledge through empirical reality.[19]

Hadith scholars such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī developed a rigorous scientific system to preserve the authenticity of hadith through research on sanad and the credibility of narrators (jarḥ wa ta'dīl). The validity of hadith is not measured solely through logical rationality, but through the moral integrity of the narrator and the continuity of the sanad. Thus, Muslim epistemic reasoning is theocentric and normative, because revelation is used as the final measure of truth.[20]

In contrast, Orientalist epistemic reasoning grew out of Western scientific traditions that emphasized rationality, empiricism, and historical criticism. Figures such as Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, and G.H.A. Juynboll argue that most hadith are products of the social, political, and legal developments of Muslims in the 2nd and 3rd centuries Hijri. They argue that hadith must be tested through historical-critical methods, not accepted based on the authority of the chain of transmission alone.[21]

This description of the differences in epistemological reasoning shows that the debate surrounding hadith does not stop at the methodological-technical level, such as the definition of hadith science, the classification of hadith, or the criteria for the validity of sanad and matan as described earlier. Islamic scholarly tradition has established a well-established methodological system and strict in maintaining the validity of hadith through a set of rules such as the continuity of the chain of transmission, the fairness and integrity of the narrators, and the absence *of syudzūdz* and *'illat*.[22]

However, this methodological discussion essentially still answers the question *of how* hadith are assessed as sahih, hasan, or da'if based on the internal rules of hadith science. This discussion has not fully touched on a more fundamental epistemological dimension, namely *why*

[18] Muhaimin et al., "HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH SCIENCE."

[19] Rahmi and Taufiqurrahman, "Criticism of Hadith in the Field of Historical Studies," *Jurnal Ulunnuha* 8, no. 1 (2019): 89–104.

[20] Rahmi and Taufiqurrahman.

[21] Lutfiah Adhwa et al., "Orientalist Studies on the Hadith of the Prophet (Ignaz Goldziher's Concept of Thought on the Hadith of the Prophet)" 5, no. 6 (2025): 1588–97; Ruhama Wazna, "CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF EXPLORING THE AUTHENTICITY OF HADITH (A Study of Harald Motzki's Thought)" 17, no. 2 (2018): 112–25, https://doi.org/10.18592/ilmu.

[22] Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti, *Tadrib Al-Rawi Fi Syarh Taqrib Al-Nawawi* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2002); Mustafa Al-'Adawi, *Syarḥ 'Ilal Al-Ḥadīts* (Mecca: Maktabah Makkah, 2004).

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sanad is regarded as an authoritative source of truth in Islamic tradition, and *on what epistemological assumptions* Orientalist historical criticism rejects or doubts the validity of sanad as an instrument for verifying hadith.[23]

This difference in the level of analysis is the main point of contention between hadith scholars and Orientalist scholars. The criticism raised by Orientalist figures such as Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht is not solely directed at the technical weaknesses of sanad, but rather at the epistemological assumptions that underlie the authority of sanad itself. They view sanad as a retrospective ideological construct, thus proposing historical criticism and matan criticism as the main methods for assessing the authenticity of hadith.[24]

Based on these differences, the following discussion will focus on analyzing the paradigms of hadith authenticity in two different scientific traditions, namely the Islamic scientific paradigm and the Orientalist paradigm. This analysis aims to reveal the epistemological assumptions, methodological orientations, and scientific consequences that underlie the different perspectives on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, so that the debate over the authenticity of hadith can be understood not merely as a difference in method, but as a difference in religious knowledge paradigms.

Analysis of the Hadith Authenticity Paradigm

1. The Paradigm of Hadith Authenticity in the Islamic Scientific Tradition

In the Islamic scientific tradition, the issue of hadith authenticity is not understood solely as a historical problem, but as an epistemological issue directly related to the authority of revelation and the legitimacy of religious teachings. Hadith is positioned as the second normative source after the Qur'an, so that its truth and authenticity are the main prerequisites for the validity of religious law and practice. Therefore, since the early period of Islam, hadith scholars have developed a set of scientific instruments aimed at maintaining the continuity of the transmission of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

One of the main reasons for serious concern about the authenticity of hadiths is the proliferation of unverifiable accounts among Muslims. This phenomenon did not only emerge in the second century of the Hijri calendar, as is often associated with the post-fitnah period, but according to some views, it has been recognized since the early days of Islam. This awareness is reflected in the Prophet Muhammad's stern warning against lying in his name, which was later used as a reference by figures such as Ahmad Amin and Hāsyim Ma'rūf to emphasize the urgency of preserving the authenticity of hadith.[25]

Awareness of the importance of hadith verification grew stronger after the great slander occurred. Ibn Sīrīn emphasized that before the slander occurred, Muslims

[23] Rahmi and Taufiqurrahman, "Hadith Criticism in the Field of Historical Studies."

[24] Musṫafā 'Azhamī, *Manhaj An-Naqd 'Ind Al-Muḥaddithīn* (Riyadh: Syirkah al-Ṭibā'ah al'Arabiyyah al-Su'ūdiyyah al-Maḥdūdah, 1982).

[25] Imam Al-Bukhari, "Al-Jami' Al-Shahih," in *Volume 2* (Cairo: Dar al-Syu'ub, 1987), 102.

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did not question the chain of narration. However, after political conflict spread, Muslims began to demand clarity regarding the identity of narrators to ensure the authenticity of the narrations. Ibn Sīrīn's statement shows that sanad is not merely a technical aspect of narration, but rather an epistemic instrument born out of the need to maintain the authenticity of religious knowledge amid political and ideological fragmentation.[26]

In this context, sanad is understood as a scientific verification mechanism that connects the text of the hadith with its authoritative source, namely the Prophet Muhammad. Hadith scholars argue that the truth of a hadith cannot be tested through rationality alone, but must be proven through the continuity of transmission and the moral integrity of the narrator. Therefore, disciplines such as jarḥ wa ta'dīl, 'ilm al-rijāl, and 'ilal al-ḥadīth were born, which serve to assess the quality of narrators and detect hidden flaws in hadith.[27]

This paradigm is also reflected in the debate regarding the writing of hadith. Although there are accounts that prohibit the writing of hadith, scholars such as 'Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb assert that this prohibition is contextual and temporary. The writing of hadith was permitted under certain conditions, especially for companions who were literate and concerned about the loss of hadith. This shows that from the beginning, Islamic scholars had developed an adaptive approach without sacrificing the principle of epistemological caution.[28]

Thus, the paradigm of hadith authenticity in Islamic tradition is based on the belief that sanad is a valid and verifiable channel of knowledge transmission. Hadith is understood as a normative text whose truth is preserved through an internal scientific system, not as a historical product that stands apart from the authority of revelation.

2. The Paradigm of Hadith Authenticity in the Orientalist Tradition

Unlike the Islamic tradition, the paradigm of hadith authenticity in Orientalist studies is based on epistemological assumptions that place religious texts as historical products. Within this framework, hadith is understood as the result of social, political, and legal constructions of Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Sanad is not seen as an instrument of verification of truth, but rather as a mechanism of legitimacy constructed retrospectively.

Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht are two key figures who shaped the Orientalist paradigm in hadith studies. Both argue that most hadith emerged in the second and third centuries AH, in line with the developing legal and political needs of Muslims. Schacht proposed the theory *of projecting back*, which is the process of tracing sanad backwards to attribute the

[26] Muhajirin, "Implications of Fitnah Kubra for the Emergence of Maudhu' Hadith," *Al-Insan: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005): 86.

[27] Maḥmūd Ṭaḥḥān, *Taisīr Muṣṭalah Ḥadīts* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 11–12.

[28] 'Ajjaj Al-Khatib, "Al-Sunnah Qabla Al-Tadwīn," n.d.

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opinions of scholars to the Prophet in order to obtain normative legitimacy.[29]

Meanwhile, Goldziher criticized the methods of classical hadith scholars, which he considered too focused on sanad criticism and neglectful of matan criticism. According to him, hadith research should place greater emphasis on analyzing the content of the text, taking into account political, social, and cultural factors. Therefore, he proposed matan criticism as the primary method for assessing the authenticity of hadith.[30]

This Orientalist paradigm resulted in deep skepticism towards hadith as a source of Islamic teachings. Hadith was no longer seen as a direct reflection of the Prophet's words, but rather as a mirror of the social dynamics of early Muslims. Thus, Orientalists argued that the validity of hadith could not be determined through sanad, but rather through historical analysis independent of normative religious claims.[31]

3. Epistemological Paradigm Differences between Islamic Hadith Criticism and Orientalism

Joseph Schacht was one of the Orientalists who systematically developed criticism of hadith, especially early legal hadith. Through the *common link* theory, Schacht observed that many fiqh hadith sanad ended up with one central narrator. He interpreted this phenomenon as an indication that these hadiths only appeared during the narrator's lifetime and were then projected retrospectively to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (*projecting back*). Based on this assumption, Schacht concluded that early fiqh hadiths cannot be authentically traced back to the Prophet, but are rather a reflection of the ijtihad of the scholars of the second century Hijri.[32]

Schacht's view was then seriously criticized by a number of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. They emphasized that the existence *of a common link* does not necessarily indicate the falsification of hadith, but may reflect the position of a narrator as a leading teacher or center of hadith transmission in an academic network. Furthermore, Schacht's approach was considered to oversimplify the issue of sanad because it ignored the analysis of matan and the social context of hadith transmission, which was lively and dynamic within the Muslim scholarly community.[33]

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[29] Ali Mustafa Yaqub, *Hadith Criticism* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2008), 14–20.

[30] ‘Azhamī, *Manhaj An-Naqd ‘Ind Al-Muḥaddithīn*, 119–89.

[31] Wazna, "CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF EXPLORING THE AUTHENTICITY OF HADITH (A Study of Harald Motzki's Thought)"; Adhwa et al., "Orientalist Studies of the Prophet's Hadith (Ignaz Goldziher's Concept of Thought on the Prophet's Hadith)."

[32] Arief, *Orientalists and the Diabolism of Thought*; Bisri Tujang, "THE EXISTENCE OF A COMMON LINK IN HADITH SANAD: A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOSEPH SCHACHT'S THEORY," *AL-MAJAALIS: JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES* 3, no. 1 (2015): 57–105, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37397/almajaalis.v3i1.32.

[33] Syakir Abdul Azam et al., “A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SCHACHT’S THOUGHTS ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF HADITH,” *JOURNAL OF HADITH STUDIES* 10, no. 1 (2025): 139–52; Tujang, “THE EXISTENCE OF A COMMON LINK IN HADITH SANAD: A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOSEPH SCHACHT’S THEORY.”

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A similar pattern of criticism is also evident in Ignaz Goldziher's approach. One concrete example is his criticism of the hadith about the superiority of three mosques narrated through Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. Goldziher believes that this hadith did not originate from the prophetic tradition, but was the result of political manipulation by the Umayyad Dynasty. He accused that the hadith was created under pressure from Caliph 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwān to shift the orientation of Muslim worship from Mecca, which was then under the control of 'Abdullāh bin Zubair, to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[34]

Goldziher's accusation was thoroughly refuted by Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami through a chronological analysis of history and biographical data of the narrator. Al-Azami pointed out that al-Zuhrī was born around 50–58 AH and only met 'Abd al-Malik after 81 AH. During the construction of the Dome of the Rock, al-Zuhrī was still very young and did not yet have the scholarly authority that would have enabled him to produce normative hadiths with broad political impact. In addition, the presence of many companions and tābi‘īn in the Sham region at that time made the assumption of collective manipulation of hadiths difficult to accept historically and socially.[35]

The study of the Goldziher and Schacht case shows that the main problem with Orientalist criticism lies not only in the accuracy of historical data, but also in epistemological assumptions that reject the authority of sanad from the outset. In the Islamic scholarly tradition, sanad criticism serves to maintain the continuity of the transmission of the Prophet's teachings by verifying the chain of transmission and the moral integrity of the narrators. Meanwhile, matan criticism is positioned as a complementary mechanism to assess the conformity of the content of the hadith with the Qur'an, the principles of sharia, and Islamic normative rationality, not as a substitute for sanad.[36]

In contrast, Orientalist historical criticism views sanad as an ideological construct that has no verificative value. The main focus is directed at the socio-historical context of the text's emergence, not at the authority of transmission. As a result, hadiths are often rejected as invalid even though they have been deemed sahih by Muslim scholars based on strict sanad criteria.[37] This difference confirms that the conflict between hadith scholars and Orientalists is not merely a difference in analytical methods, but a difference in epistemological paradigms in understanding the sources of religious truth.[38]

Based on this difference in paradigms, efforts to build a synthesis between Islamic scholarship and Orientalist

[34] ‘Azhamī, *Manhaj An-Naqd ‘Ind Al-Muḥaddithīn*.
[35] Yaqub, *Hadith Criticism*.
[36] Ṭaḥḥān, *Taisīr Muṣṭalah Ḥadīts*; Rahmi and Taufiqurrahman, “Hadith Criticism in the Field of Historical Studies.”
[37] Wazna, "CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF EXPLORING THE AUTHENTICITY OF HADITH (A Study of Harald Motzki's Thought)."
[38] Yaqub, *Criticism of Hadith*; Muhaimin et al., "HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCIENCE OF HADITH."

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studies require the affirmation of clear and consistent epistemological boundaries. In the Islamic tradition, revelation and the authority of the Prophet Muhammad are the foundations of truth that are final and non-negotiable. Hadith is not only understood as historical data, but as a normative source that has theological and juridical implications. Therefore, the critical approach of Orientalists cannot be accepted in its entirety, but can only be used selectively as a tool for historical analysis, without negating the authority of revelation and sanad as the epistemic foundation of Islamic teachings.[39]

Within this framework, methodological synthesis is possible at the technical and instrumental levels, such as the utilization of historical data, socio-political chronological analysis, philological studies, and the mapping of hadith text variants. These approaches can enrich our understanding of the context in which hadith emerged and the dynamics of its transmission, as long as they do not replace the function of sanad as the determinant of the normative legitimacy of hadith. Thus, historical criticism functions as *an auxiliary science*, not as a paradigm that replaces the epistemology of Islamic hadith.[40]

This idea finds its relevance in the integrative approach developed by Kamaruddin Amin through the *isnād cum matn* method. In this method, classical sanad criticism is not abandoned, but rather tested and enriched with historical analysis and comparisons of matn variants developed in Western studies. This approach allows for a more proportional reconstruction of the historical of hadith, without getting caught up in radical Orientalist skepticism or an apologetic attitude that closes itself off from academic criticism.[41]

However, the *isnād cum matn* method also affirms the limits of this synthesis. The integration between sanad criticism and matn criticism is only valid in the methodological-epistemological realm, not in the ontological and normative realms. Historical and philological analysis can help explain the process of hadith transmission, but it does not have the authority to invalidate the normative status of hadith that has met the criteria of authenticity according to the science of hadith. Thus, synthesis does not mean relativizing revelation, but rather optimizing scientific tools to strengthen the reliability of understanding hadith.[42]

With this clarification of boundaries, dialogue between Islamic scholarly tradition and Orientalist studies can be conducted

[39] HEDHRI NADHIRAN, *EPISTEMOLOGY OF HADITH CRITICISM: Proposing an Integration-Interconnection Paradigm in Testing the Authenticity of Hadith* (Palembang, 2018).

[40] Muhammad Naufal Hakim, "Integrative Maqâshidiyyah and the Methodological Principles of Abdul Mustaqim's Maqâshidî Theory of Tafsîr," *Islamadina: Journal of Islamic Thought* 24, no. 2 (2023): 179–99.

[41] Maliki and Husnul Hidayati, "The Thought of Hadith by Kamarudin Amin," *El-Umdah; Journal of Quranic Studies and Exegesis.* 2, no. 1 (2019): 91–101, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.20414/elumdah.v2i1.914.

[42] NADHIRAN, *CRITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF HADITH Proposing an Integration-Interconnection Paradigm in Testing the Authenticity of Hadith*; Maliki and Hidayati, "THE THOUGHT OF KAMARUDIN AMIN ON HADITH."

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critically and maturely. The Islamic tradition does not need to be defensive by rejecting all Orientalist findings, just as Orientalists do not have the right to monopolize the criteria for the historical truth of hadith. Controlled synthesis allows for the enrichment of hadith study methodology without sacrificing its authenticity, while preventing hadith studies from falling into epistemological relativism that obscures the difference between normative texts and mere historical products.[43]

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that the problem of hadith authenticity from a modern epistemological perspective is not merely a matter of textual criticism, but a fundamental clash between two systems of knowledge: Islamic revelatory epistemology and Western rational-empirical epistemology. Within this framework, the study shows that the construction of sanad has a central position in determining the authenticity of hadith because it functions as an epistemic mechanism that guarantees the continuity of truth from the Prophet to the ummah. For the Islamic tradition, sanad is not merely a historical chain of transmission, but a methodological and normative device for maintaining the integrity of revelation and affirming the validity of Islamic legal sources. In contrast, the perspective of modern Western scholars assesses sanad as a social construction built retrospectively by post-Prophetic generations to legitimize certain religious authorities, so that the authenticity of hadith is considered relative and problematic. The analysis in this study finds that this difference is rooted in an unequal epistemological basis: Islam is based on the transcendental authority of revelation, while the West relies on historical-empirical verification. Therefore, this study concludes that although the Western historical approach can serve as a tool for critical analysis, the epistemological substance of hadith must still be returned to the structure of sanad as the pillar of its validity and authenticity. Thus, the influence of sanad construction on the authenticity of hadith is fundamental not only as a technical aspect of scholarship, but as the core of the Islamic knowledge system that distinguishes itself from the Western scientific paradigm.

[43] Hakim, "Integrative Maqâshidiyyah and the Methodological Principles of Abdul Mustaqim's Maqâshidî Theory of Interpretation"; Muhaimin et al., "HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF HADITH SCIENCE."

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