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The Comprehensiveness and Realism of Hadith Criticism: A Comparative Study of the Methodologies of Muslim Hadith Scholars and Western Approaches

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Abstract

This study examines the nature of hadith criticism among early hadith scholars by highlighting its comprehensiveness and practical realism. It demonstrates that judging a hadith was not based on a single criterion, nor merely on examining the apparent form of the chain of transmission or making an overall judgment about a narrator. Rather, it was a complex process that took into account a set of mutually reinforcing indicators. Hadith critics combined knowledge of narrators and their ranks, knowledge of the particular characteristics of a narrator's transmission from a specific teacher, identification of the teacher's students, comparison of transmission routes, detection of solitary transmission and contradiction, differentiation between marfu' and mawquf reports, connected and mursal chains, additions and omissions, errors, insertions, and inversions, together with the use of chronology, generations of transmitters, travel, hearing, and actual meetings. This is clearly reflected in the statements and practices of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Hatim al-Razi, Abu Zur'a al-Razi, al-Bukhari, and Muslim, and later in the continuation of this approach by al-Fasawi, Ibn 'Adi, al-Dhahabi, and Ibn Hajar.

The study also highlights some modern Western approaches to hadith studies, from the historical reading associated with Goldziher, through Schacht's analysis of isnad, Juynboll's common-link theory, and Motzki's combined isnad-cum-matn



methodology. The study concludes that reducing hadith criticism to isnad criticism alone does not adequately represent the critical practice of the hadith scholars, because a hidden defect often becomes apparent only through collecting and comparing transmission routes. Likewise, judging a narrator as reliable does not entail authenticating all of his reports, while chronology constituted part of the tools used to verify the possibility of hearing and transmission and to understand the generations of transmitters. The study further shows that modern Western methodologies passed through several stages, and that the movement from general historical skepticism to composite analysis of isnad and matn represents an internal development within Western scholarship itself. Scientific comparison, therefore, cannot be based merely on demonstrating similarities or differences at the level of general titles; rather, it requires examination of the tool, the evidentiary indicator, the method of reasoning, and the conclusion actually permitted by the material under investigation.

Keywords: hadith criticism; ‘ilm al-‘ilal; al-jarh wa al-ta‘dil; matn criticism; historical indicators; hadith scholars; Goldziher; Schacht; Juynboll; Motzki; common link; isnad and matn.

Introduction

Hadith criticism among early hadith scholars represents a composite form of transmitted, historical, biographical, and critical knowledge. The hadith scholar did not approach a report merely as a chain of names that could be judged individually. Instead, he placed the report within a network of relationships among teachers, students, transmission routes, wording, geographical locations, and historical periods. Consequently, the sciences of narrators, generations, history, and hidden defects were closely interconnected, and the judgment on a report resulted from a careful balancing of multiple dimensions. The practical material found in books of ‘ilal, questions addressed to scholars, and historical works reveals that concise judgments such as “This is an error,” “This is a mistake,” “more accurate,” “more firmly established,” “there is no corroborating report for it,” and “the preserved version is such-and-such” acquire their scientific function only when read within the context of the comparison that produced them.

This conception is confirmed by what Muslim transmitted in the introduction to his *Sahih* from Muhammad ibn Sirin (d. 110 AH): “Indeed, this knowledge is religion, so consider from whom you take your religion.” He also transmitted from him: “They did not used to ask about the isnad; but when the fitna occurred, they said: Name for us your men. Thus, the people of the Sunnah were examined and their hadith was accepted, while the people of innovation were examined and their hadith was not accepted” (Muslim, 1955, 1, pp. 14–15). Anas ibn Sirin is also reported to have said: “Fear God, O young people, and consider from whom you take these hadiths, for they are part of your religion” (Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi, 1952; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, n.d.).

These early statements reveal the emergence of an awareness that a transmitted report cannot be separated from its transmitter and that knowledge of the men in the isnad was not merely a formal procedure but part of the process of verifying the report. This critical awareness subsequently developed in the works of the leading scholars. The science of *'ilal* emerged, principles for balancing competing reports became more clearly articulated, attention to chronology and generations expanded, and the critic increasingly employed multiple indicators in order to identify the preserved form of a hadith.

The importance of this subject becomes even clearer when it is compared with modern Western studies that attempted to reconstruct the history of Islamic transmission by means of different tools. Scholarship moved from broad historical readings associated with Goldziher to analysis of the structure of isnad in Schacht, then to the development of the common-link concept in Juynboll, and finally to more composite approaches in Motzki that combine isnad and matn. Recent studies indicate that Motzki classified approaches to dating traditions into those relying on matn, those relying on the history of collections, those relying on isnad, and those combining isnad and matn, while also criticizing unjustified reliance on *argumentum e silentio* or on formal criticism alone (Kara, n.d.).

Research Problem

The research problem can be formulated through the following question: To what extent was hadith criticism among early hadith scholars characterized by comprehensiveness and practical realism, and to what extent are modern Western methodologies capable of explaining this practice in a manner that encompasses its internal tools and practical indicators?

This main question gives rise to several subsidiary questions: Was criticism restricted to the apparent form of the isnad? How was the report of a trustworthy narrator treated when he made a mistake in a hadith transmitted from a particular teacher? What was the function of comparing transmission routes? How was chronology employed to verify hearing and actual meetings? What was the position of matn criticism? What are the historical limits of the common-link concept? Is its presence sufficient to establish the time at which a report originated? And what does combining isnad and matn add to the analysis?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from its attempt to reconstruct the image of hadith criticism through the original applications of the critics themselves rather than through terminological definitions alone. Its importance also lies in highlighting the relationship among the various hadith sciences: *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* does not operate independently of the science of hidden defects; chronology cannot be separated from

the study of chains of transmission; and matn criticism does not always function independently of the study of the route through which a report was transmitted.

The study is also significant because it examines influential Western approaches, not with the aim of issuing an overall judgment on them, but in order to understand the tools they employed and to discuss what those tools can establish and where their evidentiary limits lie.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to demonstrate the comprehensiveness and practical realism of hadith criticism and to identify the diversity of indicators upon which hadith scholars relied when judging reports. It also aims to present practical examples from the approaches of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abu Hatim, Abu Zur'a, al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Fasawi, Ibn 'Adi, al-Dhahabi, and Ibn Hajar, showing what these examples reveal about the precision with which critics distinguished between the status of a narrator and the status of a particular report. Furthermore, it seeks to analyze the role of chronology in hadith criticism and compare it with certain Western approaches that made history and the reconstruction of stages in the transmission of reports central components of their methodologies.

Research Methodology

The study adopts an inductive method in tracing critical statements, an analytical method in interpreting the procedures employed by the critics, and a comparative method in examining certain modern Western approaches. It distinguishes between verbatim quotations and the researcher's analysis: every passage placed in quotation marks is attributed to its source, while the analytical paragraphs represent an attempt to understand the significance of the source material and relate it to the general research problem.

Preliminary Discussion

Isnad constitutes one of the most important elements of hadith criticism. Nevertheless, practical criticism demonstrates that the critics did not treat it as a sequence of names detached from the circumstances in which a report was transmitted. They asked about hearing, the teacher, the mode of transmission, the level of memorization, and disagreements among transmitters.

Chapter One: The Science of Hidden Defects as the Core of Comprehensive Criticism and Its Applications among Early Hadith Scholars

The science of hidden defects ('ilm al-'ilal) is the clearest field in which the comprehensiveness of hadith criticism becomes visible, because a defect is often concealed and cannot be detected merely by examining the apparent isnad. A hadith may be transmitted through a chain whose narrators are all trustworthy, yet

examination of all transmission routes may reveal that one narrator raised a report that others transmitted as *mawquf*, connected a report that reliable transmitters transmitted as *mursal*, transmitted an unusual wording contrary to the preserved version, or attributed a teacher's report to a form different from that transmitted by the teacher's other students. Hence, the science of hidden defects is based on comparison, weighing competing versions, and scholarly discussion rather than on the mechanical application of an abstract rule.

Abu Hatim al-Razi expressed the rarity of this critical faculty when describing his discussions with Abu Zur'a. He stated that they would mention hadiths and identify their defects and the mistakes of their teachers, and Abu Zur'a told him: "Few people understand this; how rare it is. If you remove this [ability] from one or two [people], how few you will find who are proficient in it" (Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi, n.d.). This statement shows that the objective was not simply familiarity with the terminology of *'ilal* but the practical ability to discover the location of an error after assembling the relevant indicators.

The realism of this method is evident in the fact that the critic does not merely describe a hadith as defective; he searches for the preserved version. Thus Abu Zur'a repeatedly used expressions such as "This is an error; rather, [the correct version is] ...," and on another occasion he said, "Yazid ibn Zuray' is more accurate in his memory." The expression "more accurate in his memory" is not merely a biographical characterization; it constitutes an evidentiary indicator used to prefer one version over competing versions (Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi, n.d.).

Moreover, the fact that a narrator possesses strong memory does not automatically give his solitary version priority when he contradicts a group of more accurate transmitters. Muslim states in the introduction to his work *al-Tamyiz* that when a group of reliable memorizers transmit a hadith from an imam through one *isnad* and one *matn* and another narrator transmits the same report but contradicts them in the *isnad* or reverses the *matn*, the correct version is the one transmitted by the group rather than the solitary transmitter, even if the latter is himself a memorizer. Muslim attributes this critical practice to leading hadith scholars such as Shu'ba, Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna, Yahya ibn Sa'id, and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi (Muslim, n.d.).

Comparison among transmission routes also makes it possible to detect *munkar* reports. Muslim explains that the sign of a *munkar* report is that, when a transmitter's report is compared with the reports of other reliable and accurate transmitters, his version contradicts theirs or scarcely agrees with them; when this characterizes most of his reports, his hadith becomes abandoned and unacceptable (Muslim, 1955).

Section One: Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the Multiplicity of Indicators

The methodology of Ahmad ibn Hanbal reveals the transition from a general judgment to the diagnosis of the precise location of an error. In some reports he would say, "This is an error," or "This is a munkar hadith," and at times he would identify the narrator responsible for the mistake, saying, for example, "al-A'mash made a mistake in it." Such formulations demonstrate that the question was not simply whether the narrator was trustworthy or untrustworthy, but rather: How did he transmit this particular hadith? Who contradicted him? Who was more accurate than he was? And is this report actually preserved from this particular teacher?

One of the clearest examples is Ahmad's statement concerning Abu Bakr ibn 'Ayyash: "Abu Bakr's hearing from Abu Ishaq is not particularly strong" (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, n.d.). Here the judgment does not concern the narrator's overall status but his relationship with a particular teacher. This is one of the most important keys to understanding early criticism: a narrator may generally be trustworthy, while his reports from a particular teacher may be less precise, or his transmission from that teacher during a certain period may be weaker, or he may have relied on memory rather than on his written material. Thus the judgment is attached to the specific transmission rather than to the narrator's name in the abstract.

This example reveals an important methodological principle: criticism may concern the relationship between a narrator and his teacher rather than the narrator in isolation. Historical indicators also appear in this context, since mere contemporaneity was not sufficient for the critics. Abu Hatim said regarding Abu Ishaq: "Abu Ishaq saw Hujr ibn 'Adi, but I do not know that he heard from him" (Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi, n.d.). Seeing is not equivalent to hearing, and the possibility of meeting is not equivalent to establishing actual transmission. This distinction makes chronology an integral component of criticism rather than an auxiliary discipline.

Section Two: Abu Hatim and Abu Zur'a and the Comparison of Competing Versions

The value of the approaches of Abu Hatim and Abu Zur'a lies not simply in the large number of judgments they issued but in the manner in which those judgments were constructed. They collected different versions, considered the ranks of transmitters, examined the particular nature of their transmission from their teachers, compared their agreement with one another, and then identified the preserved version. Accordingly, their disagreement on certain questions should not be interpreted as inconsistency in their basic methodology; rather, it may reflect differences in assessing the indicators and applying them to a particular case (Nawfal & Abu Su'aylik, n.d.).

Accordingly, Abu Zur'a's or Abu Hatim's statement "This is an error" does not necessarily mean that the entire report is to be rejected. It may mean that a particular form of its isnad or matn is not preserved. This explains how a critic can affirm the

basic substance of a hadith while weakening a particular route, accept a *mawquf* version while rejecting an erroneous *marfu'* version, or establish the version transmitted by a group while regarding the contradictory individual version as an error. Muslim similarly distinguishes between the transmission of a group and that of an individual, explaining that the correct version may be the one transmitted by a group of memorizers rather than by a solitary narrator "even if he is a memorizer" (Muslim, n.d.). Solitary transmission, therefore, is not in itself a final judgment; its value depends on the status of the solitary transmitter and the extent of his contradiction of those who are more accurate and more numerous.

For this reason, the critic's statement that a narrator is "trustworthy" should not be converted into an automatic judgment concerning every hadith he transmits. The hadith itself remains subject to comparison and examination of its routes. This makes hadith criticism closer to the study of a transmission as an independent historical event than to the mechanical application of a prior classification to the narrator.

Section Three: al-Bukhari—The Convergence of Hidden Defects, Chronology, and Knowledge of Isnads

Al-Tirmidhi's statement describing al-Bukhari has particular methodological significance. He said: "I have not seen anyone in Iraq or Khurasan more knowledgeable than Muhammad ibn Isma'il regarding hidden defects, chronology, and knowledge of the isnads" (al-Tirmidhi, n.d.). The combination of hidden defects, chronology, and knowledge of isnads demonstrates that hadith knowledge did not consist of separate and isolated fields. Knowledge of the isnad requires knowledge of transmitters; knowledge of transmitters requires chronology and generations; and the science of hidden defects requires these forms of knowledge collectively.

Among the expressions attributed to al-Bukhari is "There is no corroborating transmission for his hadith." This expression should not automatically be transformed into an absolute judgment of weakness; it may indicate a solitary transmission that requires further examination. The relevant material concerning 'Ubayd ibn Abi Qurra in al-Tarikh al-Kabir shows that solitary transmission in al-Bukhari's criticism forms part of a network of indicators rather than constituting an isolated rule (al-Bukhari, n.d.).

Section Four: al-Fasawi and the Relative Ranks of Trustworthy Narrators

A clear example of differentiating among levels of precision is found in Ya'qub ibn Sufyan al-Fasawi's statement concerning Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Ta'ifi: "Although Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna is more firmly established than he is, Muhammad ibn Muslim is also trustworthy and acceptable" (al-Fasawi, n.d.). This precise statement combines recognition of Muhammad ibn Muslim's reliability with the acknowledgment that Sufyan is more accurate than he is. A narrator's lower degree of precision than another trustworthy narrator does not therefore make him weak.

Ibn ‘Adi reinforces this meaning in his discussion of Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Ta’ifi, stating that he had good and unusual reports, that he was acceptable in hadith, and that Ibn ‘Adi had not seen him transmit a munkar hadith (Ibn ‘Adi, n.d.). Here criticism distinguishes between unusual transmission and munkar transmission, between different levels of memory, and between the overall judgment on a narrator and the status of individual reports. This confirms that narrator classification among the critics was not a rigid binary opposition between “trustworthy” and “weak,” but a hierarchy of degrees and distinctions connected to the report and its particular form.

Section Five: Ibn ‘Adi and Ibrahim al-Hijri—Diagnosing the Type of Error

Ibrahim al-Hijri provides a particularly significant composite example of the realism of hadith criticism. Ibn ‘Adi stated that Shu‘ba, al-Thawri, and others transmitted from Ibrahim al-Hijri, that most of his hadiths were sound in their matn, but that the critics objected to the frequency with which he transmitted from Abu al-Ahwas from ‘Abd Allah; Ibn ‘Adi nevertheless considered him among those whose hadith could be written down (Ibn ‘Adi, n.d.). Ibn ‘Adi therefore did not treat the presence of Shu‘ba and al-Thawri among his teachers as sufficient to authenticate all of his reports, nor did he regard criticism directed at him as sufficient to reject all his hadiths. Instead, he identified the specific area of concern.

The matter becomes even clearer in the account concerning Ibrahim al-Hijri’s written material. After review, Sufyan ibn ‘Uyayna reportedly said: “This is from ‘Abd Allah, this is from the Prophet, and this is from ‘Umar” (Ibn ‘Adi, n.d.). The problem here is not simply general weakness but an error in distinguishing between marfu‘ and mawquf material. This constitutes a model example of criticism involving both matn and isnad, because attributing a statement to the Prophet changes its scholarly status, and the critic does not merely identify the narrator but examines the precise form in which the transmission occurred.

Ibn Hajar later offered a more precise interpretation of the nature of the criticism, explaining that the earlier account from Ibn ‘Uyayna indicates that Ibrahim’s transmission from ‘Abd Allah was sound, because the criticism concerned his raising of reports that were actually mawquf; Ibn ‘Uyayna had distinguished between the reports of ‘Abd Allah and those of the Prophet (Ibn Hajar, n.d.). Ibn Hajar’s comment demonstrates the precision with which the type of error can be analyzed: Ibrahim’s problem was not necessarily with everything he transmitted, but with raising certain reports that should have remained mawquf. Thus hadith criticism can reach the level of diagnosing the Chapter Two: The Historical Continuity of Hadith Criticism and Its Practical Applications

Section One: al-Dhahabi, Ibn Hajar, and the Accumulation of Critical Knowledge

Al-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar represent an advanced stage in the cumulative development of hadith criticism. In *Mizan al-I’tidal*, al-Dhahabi brings together the statements of a large number of critics, sometimes presenting their differing assessments of a narrator and, on occasion, mentioning the reports that influenced their judgments. In this way, the biographical entry becomes a history of critical judgment rather than merely an identification card for the narrator. In *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* and *Taqrib al-Tahdhib*, Ibn Hajar reorganized a vast body of earlier critical material while retaining, to varying degrees, the traces of disagreement among the critics (al-Dhahabi, n.d.; Ibn Hajar, n.d.).

The importance of this stage lies in preventing a reading of *al-jarh wa al-ta’dil* as a collection of isolated judgments detached from their causes. A judgment concerning a narrator may be general, but it may also be specific to a particular report, teacher, or period. It may arise from raising a mawquf report to the status of marfu’, connecting a report that was transmitted as mursal, or making an error in a particular wording. Consequently, the historical interpretation of a judgment is no less important than the transmission of the judgment itself.

Section Two: Matn Criticism as an Integral Part of the Critical Process

It is impossible to adequately conceive of the comprehensiveness of hadith criticism if it is restricted to the *isnad*. The *matn* was present in the comparative process through differences in wording, additions made by some transmitters, inversion, insertion, contradiction of the preserved version, and an unsupported raising of a report. Ibn ‘Adi’s statement that most of Ibrahim al-Hijri’s reports were sound in their *matn* is a clear example of the use of *matn* integrity in evaluating a narrator’s transmissions (Ibn ‘Adi, n.d.). Likewise, identifying what is “preserved” and what is “an error” cannot, in a number of applications, be understood without comparing the contents and formulations of the transmitted reports.

Muslim explicitly states in al-Tamyiz that contradiction may occur in either the isnad or the matn. In his comparison of the transmission of a group with that of an individual, he notes that the individual may “reverse the matn and make it contrary to what the group of memorizers transmitted” (Muslim, n.d.). This demonstrates that the matn was part of the critical process. Nevertheless, matn criticism among the hadith scholars was generally connected to the history of its transmission. The critic asked: Who transmitted this wording? Did anyone else agree with him? Is this among the teacher’s own expressions? Did it contradict the more accurate transmitters?

This represents a form of historical textual criticism, although its premises differ from some forms of modern literary or philosophical criticism. The significance of this level of analysis lies in the fact that a critic might neither reject a report merely because one of its transmitters was weak nor accept it merely because its transmitter was trustworthy. Rather, he examined whether its matn agreed with the preserved version, whether it could plausibly have been transmitted in that wording, and how it related to other versions. Matn criticism among early scholars should therefore not be reduced to theoretical criteria detached from practice; it should be reconstructed from the books of ‘ilal, questions addressed to scholars, and historical works.

Section Three: Chronology, Generations, Hearing, and Meeting

Chronology was a practical critical instrument for hadith scholars. Dates of birth and death, places of residence, journeys, teachers and students, and the generations of transmitters all entered into the examination of the possibility of hearing and meeting. A narrator might have been a contemporary of his teacher, and he might even have been established as having seen him, while his hearing from him nevertheless remained unproven. This explains Abu Hatim’s statement concerning Abu Ishaq and Hujr ibn ‘Adi: “He saw Hujr ibn ‘Adi, but I do not know that he heard from him” (Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi, n.d.).

Knowledge of changes in a narrator’s condition over time also entered into the judgment. A narrator may have been strong during one period and later experienced confusion or a deterioration in memory; alternatively, he may have transmitted one report from his written book and another from memory. It is therefore not methodologically sound to turn the word “trustworthy” into an automatic judgment concerning every report transmitted by a narrator, in every period and from every teacher. This is the meaning confirmed by the applications of Ahmad, Abu Hatim, Abu Zur‘a, al-Fasawi, and Ibn ‘Adi.

Chapter Three: Western Approaches to Hadith Criticism and the Methods They Employ

Section One: Goldziher and the Transition to Broad Historical Reading

The works of Ignaz Goldziher represented an influential stage in Western hadith studies. He approached reports within a broader historical, intellectual, and social context and connected some of them to developments experienced by Muslim society during the early centuries. This approach broadened the researcher's question from the content of a report to the history of its formation and its function within its intellectual context (Goldziher, 1971).

Nevertheless, broad historical interpretation faces a methodological problem when general social or intellectual indicators are transformed into comprehensive judgments about a body of reports without detailed examination of their transmission routes, isnads, and matns. Modern discussions of Motzki's methodology indicate that one element of his criticism of Goldziher concerned the fact that the latter's evidence in many cases consisted largely of reports about transmitters and hadiths, while he did not always examine the reliability of the reports he employed with the same degree of scrutiny that he applied to his historical conclusions (Motzki, 2005).

Historical context therefore constitutes an indicator that needs to be combined with other indicators. This makes comparison with hadith criticism useful, because the hadith scholars themselves generally did not construct precise judgments on the basis of a single indicator.

Section Two: Schacht and the Theory of the Backward Growth of Isnad

Joseph Schacht focused on the development of isnad and connected it with the history of Islamic law. His name became associated with the idea of the backward growth of isnads, or what is commonly described as projection backward: the assumption that isnads tended, over the course of their historical development, to become more complete through the addition of names higher up in the chain. In this approach, a more elaborate isnad may be understood as later in its formation (Schacht, 1950).

Among the tools associated with this approach is *argumentum e silentio*, that is, reasoning from the absence of a report in an early source or from its absence in a particular context, treating that absence as an indicator that the report was not known at that time or had not yet circulated. It can thus be understood as an attempt to use the absence of citation of a particular report in an earlier source as evidence concerning the date of its emergence or circulation (Rubin, n.d.).

This method, however, raises an important methodological question: Does every development in the formulation of an isnad necessarily indicate fabrication of the

report or a late origin of its substance? Or might some of that development be related to updating, transmission by meaning, variations in formulas of transmission, and the multiplication of transmission routes? The evidentiary value of this tool becomes strong only when conditions are present that make the source one in which the report would reasonably be expected to appear and the context one in which its absence would be meaningful.

Modern scholarship presents this theory as an attempt to use the structure of *isnad* as a tool for dating traditions (Motzki, 2005). Yet the value of *argumentum e silentio* depends on the nature of the source in which the silence occurs. Not every book is comprehensive, and not every author is required to mention everything known to him. The absence of a report therefore does not, by itself, equal the non-existence of that report.

The importance of this theory lies in the fact that it transformed *isnad* from a means of establishing transmission within the *hadith* methodology into material for reconstructing the history of a tradition. The methodological difference, however, appears in the degree to which one moves from observing a phenomenon in an *isnad* to assigning a date to the origin of a report. Differences in *isnads*, the addition of a route, or branching of a chain require internal and external examination before being converted into a definitive historical conclusion. Contemporary discussions of Motzki emphasize his criticism of unjustified reliance on *argumentum e silentio* and the need to avoid turning the absence of a text in a source into conclusive evidence of its historical non-existence (Motzki, 2005).

The methodological rule here is to distinguish between “absence of evidence” and “evidence of absence.” The former becomes the latter only when independent indicators explain why the text should have appeared if it had existed. Similarly, inferring the date of a report from the structure of its *isnad* requires consideration of the nature of *hadith* transmission, variations in transmission formulas, and the possibility that reports existed without surviving in the sources available to us. This explains why some later scholarship reconsidered conclusions built upon a one-dimensional reading of *isnad*.

Section Three: Juynboll and the Common Link

G. H. A. Juynboll developed an analysis of branching *isnads* and the concept of the “common link,” namely, a transmitter at whom several *isnads* converge and from whom subsequent routes branch out. Modern studies note that the term “common link” has an earlier conceptual history associated with Schacht and subsequently became a central concept in later scholarship, including Juynboll’s work (Juynboll, 1983).

The existence of a common transmitter across several isnads does not logically establish that he was the fabricator of the report. The first datum established by the evidence is the existence of a convergence point within the transmission network. Interpreting its historical function requires additional indicators: Was the transmitter an early collector? Was he an educational center from whom many reports circulated? Did he possess written materials? Are there independent routes predating him? And do the matns converge in a manner that strengthens or weakens a particular hypothesis? Motzki moved toward criticizing the automatic association between the common link and fabrication, arguing that in a number of cases the common link could have been an early collector or an active transmitter of the material (Motzki, 2005).

The existence of a transmitter from whom routes branch may mean that he was the first transmitter through whom the report achieved wide circulation, or the first point at which a network of transmission routes converged. It does not necessarily mean that he originated the report. Thus, moving from "the existence of a common link" to "proof of fabrication" requires additional indicators.

Section Four: Motzki and the Combined Isnad-and-Matn Method

Harald Motzki represents a more composite stage in modern Western scholarship through the matn-cum-isnad methodology, which combines analysis of the isnad with analysis of the matn. In its general form, the method involves collecting as many transmission routes as possible, comparing isnads and matns together, identifying points of agreement and disagreement, and attempting to establish historical layers in the transmission of a report. Modern scholarship describes this as one of four principal approaches to studying the history of traditions: isnad criticism, matn criticism, dating of collections, and the combination of isnad and matn (Motzki, 2005).

The value of this approach becomes especially apparent in comparison with hadith criticism because collecting transmission routes and comparing matns were already present in Islamic books of hidden defects. Yet similarity in procedure does not imply identity of purpose. A hadith scholar may collect transmission routes in order to identify the preserved version and judge a hadith, whereas a modern historical researcher may use the same material to reconstruct the period in which a report circulated or the path through which it developed. The tool and the conclusion must therefore be distinguished.

Motzki also contributed to moderating some of the stronger conclusions associated with common-link theory. The fact that a transmitter constitutes a branching point does not necessarily mean that he originated the report. Contemporary studies present this shift clearly, indicating that Motzki rejected treating the common link as automatically equivalent to the fabricator and allowed for the possibility that the

common link was an early collector or a skilled transmitter of the material (Motzki, 2005).

Chapter Four: Points of Agreement and Difference between Classical Hadith Criticism and Modern Western Criticism

Section One: Methodological Points of Convergence

There is a significant area of methodological convergence in a number of procedures: collecting transmission routes, comparing isnads, analyzing differences among matns, using historical data, and examining the branching of transmission networks. These elements are not foreign to the books of hidden defects. Muslim critics compared the reports of a teacher's students, preferred some memorizers over others, distinguished marfu' from mawquf reports, and investigated hearing and the generations of transmitters.

Scientific comparison, however, must not exceed its proper limits. Collecting routes among the hadith scholars was part of identifying the preserved and defective versions, whereas for a historical researcher it may become a means of reconstructing the history of the emergence of a report. The study of chronology among the hadith scholars served to test transmission and hearing, whereas modern studies may employ chronology to identify the earliest layer to which a report can be attributed. Similarity in tools is therefore insufficient to establish identity of methodology.

Section Two: Fundamental Methodological Differences

The first difference is that hadith criticism emerged within a scholarly system possessing a specific conception of isnad, uprightness, precision, and hidden defects, whereas modern historical studies generally seek to reconstruct the process through which a text developed and circulated. Second, the hadith scholars did not treat the existence of a single phenomenon—such as solitary transmission or a common link—as a final judgment; instead, they incorporated it into a wider network of indicators. Third, a judgment concerning a narrator was not necessarily a fixed judgment concerning all of his reports. Fourth, the teacher, the report, and chronology interacted with the isnad, while matn criticism did not necessarily operate independently of them in identifying the location of an error.

Accordingly, a sound comparison should answer four questions in every example: What material did the critic examine? What evidentiary indicator did he rely upon? How did he connect the indicators to one another? And what degree of conclusion do those indicators permit? When the same questions are applied to Western studies, it becomes apparent that some approaches are broader in terms of historical reconstruction, whereas the internal hadith material is richer in detailed practical analysis concerning narrators, transmission routes, and hidden defects.

Section Three: Toward a Balanced Critical Reading

A balanced scholarly reading requires benefiting from modern tools without directly imposing them upon the classical heritage. It also requires benefiting from the original hadith material without reducing the analysis to merely rhetorical defense. The more productive approach is to reread the books of hidden defects, chronology, and narrator criticism as both theoretical and practical sources, then test Western hypotheses against multiple bodies of hadith material while distinguishing between observing the structure of an isnad and historically interpreting that structure.

Partial examples should likewise be given renewed importance, because the strength of a methodology is not demonstrated through general slogans but through its ability to explain a specific case: Why did Abu Zur‘a prefer one version to another? Why did Ahmad say that Abu Bakr’s hearing from Abu Ishaq was “not particularly strong”? Why did Ibn ‘Adi not reject all of Ibrahim al-Hijri’s hadiths? Why did Ibn Hajar explain the criticism in terms of raising mawquf reports? Likewise, what does the existence of a common link in the isnad of a particular hadith actually mean? Are there earlier matns and transmission routes? Does the evidence permit identification of the origin of the report, or merely identification of an important stage in its circulation?

An analytical tool does not by itself generate all the conclusions that may be attributed to it. The common link establishes a particular isnad structure, but it does not by itself establish the transmitter’s historical function. Argumentum e silentio establishes the absence of citation in a source, but it does not by itself establish the absence of the report before that point. Likewise, similarity between a text and its historical context does not, by itself, establish that the context produced the text. All of this requires that analytical tools remain instruments of testing rather than premises for conclusions predetermined in advance.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the comprehensiveness of hadith criticism is not a theoretical description but a reality manifested in the details of critical practice. Hadith scholars combined criticism of narrators with criticism of reports, isnad with matn, chronology with the generations of transmitters, and comparison among narrators with analysis of differences among transmission routes. The realism of their criticism is also evident in the connection between a judgment and the particular report and specific type of error, rather than in merely applying a prior classification to the narrator.

Research Findings

1. The science of hidden defects is based on a system of mutually reinforcing indicators and cannot be reduced to a single rule.

2. Judging a narrator does not amount to judging every hadith that he transmits.
3. A critical judgment among the hadith scholars is not sufficient when detached from its explanation; the critic's judgment must be distinguished from the reasoning that supports it.
4. Trustworthiness is not an identical rank across all reports: one trustworthy narrator may be more firmly established than another, and a trustworthy narrator may make an error in transmitting from a particular teacher.
5. Solitary transmission is not a final judgment; its value depends on the narrator's condition and on whether and how he contradicts other transmitters.
6. Distinguishing marfu' from mawquf reports and connected from mursal transmissions is central to the critical process.
7. Chronology, hearing, and the generations of transmitters are direct critical tools.
8. Matn criticism is present in the practical applications of the critics.
9. Al-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar represent a cumulative stage that reorganized earlier critical experience.
10. Western studies moved from broad historical readings toward more composite analyses.
11. The common link alone is insufficient to establish fabrication or the origin of a report with the common link.
12. Combining isnad and matn constitutes an important tool for reconstructing the history of transmission, while it should not automatically be equated with the methodology of the hadith scholars.
13. The comprehensiveness of criticism lies in its movement from the narrator, to his relationship with his teacher, to the transmission route, to comparison among routes, to the matn, and then to historical indicators, ultimately reaching a judgment about the preserved version. In critical practice, the hadith is therefore a composite unit rather than merely a chain of names.
14. The realism of criticism appears in its recognition of differences in human memory, changes in narrators' conditions, variations in their ability to transmit from particular teachers, differences between transmission from written material and transmission from memory, and the possibility of error.
15. The most important value of comparison is that it demonstrates that hadith criticism was based on the convergence of multiple indicators and that historical methodology reaches a high degree of scientific strength only when combined with multiple indicators that can be examined.

Recommendations

1. The books of hidden defects, scholarly questions, and historical works should be reconsidered as original sources for constructing hadith critical theory rather than relying exclusively on later books of terminology.
2. Studies should be developed that bring together the statements of Ahmad, Abu Hatim, Abu Zur'a, al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Fasawi, Ibn 'Adi, al-Dhahabi, and Ibn Hajar concerning the same hadith or narrator, because this reveals the development, causes, and levels of critical judgment.
3. The relationship between isnad and matn should be studied in an integrated manner because many hidden defects become visible only when both are collected and the different reports are compared.
4. The historical applications of hadith criticism concerning hearing, journeys, generations of transmitters, and changes in narrators' conditions should be studied further.
5. Matn criticism should be reconstructed from the practical applications of the hadith scholars rather than from theoretical debates over whether matn criticism existed.
6. The common-link theory should be retested across multiple bodies of hadith material while distinguishing between establishing the existence of a common link and determining its historical function.
7. Dialogue with Western scholarship should move beyond general positions of acceptance or rejection toward analysis of each theory's premises, tools, applications, and conclusions.
8. Comparative studies between hadith criticism and modern Western methodologies should be expanded at the level of tools, indicators, and conclusions.

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- nature of an error rather than merely describing the narrator.