



The Genealogy of Hadith Criticism Methods in Western Scholarship

The historicity of hadith is a prominent topic in debates concerning hadith criticism methods within Western hadith scholarship. The issue lies in the fact that the methods developed by Western revisionist hadith scholars, primarily based on the written tradition, tend to marginalize sources of hadith historicity grounded in the oral tradition. Consequently, Western revisionist hadith scholarship often provides an unbalanced justification and generalization of hadith historiography. Addressing this concern, this article employs a genealogical approach alongside Michel Foucault's theory of power relations in knowledge to trace, examine, and evaluate the methods of hadith criticism that have emerged within Western scholarship. The findings of this research are as follows: first, the methods of hadith criticism developed by Western revisionist scholars are founded upon a Eurocentric paradigm that dominates and exerts hegemony over the history of hadith. This paradigm centers on the primacy of the written tradition's validity. Second, the methods developed by the revisionist group are ultimately rooted in a network of knowledge-power, which is interconnected and exerts hegemonic control over the discourse.

Keywords: Genealogy, methods of hadith criticism, Western scholarship.

Historisitas hadis merupakan salah satu topik utama dalam perdebatan mengenai metode kritik hadis di kalangan sarjana hadis Barat. Permasalahan utamanya terletak pada kenyataan bahwa metode-metode yang dikembangkan oleh para sarjana hadis revisionis Barat, yang terutama bertumpu pada tradisi tertulis, cenderung memarginalkan sumber-sumber historisitas hadis yang berlandaskan tradisi lisan. Akibatnya, kajian hadis revisionis Barat sering kali menghasilkan justifikasi dan generalisasi yang tidak seimbang terhadap historiografi hadis. Berangkat dari persoalan tersebut, artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan genealogi serta teori relasi kuasa-pengetahuan Michel Foucault untuk menelusuri, mengkaji, dan mengevaluasi metode-metode kritik hadis yang berkembang dalam tradisi keilmuan Barat. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan dua temuan utama. Pertama, metode kritik hadis yang dikembangkan oleh para sarjana revisionis Barat dibangun di atas paradigma Eurosentrisme yang mendominasi sekaligus menghegemoni sejarah hadis. Paradigma ini menempatkan validitas tradisi tertulis sebagai pusat pijakan analisis. Kedua, metode yang dikembangkan oleh kelompok revisionis pada akhirnya berakar pada suatu jaringan kuasa-pengetahuan yang saling terhubung dan menjalankan fungsi hegemonik dalam membentuk serta mengendalikan diskursus.

Kata Kunci: Genealogi, metode kritik hadis, kesarjanaan Barat.

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Introduction

The study of hadith has emerged as a significant area of interest among scholars of Islamic studies in the West.¹ This is largely because hadith is deeply interconnected with various other aspects of Islamic studies.² Such interconnections call for thorough and comprehensive research on hadith. The body of hadith research developed in the West clearly illustrates how this field has become a strong focal point for scholars.³

Upon closer examination, Western research on hadith does not initially address the core issues of hadith studies.⁴ Instead, it begins by exploring other aspects. For instance, Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921 CE) started his study of hadith through the lens of Islamic law.⁵ While investigating Islamic law, he gradually shifted his focus to hadith studies.⁶ Similarly, Joseph Schacht (d. 1969 CE) concentrated on the foundational sources of Islamic rituals.⁷ Although his primary interest was these original

sources, he eventually expanded his analysis to encompass hadith studies.⁸

One factor that has brought the discourse on hadith to the forefront of research among Western hadith scholars, such as Goldziher and Schacht, is the issue of historicity.⁹ The entire framework of Islamic religious tradition, rituals, and literature is based on information from the past, which naturally raises questions about its historical accuracy.¹⁰ The further back in time the origin of a piece of information, the greater the effort needed to verify its authenticity.¹¹

The factors mentioned above sparked the emergence of critical discourse on hadith, and subsequently the development of critical methods, among Western scholars.¹² They view hadith, as a source of doctrine and knowledge within the Islamic tradition, as being in a problematic state.¹³ According to them, the hadith contains flaws that make it increasingly fragile. The works of Goldziher, Schacht, Juynboll,¹⁴ and Patricia Crone,¹⁵ for example,

¹ Christopher Melchert, 'Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith', *Islamic Law and Society* 15, no. 3 (2008): 408–411.

² Aharon Layish, 'Notes on Joseph Schacht's Contribution to the Study of Islamic Law', *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies. Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (January 25, 1982): 132–140.

³ Joseph Schacht, 'A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 81, no. 3–4 (October 15, 1949): 143–154.

⁴ William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet* (London: Smith, Elder, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place, 1877).

⁵ Richard Gottheil, 'Ignaz Goldziher', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 42 (February 1922): 189.

⁶ Paul E. Walker, 'Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law by Ignaz Goldziher, Andras Hamori, Ruth Hamori, Bernard Lewis', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 4 (October 1983): 761.

⁷ J. N. D. Anderson, 'The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence by Joseph Schacht', *Die Welt des Islams* 2, no. 2 (1952): 136.

⁸ Joseph Schacht, 'Problems of Modern Islamic Legislation', *Studia Islamica*, no. 12 (February 1960): 99–129.

⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Mohammed and Islam*, ed. Morris Jastrow, Douglas Pratt, and Kate Seelye, *Mohammed and Islam* (Gorgias Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Jonathan A C Brown, 'Did the Prophet Say It or Not? The Literal, Historical, and Effective Truth of Hadiths

in Early Sunnism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 2 (February 2009): 259–285.

¹¹ Tayeb El-Hibri, 'The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study by Albrecht Noth, Michael Bonner', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1 (January 1998): 114–118.

¹² Critical discourse did not emerge only in the field of hadith studies; long before that, this discourse had already emerged in Qur'anic studies. See: 'Umar Luṭfī Al-Ālim, *Al-Mustashriqūn Wa Al-Qur'ān: Dirāsah Naqdiyyah Li Manāhij Al-Mustashriqīn* (Malta: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Ālam al-Islāmī, 1991); Johan Fueck, *Tārīkh Ḥarakat Al-Istishrāq: Al-Dirāsāt Al-'Arabiyyah Wa Al-Islāmiyyah Fī Ūrubba Ḥattā Bidāyat Al-Qarn Al-'Ishrīn*, ed. 'Umar Luṭfī al-Ālim (Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2001); Aḥmad Naṣrī, *Ārā' Al-Mustashriqīn Al-Faransiyyīn Fī Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Rabat: Dār al-Qalam, 2009).

¹³ Jonathan Brown, 'How We Know Early Hadith Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find', *Islamic Law and Society* 15, no. 2 (2008): 143–184.

¹⁴ M. Muranyi, 'Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth by G. H. A. Juynboll', *Die Welt des Islams* 23 (1984): 516–519.

¹⁵ Patricia Crone, 'What Do We Actually Know about Mohammed?', *OpenDemocracy*, last modified 2008, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/mohammed-3866jsp/>.





broadly highlight the main issues within the hadith corpus: problems with the written textual sources, instances of forgery, and the political factors underlying the development of hadith.¹⁶ These concerns have formed the foundation of criticism among Western hadith scholars from the inception of hadith research up to recent decades.

The question of whether written hadith texts served as the historical foundation of the hadith corpus remains one of the most complex issues. Hadith scholars have repeatedly sought to clarify this challenging topic. For example, Nabia Abbot examined the possibility of factual written texts from the early period of Islam. Similarly, Fuat Sezgin presented arguments supporting the existence of a substantial written hadith tradition during Islam's formative years. Along the same lines, Muhammad Qasim Zaman and Hayat Amamou have also worked to trace and provide insights into the oldest hadith manuscripts.¹⁷

At this low point, complex issues emerge. The criticisms raised by many Western hadith scholars seem to reach an impasse, hitting a dead end. Their evaluations and justifications concerning the hadith, particularly regarding its historicity, follow a similar pattern: the hadith cannot ultimately be historically validated as authentic information from the past. For instance, Goldziher's final assessment is that hadith can only be considered reliable information at best from the 2nd century AH (700s CE) or from the generation of the *tābi'īn*. Similarly, Schacht's argument, based on the *argumentum e silentio* paradigm, claims that the

information contained in hadiths that appeared in later periods lacks valid historical roots. Juynboll, Patricia Crone, and Michael Allan Cook ultimately reach the same conclusion.¹⁸

In addition to the research models developed by the scholars mentioned above, several other Western hadith scholars have also brought fresh perspectives to the field of hadith studies. For instance, Gregor Schoeler offers a more detailed approach to the oral tradition in hadith to uncover potentially valid information.¹⁹ Andreas Görke's emphasis on the importance of considering oral tradition is equally noteworthy.²⁰ Similarly, Harald Motzki proposes the *isnād cum matn* theory, which aims to provide more integrated data for examining historical figures within the chain of transmission.²¹ However, both Görke's and Motzki's approaches still fall slightly short compared to those of earlier scholars. Ultimately, the historical validity of hadith cannot be definitively confirmed as extending all the way back to the time of the Prophet.

This study aims to illuminate the complex problems and issues surrounding the historical validity of hadith. Its objective is to find answers and unravel the intricate web of questions related to this topic. Is it true that the historicity of hadith can only be accurately and effectively assessed up to the *tābi'īn*? What factors led Western researchers to this conclusion? How did the development of the critical method evolve to reach such a standpoint? To address these questions, this study adopts a broad framework combining the history of ideas and the sociology

¹⁶ Gautier H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007).

¹⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Maghazi and the Muhaddithun: Reconsidering the Treatment of "Historical" Materials in Early Collections of Hadith', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (February 1996): 1–18; Hayat Amamou, 'The Nature of Early Islamic Sources and the Debate Over Their Historical Significance', *AlMuntaqa* 1, no. 2 (2018): 68–79.

¹⁸ Imam Sahal Ramdhani, 'Teori The Spread of Isnad (Telaah Atas Pemikiran Michael Allan Cook)', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 16, no. 2 (February 3, 2017): 223–242.

¹⁹ Gregor Schoeler, 'Character and Authenticity of the Muslim Tradition on the Life of Muhammad', *Arabica* 49, no. 3 (2002): 360–366; Gregor Schoeler, 'The Relationship of Literacy and Memory in the Second/Eighth Century', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 40 (February 2010): 121–129.

²⁰ Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, 'First Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate', *Der Islam* 89, no. 1–2 (January 2012): 2–59.

²¹ Harald Motzki, 'Introduction', *Islamic Law and Society* 19, no. 1–2 (2012): 1–10.





of knowledge to 'unveil' and 'interpret' these issues. Specifically, it utilizes Michel Foucault's theory of the genealogy of knowledge to explore the origin and nature of the material object, alongside the theory of the social construction of knowledge to expose the power dynamics underlying the debates and discourses.²² Additionally, to deepen the analysis and enrich its details, this study incorporates the deconstructive paradigm to analyze discourse and the decolonization paradigm to critique Eurocentrism, both drawn from the field of philosophy.²³

Based on the problem and approach outlined above, this study argues that the primary obstacle in research on the historicity of hadith among Western scholars is a mismatch in research paradigms. Specifically, the paradigm employed so far has focused on textual tradition rather than oral tradition.²⁴ This reflects the persistent influence of Eurocentrism in the narrative of hadith studies among Western scholars.²⁵ In other words, adopting an alternative paradigm could reveal evidence supporting the historicity of hadith.²⁶

The Early Roots of Hadith Criticism in Western Scholarship

One of the early catalysts for the development of hadith studies in the West was Ignaz Goldziher, a pioneering scholar who inspired many others in the field. He argued that hadiths cannot be accepted as reliable historical data; they are largely inauthentic and can only be validated if they date back to the second century of the Hijri calendar. Goldziher produced a

significant series of essays in which he outlined several reasons why hadiths should not be trusted as historical evidence. First, *isnāds* were often fabricated by religious figures who had partisan interests concerning the Prophet. Second, the *matn* frequently contains anachronisms and prophecies, undermining their authenticity. Additionally, Goldziher found questionable evidence within Islamic texts themselves regarding the compilation of hadiths.

Shortly after Goldziher, the renowned hadith scholar Joseph Schacht adopted and expanded upon Goldziher's framework. In his book *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*^{*} Schacht was inspired by Goldziher's theory, which he modified and developed further to propose a theory on the development of Islamic law. He argued that the Qur'an did not influence the formation of *sharia* and that the hadith were "fabricated" in the late 2nd century AH to enable the integration of Umayyad and Roman administrative practices, along with other elements, into Islamic law.

Schacht proposed a theory that has gained popularity among hadith scholars, known as "*argumentum e silentio*." According to this theory, if a particular piece of information appears in a later collection but is absent from an earlier one, it suggests that the information did not actually exist at the earlier time. Another theory he introduced, called "Backward Projection," argues that *isnāds* were spread by narrators from the *ahl al-fiqh* to legitimize their doctrinal views. He contends that *isnāds* did not develop organically but were shaped deliberately by a

²² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (Tavistock Publication Limited London, 1973).

²³ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); Herbert Berg, 'Mapping Islamic Studies: Genealogy, Continuity, and Change by Azim Nanji', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119, no. 3 (July 1999): 544-545.

²⁴ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 30th Anniv. (Routledge, 2013).

²⁵ The counter-perspective to the Eurocentrism paradigm is the perspective of Occidentalism, a concept

proposed by Said. Edward W Said, *Orientalisme: Menggugat Hegemoni Barat Dan Menundukkan Timur Sebagai Subjek*, ed. Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, trans. Achmad Fawaid (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010); Hassan Hanafi, *Oksidentalisme: Sikap Kita Terhadap Tradisi Barat*, ed. Syafiq Hasyim, trans. M. Najib Buchori, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Penerbit Paramadina, 2000).

²⁶ El-Hibri, 'The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study by Albrecht Noth, Michael Bonner', 114-118.





fabricator or manipulator. This idea of a “mysterious” fabricator led Schacht to develop his influential “common link” theory, which has inspired extensive research, investigations, and seminars among hadith scholars. The theory seeks to identify the individual considered to be the fabricator who composed the hadith narrative and transmitted it widely to subsequent narrators. Schacht claims that his theory enables him to accurately date hadiths.

The fundamental paradigm advocated by Goldziher and Schacht has been adopted by several modern, or perhaps contemporary, hadith scholars. Notable figures include J. Wansbrough, Crone, and Michael Allan Cook, who collectively describe their approach as “renewed skepticism.” Wansbrough rejects the traditional Islamic account of the complete redaction of the Qur’anic text and also dismisses nearly the entire body of early Islamic tradition. Similarly, Crone, in her seminal work *Hagarism*, raises numerous questions about the authenticity of hadith.²⁷ Cook introduces a theory of hadith dating based on the “spread of *isnād*” (the theory of *isnād* diffusion). This theory suggests that identifying the common link within *isnād* chains is challenging. Cook identified many potential common links, half of which are likely false or apparent rather than genuine. In other words, Cook’s perspective is not only skeptical of the entire hadith corpus but also questions the validity of the common link theory itself, effectively dismantling it from its very foundations.²⁸

While Goldziher, Schacht, and other skeptics argued that *isnad* cannot guarantee the authenticity of a hadith, Juynboll offered a fresh perspective: he proposed that *isnād* itself constitutes sufficiently factual historical data, even if the *matn* is not authentic. This view was

shaped by his research methods, which he also applied while assisting in the compilation of Wensinck’s book *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*.²⁹ Although Juynboll developed his theory based on Schacht’s “common link” theory, he did not adopt all of its aspects. His views are clearly presented in his first work on hadith, published in 1969, as well as in at least twenty other articles on the subject, in addition to his collection of essays, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadith*.³⁰ When evaluating his theory, one might consider it highly technical and complex. Juynboll introduced many specialized terms into his framework, such as ‘divining strands,’ ‘real common link,’ and ‘partial common link.’ According to him, while determining the authenticity of hadith or tradition is challenging, this approach also opens the possibility of uncovering genuine historical data.

Like Juynboll, the “common link” theory proposed by Schacht prompted responses from Fuat Sezgin and Nabia Abbott. Abbott argued that the early development of hadith relied on written materials. Similarly, Sezgin did not claim that only two of the eight modes of transmission involved memorization; rather, the others all involved written sources.³¹ Although both scholars responded to Schacht’s theory, their critiques appear weak. Herbert Berg points out this weakness, noting that their critiques seem more apologetic than factual.

Among the prominent figures of the Middle Ground school was Gregor Schoeler, a German hadith scholar who devoted considerable attention to historical criticism and the historicity of hadith. He not only explored the development of hadith dating but also contributed

²⁷ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (CUP Archive, 1977).

²⁸ I conducted an in-depth analysis of Cook’s work in my thesis. See: Imam Sahal Ramdhani, ‘Teori The Spread of Isnad (Telaah Atas Pemikiran Michael Allan Cook)’ (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015).

²⁹ Arent Jan Wensinck, *Concordance et Indices de La Tradition Musulmane*, 3rd ed. (Brill Archive, 1936).

³⁰ Muranyi, ‘Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth by G. H. A. Juynboll’, 516–519.

³¹ Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums: Poesie Bis ca. 430H*, 2nd ed. (Brill, 1967), 58–62.





significantly to hadith historiography.³² Schoeler sought to develop a dating methodology akin to the theories proposed by other Sanguine groups. This endeavor is reflected in many of his works, including *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, *Ecrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'Islam* (translated into English as *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: The Oral and Written Traditions in Early Islam*), and *The Biography of Muhammad: Nature and Authenticity*. The latter is his most recent publication, encompassing all of his latest technical theories. His work falls within the fields of hadith source criticism, hadith dating studies, and hadith historiography.

Just as Schoeler maintains that the authenticity of hadiths can be traced and verified, scholars from the “sanguine” school offer perspectives that closely align with the intellectual framework of traditional hadith scholarship. Notable figures include F. Buhl,³³ J. Horowitz,³⁴ A. Guillaume,³⁵ J. van Ess,³⁶ M. Watt, Serjeant,³⁷ Johan Fuck,³⁸ Rudi Paret, Ursula Segzin, Albrecht Noth, Cornelius Kees Versteegh, Miklos Muranyi, M. Lecker, G. Stauth, E. Whelan, Andreas Görke,³⁹ and Harald Motzki.

M. Watt contends that the foundational framework of the Sirah is primarily composed of *maghāzī* content, which has long been widely

accepted and regarded as reliable. Interestingly, this material has not been extensively utilized in European biographies of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁰ This perspective, that the *sirah*'s foundation lies in *maghāzī* material, was actually proposed earlier by Rudi Paret. Paret maintains that *maghāzī* accounts can serve as a basis for historical verification. He also examines key transmitters such as Ibn Ishāq, al-Zuhrī, and 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, who were similarly assessed by Watt.⁴¹ Within the Muslim scholarly community, Muhammad Qasim Zaman offers a closely aligned viewpoint, arguing that *maghāzī* content constitutes valid historical data.⁴²

Another notable figure is Albrecht Noth, whom skeptics often consider an ally and forerunner. However, this is a misconception, as he ultimately rejected their ideas and advocated for a more moderate approach to the study of hadith. In the second edition of his book *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (translated into English as *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*), he states: “Hadiths present a wealth of valuable historical material; although this data requires complex and meticulous examination, it nonetheless opens up promising possibilities regarding its factual dimensions.”⁴³

In addition to Noth, Michael Lecker, a professor of Arab studies at The Hebrew

³² Schoeler, ‘Character and Authenticity of the Muslim Tradition on the Life of Muhammad’, 360–366.

³³ Frants Buhl, *Das Leben Mohammeds*, trans. Hans Heinrich Schaefer (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1930).

³⁴ Josef Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2002).

³⁵ Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasulullah* (Oxford University Press, 1955).

³⁶ Josef van Ess, *Between Hadith and Theology: Studies on the Origins of Predestination in Islamic Tradition* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1975).

³⁷ R. B. Serjeant, ‘Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam: Misconceptions and Flawed Polemics’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 3 (July 1990): 472–486.

³⁸ Johann Wilhelm Fück, ‘Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq: Literarhistorische Untersuchungen’ (Goethe University Frankfurt, 1925).

³⁹ Andreas Görke, ‘The Historical Tradition about Al-Hudaybiya: A Study of Urwa b. Zubayr's Account’, in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden, 2000), 240–275.

⁴⁰ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 32.

⁴¹ Rudi Paret, *Muhammad in the Quran: History and Proclamation of the Arab Prophet* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1957), 151.

⁴² Zaman, ‘Maghazi and the Muhaddithun: Reconsidering the Treatment of “Historical” Materials in Early Collections of Hadith’, 1–18.

⁴³ Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994), 24.





University of Jerusalem, offers an optimistic perspective. He has conducted extensive research on the early history of Islam, focusing particularly on the life of Muhammad and the Jewish community in the Arabian Peninsula. Some of his notable works include *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document and People, Tribes, and Society in Arabia around the Time of Muhammad*.⁴⁴

Alongside Lecker, another notable hadith scholar with a strong interest in this field has emerged: Andreas Görke, a researcher at Christian-Albrecht University in Kiel. He studied Islamic studies at the University of Hamburg, earning his Ph.D. in 2001. Following this, he worked as a research assistant in Hamburg, Basel, and Berlin. In 2010, he completed his Habilitation at the University of Basel. His publications include *Das Kitab al-Amwal des Abu Ubayd al-Qasim bin Salam* and *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads: Das Korpus Urwa ibn Zubair*.⁴⁵ His research primarily focuses on early Islamic history, historiography, the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, hadith studies, as well as the development of Islamic law and exegetical discourse.

The most prominent scholar of the 'sanguinis' group, widely regarded as its leading figure, is Motzki.⁴⁶ Many experts, including Schoeler,⁴⁷ Kevin Reinhart,⁴⁸ Brown,⁴⁹ Görke,⁵⁰ Gunther, and others, classify Motzki within the

'sanguinis' group. However, Berg places him in a more intermediate position. This makes Motzki's stance clearer than that of Juynboll, whose classification remains debated—some experts consider Juynboll a 'skeptic,' while others view him as a 'sanguinis.'

Motzki proposed his groundbreaking theory on historical criticism, known as the *isnād cum matn* method.⁵¹ This approach has inspired many hadith scholars, especially those from the 'sanguinis' school, to delve deeper into hadith studies. Some scholars have even applied this theory beyond hadith, extending it to fields such as *fiqh*, *sīrah*, the origins of books, and more. Motzki asserts that his method is more effective for investigating hadith than other approaches, such as the "common link" theory or the "spread of *isnād*" theory.⁵² Furthermore, he argues that his theory can successfully trace the authenticity of hadith back to the era of the Companions, whereas other theories, like the "common link" theory, only trace back to the era of the *tabi'īn*.

The discourse on hadith criticism extends beyond scholars who lived before and during Motzki's era to include those who came after him and were influenced by his ideas, methods, theories, and paradigms. Notable figures in this field include Joas Wagemakers,⁵³ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort,⁵⁴ Kamaruddin Amin,⁵⁵ among others. Some of these scholars have sought to develop Motzki's method, reformulate

⁴⁴ Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad First Legal Document* (Gerlach Press, 2023); Michael Lecker, *People, Tribes and Society in Arabia Around the Time of Muhammad* (London: Routledge, 2022).

⁴⁵ Andreas Görke, *Das Kitab Al-Amwal Des Abu'Ubayd Al-Qasim b. Sallam: Entstehung Und Überlieferung Eines Frühislamischen Rechtswerks* (The Darwin Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Harald Motzki, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Sean W. Anthony, *Analysing Muslim Traditions* (Brill, 2010).

⁴⁷ Schoeler, 'Character and Authenticity of the Muslim Tradition on the Life of Muhammad', 360–366.

⁴⁸ A Kevin Reinhart, 'Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and Hadith Study in the Twenty-First Century', ed. G H A Juynboll et al., *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 3 (February 2010): 413–444.

⁴⁹ Brown, 'How We Know Early Hadīth Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find', 143–184.

⁵⁰ Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler, 'First Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate', 2–59.

⁵¹ Harald Motzki, 'The Muṣannaf of 'Abd Al-Razzāq Al-San'ānī as a Source of Authentic Aḥādīth of the First Century A. H.', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (January 1991): 1–21.

⁵² Harald Motzki, 'Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey', *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–253.

⁵³ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers, *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Brill, 2011).

⁵⁴ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, 'Wie Was Mohammed?', in *#Islamstudies*, ed. Joas Wagemakers (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, 2015), 6–9.

⁵⁵ Kamaruddin Amin, *The Reliability of Hadith-Transmission A Re-Examination of Hadith-Critical Methods* (Germany: Universitaet Bonn, 2005).





his theory, apply his concepts, respond to his ideas, and critique his paradigm. In other words, they do not simply accept Motzki's views; for instance, Gledhill has notably criticized Motzki's method.⁵⁶

A notable Western scholar of hadith following Motzki is Nicolet Boekhoff. She graduated from the Institute of Translation in Maastricht in 1992 and then pursued Arabic studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen, where she earned her M.A. in 1996 with a thesis analyzing the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* in the *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq.⁵⁷ For her Ph.D. research, she examined the biographical sources of the Prophet by applying *isnād* cum *matn* analysis to a hadith transmitted by Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. Since 2008, Nicolet has been a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Radboud University.

Finally, Kamaruddin Amin, an Indonesian hadith scholar who completed his doctoral studies in Germany and was a student of Motzki, applied the *isnād* cum *matn* theory to his research. Drawing on this approach, Amin successfully established the dating of the *ṣiyyām* hadith. He concluded that the earliest appearance of the *ṣiyyām* hadith dates back to the era of the Companions and identified Abū Hurayrah as the key common link. While Kamaruddin acknowledged that his research could not definitively verify the historical transmission of this hadith all the way back to the Prophet's time, his study nonetheless represents a significant advancement of Motzki's theory.⁵⁸

Typologies of Hadith Criticism in Western Scholarship

Several scholars have proposed typologies of hadith criticism within Western hadith studies. An interesting example is Herbert Berg's typology, which was later adopted by Amin in his dissertation. Herbert identified four schools of hadith criticism among Western scholars. The first is the early skeptical school (Early Western Scepticism), which includes many prominent figures such as Goldziher,⁵⁹ Schacht,⁶⁰ Joseph van Ess,⁶¹ and others who share similar critical perspectives.

Herbert explains that the key factor placing Goldziher within this school of thought is his fundamental perspective on hadith. Goldziher finds it extremely difficult—if not impossible—to verify the historicity of hadith. He attributes this challenge primarily to the phenomenon of forgery that emerged after the second century of the Hijri calendar. Additionally, the fact that many significant hadith narrators were predominantly later (younger) figures further undermines the historical reliability of hadith. This is because Goldziher idealized a historical authenticity that depended on the predominance of narrators from the early period.⁶²

In addition to Goldziher, Berg also identified Schacht as a member of the early skeptical school. Schacht's skepticism is primarily grounded in two theories he developed: the common link theory and the backward projection theory. These theories sparked significant debate within academic circles, generating a substantial response both in support of and opposition to them. According to Goldziher's perspective, the

⁵⁶ Paul J Gledhill, 'Motzki's Forger: The Corpus of the Follower 'Atā' in Two Early 3rd/9th-Century Ḥadīth Compendia', *Islamic Law and Society* 19, no. 1–2 (2012): 160–193.

⁵⁷ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, 'Production The Kitāb Al-Maghāzī of 'Abd Al-Razzāq b. Hammām Al-Ṣan'ānī: Searching for Earlier Source-Material', in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam* (Brill, 2011), 25–47.

⁵⁸ Amin, *The Reliability of Hadith-Transmission A Re-Examination of Hadith-Critical Methods*.

⁵⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2 vols. (London, 1967).

⁶⁰ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950).

⁶¹ Ess, *Between Hadith and Theology: Studies on the Origins of Predestination in Islamic Tradition*; Kamaruddin Amin, *Re-Examining the Accuracy of Hadith-Critical Methods* (Jakarta: Hikmah, 2009).

⁶² Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 9–12.





overall conclusion of Schacht's research is that hadiths are extremely difficult to authenticate. Later, E. Stetter expanded on Schacht's ideas, formulating the *Topoi* and *Schemata* theory based on Schacht's conceptual framework.⁶³

The second school of thought is known as the "Reaction against Skepticism," comprising scholars who opposed the Skeptical school.⁶⁴ Herbert identifies several figures associated with this movement, including Seigzin,⁶⁵ Abbot,⁶⁶ Azami,⁶⁷ and others. This school emerged as a response to the influence of skeptical groups. Seigzin notably critiqued the ideas of Goldziher, presenting his arguments in works such as *Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftums, Band I: Qur'an, Wissenschaften, Hadith, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystic*.⁶⁸ Similarly, Abbot found the Skeptics' views to be unusual. Her research focused on examining evidence for the existence of a written hadith tradition in early Islam, including written documentation. Ultimately, she argued that such a written tradition did exist during the Prophet's time and that it provides a historical foundation for the hadith.⁶⁹

The steps pioneered by Abbot were later followed by Azami, who is well-known for his sharp criticism of Schacht's ideas, especially concerning the historicity of *isnāds*.⁷⁰ Azami dedicated two works to exploring the complexities and nuances of this issue: *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* and *On Schacht's Origins of*

Muhammadian Jurisprudence.⁷¹ He also re-examined the *isnād* framework reconstructed by Schacht, arguing that Schacht did not fully understand the concept and scholarly nature of hadith.

Third, there is the Middle Ground school, representing the centrist perspective. Berg identifies several scholars in this group, including Juynboll, Schoeler, and Motzki. According to Berg, this school arose amid the "turmoil" between the first and second schools. In other words, positioned between two opposing viewpoints, this group sought a balanced middle ground and a practical solution. For instance, Juynboll criticized the "common link" theory proposed by Schacht, yet he also did not hesitate to critique the conceptual framework put forward by Azami. Motzki later adopted this moderate stance. While he disagreed with the skeptical group in some of his arguments, this did not mean he accepted the reasoning of the second group uncritically.⁷²

Fourth, the Renewed Scepticism or Neo-Scepticism school includes scholars such as Michael Allan Cook and Norman Calder,⁷³ as noted by Berg. This group not only questions the historicity of the hadith but also challenges the theories that support the possibility of such

⁶³ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 12–17.

⁶⁴ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 18.

⁶⁵ Fuat Sezgin, *History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

⁶⁶ Nabia Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II: Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁶⁷ Mohammad Mustafa Azmi, 'Studies in Early Hadith Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts' (University of Cambridge, 1967).

⁶⁸ Sezgin, *Geschichte Des Arabischen Schriftums: Poesie Bis ca. 430H*; Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 21.

⁶⁹ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 18.

⁷⁰ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 23–26.

⁷¹ Azmi, 'Studies in Early Hadith Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts'; Mohammad Mustafa Azami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadian Jurisprudence* (John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 1985).

⁷² Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 34–38.

⁷³ Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993); Yasin Dutton, 'Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence by Norman Calder', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 102–108.





historicity.⁷⁴ For instance, Cook critiques the concept of the “common link,” which has traditionally been seen—at least according to Juynboll—as a key narrator in the hadith chain. Cook argues that the common link remains doubtful because, based on his examination of the hadiths, the figure identified as the common link is actually a product of forgery by other narrators.

Based on a characteristic of a figure in this group (Cook), it is clear that the Renewed Skepticism school is more radical than the early skeptic school. Therefore, Fred Donner’s label of this school as “new skepticism” is appropriate.⁷⁵ This fourth school retains the spirit of the early skeptic school, enhanced by more advanced and radical findings and analyses.

Referring to Berg’s mapping of schools of hadith criticism within Western scholarship, the characteristics of each school reflect the patterns of ideas and concepts they propose. Kevin Reinhart also identified these patterns, which allowed him to develop his own classification and mapping. He categorizes the schools into two groups: first, the Juynboliana and Revisionist schools; second, the Gradualist and Big Bang schools. The first group includes scholars influenced by Juynboll’s ideas as well as those representing revisionist perspectives, such as Goldziher, Schacht, Juynboll himself, Cook, Crone, and several others. The second group comprises scholars who approach the origins of hadith from a gradualist perspective.⁷⁶ Comparing Berg’s and Reinhart’s classifications, the main difference lies in the placement of Juynboll. Herbert considers Juynboll part of a middle-ground group, whereas Reinhart places

him among those who maintain skeptical or revisionist views.

Juynboll’s own position is most clearly expressed in his introduction, where he acknowledges that many readers and others continue to misunderstand his ideas. Concerning the labels attributed to him, Juynboll does not adopt a strictly black-and-white view of such classifications.⁷⁷

The following framework was proposed by Schoeler and later adopted by Gledhill and Motzki. Kevin Reinhart also expanded upon Schoeler’s model. Schoeler classified Western hadith scholars’ approaches to hadith criticism into two main schools of thought.

The first school of thought is the ‘Sanguine’ or traditionalist school. Schoeler defines ‘sanguine’ as scholars who adopt a historical approach to sources about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, even though they acknowledge that the information may have been distorted during transmission. In other words, they generally accept the basic framework and outline of Muhammad’s history as accurate.

The second school of thought is known as the “Revisionist” school. Schoeler refers to it by various names, including “The Revisionist School of Islamic Studies,” “The Historical-Critical School of Islamic Studies,” or simply “Revisionism.” Schoeler defines this group as consisting of scholars who argue that the sources about the early period of Islam, which are used by the Sanguine group, are actually opinions formed by later generations. They maintain that the classical biographical accounts of Muhammad are largely fabrications.⁷⁸

From these various mappings, it is clear that there are interconnected genealogical links

⁷⁴ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, 42.

⁷⁵ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing* (New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1998), 20.

⁷⁶ Reinhart, ‘Juynboliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and Hadith Study in the Twenty-First Century’, 413–444.

⁷⁷ Muranyi, ‘Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth by G. H. A. Juynboll’, 516–519.

⁷⁸ Gregor Schoeler, Uwe Vagelpohl, and James E. Montgomery, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (Routledge, 2006).





between different figures. It is also apparent that ideas influence one figure from another, especially among those within the same mapping group. This genealogical network reveals several key points: first, that the ideas developed by later revisionists are extensions of those introduced by earlier figures; second, that these ideas are rooted in a written tradition. As a result, sources of information originating from oral traditions were ultimately disregarded and not considered.

Methodologies and Approaches to Hadith Criticism Among Western Scholars

As mentioned in the previous section, Western Hadith scholarship typically utilizes the approach of Historical Criticism in its research. This method is particularly effective for tracing sources of information from the past. By critically analyzing primary sources, scholars aim to reconstruct information in its most accurate form.

Unfortunately, from the very beginning, the fundamental concept of historical source criticism applied in hadith studies has been based on an oral tradition. This is evident in the logical assumptions underlying these theories and approaches. Naturally, this perspective did not emerge without reason. Tracing its origins reveals that it stems from the genealogy of Western knowledge traditions, which have been dominated by a written culture. The Age of Enlightenment and the invention of the printing press were pivotal moments in this development.

Following the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, Western knowledge entered a colonial phase. During this period, knowledge became intertwined with political interests and colonization. In other words, knowledge rooted in the written tradition was regarded as the standard of progress. This written tradition was seen as a superior and more powerful system of

knowledge compared to the oral tradition, which was often viewed as inferior or weak. Consequently, it is unsurprising that terms such as “illiterate society,” “backward society,” “savage man,” “underdeveloped society,” and “uncivilized society” emerged to describe societies or tribes unfamiliar with the written tradition.⁷⁹

The influence of Eurocentrism is so pervasive that it extends beyond the colonization of territories to deeply affect academic circles.⁸⁰ Several prominent Western scholars of hadith exemplify how Eurocentric perspectives continue to shape their research frameworks. For example, the hadith dating methodologies developed by Schacht and Juynboll rely on the “common link” theory, which originated from hypotheses proposed by Goldziher. Goldziher himself was skeptical of hadith sources from the beginning, largely because, in their early stages, these sources did not exist as formal documents or written texts. In other words, from his Eurocentric viewpoint, Goldziher idealized the presence of a fully developed written hadith tradition during the formative period of hadith development.

Both genealogical and historical analyses of the emergence of hadith reveal that it originated as an oral tradition.⁸¹ Although hadith eventually became part of the written tradition, facilitated by the invention of writing tools and paper, the formative phase relied primarily on oral transmission. Orality was the foundation for conveying hadith information in the early period. When examined closely, four phases and patterns of transition between oral and written traditions can be identified in the context of hadith. First is the phase of oral dominance, which lasted from the time of the Prophet until the early 2nd century AH. Second is the phase of transition from oral to written tradition. During this period, narrators began to adopt writing

⁷⁹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

⁸⁰ Wael B Hallaq, ‘The Authenticity of Prophetic Hadith: A Pseudo-Problem’, *Studia Islamica* 89, no. 89 (1999): 75–90.

⁸¹ Furthermore, if one traces the genealogy of this oral tradition more deeply, it actually has its roots in the Jahiliyyah period. See: Shawqī Dayf, *Tārīkh Al-Adab Al-‘Arabī: Al-‘Aṣr Al-Jāhili*, 18th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.).





practices. However, this written tradition was still fundamentally based on oral transmission. This is evident in the process known as “*taḥammul wa al-adāʾ*,” where a narrator would write hadith information in a manuscript relying on memory or information received orally.⁸² This differs from the concept held by revisionist scholars, who consider an authentic text to be one that exactly reproduces the information previously written.⁸³

This reasoning later evolved into Schacht’s *argumentum e silentio* theory. Naturally, the development of this theory was inevitable, especially since an awareness of the oral tradition was not established from the very outset of the research. However, when examining the transition from oral to written tradition, certain findings do not automatically justify viewing textual inconsistencies as ahistorical. Moreover, the nature of oral tradition does not require uniformity in the wording of transmitted information. Instead, oral tradition focuses on conveying the meaning or essence of the message. Consequently, the term *riwāyah bi al-maʿnā* emerged to reflect this concept.⁸⁴

Third, the phase of written dominance. During this phase, the codification of hadith was primarily driven by the rewriting of earlier manuscript sources. *Makḥṭūṭāt*, or manuscripts, served as the foundation for producing newer hadith collections. By this time, the written tradition had become a well-established aspect of the hadith world. The transmission process increasingly emphasized textual consistency, leading to the emergence of practices such as *taḥqīq* and others.⁸⁵ Fourth, the blended phase, characterized by a combination of written and oral traditions. In this phase, hadith transmission occurred simultaneously through both written and oral means. The written tradition dominated the rewriting of collections, while the oral

tradition remained more influential in memorization and practice.

An understanding of the oral tradition underlying hadith is clearly reflected in the dating methodology proposed by Schoeler, Sebastian Gunther, and Motzki. They argue that to accurately reconstruct the original sources of hadith, researchers must engage directly with the discourse of this oral tradition. This approach demonstrates that all three scholars have moved beyond the constraints of Eurocentrism, which traditionally values only written sources as “civilized” and legitimate. Instead, they recognize the importance of indigenous, foreign, marginalized, and overlooked sources of knowledge. This progressive perspective brings a refreshing new approach to hadith research, which was previously seen as stagnant and conclusive.

One example of how Motzki employs a consciousness-based approach to oral tradition is his incorporation of the *matn* dimension when assessing the historical authenticity of hadith. Additionally, Motzki reevaluates the concept of the “common link,” which Schacht and Juynboll identified as the primary forger, redefining it as the most prolific transmitter in the dissemination of hadith information. In other words, the position of this “common link” does not automatically imply forgery simply because the earlier chain of transmission was single and the subsequent chain expanded on a large scale. Motzki acknowledges that in oral tradition, information can be transmitted through a limited number of individuals, as oral tradition fundamentally relies on authority.

Through the lens of Foucault’s concept of power-knowledge relations, a clear dominance of power is evident in the discourse of hadith criticism, especially within Western revisionist hadith scholarship. This power originates from a

⁸² Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Shahbah, *Al-Wasīṭ Fī ‘Ulūm Wa Muṣṭalaḥ Al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-Maʿrifah, n.d.).

⁸³ Garret Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition Islamic History and Civilization* (Brill, 2021).

⁸⁴ Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, *Al-Madkhal Ilā ‘Ulūm Al-Ḥadīth* (Medina: al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1972).

⁸⁵ Aisha Y Musa, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).





network of revisionist scholars based primarily in Europe and America. The genealogical development of various methods within Western revisionist hadith scholarship reveals the presence of this power network. In other words, discourses grounded in Eurocentric reasoning have ultimately been the ones historicized and sustained throughout the historical evolution of hadith criticism methods.

When considered implicitly, the dominance of the revisionist perspective tends to marginalize the potential and opportunities presented by the methods of hadith criticism that have long been developed by Muslim scholars. The intellectual dominance of the revisionist group, which focuses on the written tradition, risks gradually and ultimately de-historicizing the historical context of the hadith. In contrast, the sanguine group's perspective still allows room for the historicity of the hadith. This sanguine approach, which seeks to assess the historicity of hadith from the clearest possible standpoint, could ultimately serve as a viable alternative. Its goal is to enable the hadith to independently testify to its own historicity.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this article are as follows: first, the origins of the ideas and knowledge behind the hadith criticism method in the West can be traced to two main groups—the sanguine and revisionist schools. These roots extend back to earlier works by Orientalists. The core concepts developed by Cook and Crone are, in fact, still grounded in the foundational ideas of Schacht and Ignaz. Throughout this process, adaptations and modifications have been made to this body of knowledge.

Second, the stalemate within the revisionist group's research arises from a Eurocentric viewpoint. This perspective continues to dominate the paradigms of certain Western hadith scholars, especially among revisionists. The optimistic approach of the sanguine group, which emphasizes awareness of the oral

tradition, could offer a clear way forward in addressing this issue.

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