

Hadith Criticism in Islam: Basic Concepts, Definitions, and Historical Development

Abid Nurhuda^{1*}, Aurizan Himmi Azhar², Nur Muhammad Lathif³

^{1,2}Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, Indonesia

³Umraniye Buyuk Kurs Istanbul, Turkey

Email: ¹⁾ abidnurhuda@mhs.ptiq.ac.id, ²⁾ aurizanhimmi@ptiq.ac.id, ³⁾ nurlathif99@gmail.com

Received:	Revised:	Accepted:	Online:
January 29, 2026	February 24, 2026	February 26, 2026	February 27, 2026

Abstract

Hadith occupies a central position in the normative structure of Islam as the second source of law after the Qur'an and the historical medium for transmitting the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, the humanistic nature of hadith narration makes the problem of authenticity an unavoidable epistemological issue. This article aims to analyze hadith criticism in Islam as a historical and scientific process that develops from personal belief to systematic methodological standards. This research uses a library study method with a historical-epistemological approach to classical and contemporary literature on hadith science. The results of the study indicate that hadith criticism has been present since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through direct verification mechanisms, developed during the era of the Companions and *Tabi'in* through the affirmation of the importance of *sanad* (chain of transmission), and reached methodological maturity in the codification and post-codification periods through the disciplines of *rijal*, *jarh wa ta'dil*, and *musthalah al-hadith*. In the medieval period, hadith criticism functioned as a means of preserving and perfecting the scientific heritage through the traditions of *shari'ah* and *takhrij*. Meanwhile, in the modern era, hadith criticism has been adaptive and dialogical in responding to the challenges of Orientalism and the Qur'anic scripturalism movement. This article asserts that hadith criticism is not a rejection of the Sunnah, but rather a foundation of scientific rationality that safeguards the Prophet's authority from historical distortion and ensures its relevance throughout the ages.

Keywords: Criticism of Hadith, Islam, Matan, Sanad

1. Introduction

Hadith occupies a central position in the normative structure of Islam, not only as the second source of law after the Qur'an, but also as a historical medium connecting revelation with the practical realities of the people's lives. This strategic position has made hadith both an object of authority and an arena for epistemological contestation since the early period of Islam (Hansu, 2021). Unlike the Qur'an, which was transmitted *mutawatir* and codified relatively quickly, the hadith relies on a process of human transmission that takes place across generations, space, and social interests, so that the problem of authenticity becomes an epistemic necessity.

In the early phase, the acceptance of hadith rested on personal trust in the narrator, built on moral integrity, closeness to the Prophet, and a reputation for piety within the early Muslim community. In a society that was still demographically limited and relatively homogeneous, this mechanism functioned effectively as a system of social control (Faraz et al., 2024). Personal honesty is considered sufficient to guarantee the validity of a narration, so that criticism of the hadith is more ethical and moral than methodological-scientific.

However, epistemologically, personal belief has fundamental limitations. The validity of knowledge that relies on individual subjectivity does not provide a verifiable mechanism for intersubjective



verification. As the transmission of hadith began to involve the successor and successor generations, the temporal distance from the source increased the risk of memory errors, affiliation bias, and unconscious narrative reconstruction (Rohman, 2025). This situation necessitates the creation of standards of assessment that go beyond mere personal reputation.

The situation became even more complex after the Great Fitnah, when political conflict and theological divisions turned hadith into an instrument of ideological legitimacy. Narratives no longer circulated in a purely religious space but were directly involved in the struggle for political and doctrinal authority (Hervieu-Léger, 2002). At this point, personal trust collapses as the sole epistemic foundation, because individual moral claims are unable to distinguish between authentic history and history fabricated for the benefit of certain groups.

Awareness of the crisis of authority of these narrations led to the emergence of a new paradigm in the reception of hadith, reflected in the affirmation of the importance of the *sanad* as an instrument of verification. The *sanad* is understood not only as a chain of narrators but as an epistemological mechanism for tracing the source of knowledge and assessing the credibility of transmission. (Anwari et al., 2025). Ibn Sirin's statement about the urgency of *sanad* marks a shift in the awareness of Muslims from figure-based belief to scientific structure-based verification.

Subsequent developments show that hadith criticism did not stop at verifying the *sanad* (chain of transmission), but developed into a scientific discipline with complex methodological tools. The sciences of *rijāl*, *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, and *musthalah al-ḥadīth* represent the scholars' systematic efforts to transform moral authority into methodological authority (Akmaluddin, 2021). This shift marks the maturity of Islamic epistemology, where religious truth is safeguarded through testable and accountable scientific procedures.

Based on this framework, this article analyzes hadith criticism as a historical and epistemological process that moves from personal belief to scientific standards. By situating hadith criticism within the context of Islamic intellectual history, this paper asserts that the discipline is not an expression of skepticism toward the Sunnah, but rather a foundation of scientific rationality that safeguards the Prophet's authority from historical distortion. This approach is expected to make a significant theoretical contribution to understanding hadith criticism as a central pillar of the Islamic scholarly tradition, both classical and contemporary.

2. Literature Review

Hadith linguistically has several meanings, namely *Jadid* (new), which means that it has just appeared after the Qur'an was revealed, while the Qur'an is *Qadim* (earlier) (Al-Shalih, 1969). Then *Qarib* (close) is meant to be close to the daily life of the Prophet. "Then *Khobar* (news) is meant to transfer news from one person to another," which is usually used in *lafdz akhbarona* or *haddtsana* in a hadith. Meanwhile, the term hadith has several views, including hadith experts who interpret it narrowly, providing a limitation, namely, everything that is only attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, whether in the form of actions, words, agreements, or characteristics (Shidiqi, 1994). Meanwhile, hadith scholars who interpret it broadly state that hadith includes *mauquf* (words attributed to friends), *maqtu'* (words attributed to *tabi'in* and *marfu'* or words attributed directly to the Prophet).

As for other names or equivalent names according to scholars of hadith, including *sunnah*, which is interpreted by hadith experts to mean that everything the Prophet did both before and after his prophethood can be used as evidence, so that its scope is wider than hadith. Meanwhile, according to *ushul* experts, hadith is everything that can be used as evidence from the Prophet after his prophethood

(Nasir, 2008). As for the experts in Islamic jurisprudence, they say that hadith is everything that was determined by the Prophet and is not included in the obligatory category.

Another name for this is *khavar*, where some hadith scholars say that anything that comes from other than the Prophet is included in the *mauquf* and *maqtu'*, so it can be said that not every *khavar* is necessarily a hadith. However, every hadith is definitely *khavar*. (Al-Khatib, 1989). Another name is *atsar*, which is interpreted as *nuqilan* or remnants, words, deeds, or other materials from the *salaf*, *tabi'in*, companions, and others. From the complete explanation above, it can be said that hadith is anything that is attributed to the Prophet in the form of *takrir* (determination), *qouly* (words), and *fi'ly* (deeds). The *sunnah* is recommendations in the form of commands or prohibitions that were repeatedly carried out by the Prophet so that they became habits. Meanwhile, *Atsar* usually comes from a friend of the Prophet Muhammad.

3. Methods

This research is library research with a historical-epistemological approach that aims to trace the history of the development of hadith criticism as a scientific construct in Islam. The research data are sourced from classical primary literature on hadith science, such as works on *sanad*, *rijāl*, and *jarh wa ta'dil*, as well as secondary literature in the form of contemporary studies by Muslim and Western scholars discussing the transmission of hadith and its historical criticism (Qohin & Kasiyati, 2020). The analysis is conducted through critical-analytical reading, placing the text within its underlying social, political, and intellectual context, and comparing the views of scholars across time periods to uncover the dynamics of the shift from personal beliefs to scholarly standards. The validity of the analysis is maintained through source triangulation and argumentative coherence, ensuring that the research results can be scientifically and historically justified.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Functions and Elements of Hadith

The true function of the hadith is to explain (*bayan*) the contents of the verses of the Qur'an, as Allah SWT says in QS: An Nahal: 89, from this verse the scholars detail the division of *bayan* into several types, namely (Al-Siba'iy, 2014): *bayan taqrir* where the hadith strengthens the basis of global or detailed laws contained in the Qur'an. Next, *bayan tafsir* where the hadith provides specific limitations on general verses (*khos-am*), limits absolute verses (*taqyid-mutlaq*), and details verses that are still global (*tafshilul mujmal*). *Bayan tasyri'* where the hadith establishes a law that has no text through the path of *qiyas* or following the Prophet's teachings according to the direction of the Qur'an. Finally, *bayan naskh* removes the law from the essence of the verses of the Qur'an, even though some scholars do not agree that hadith can remove the Qur'an.

Once the function of a hadith is understood, it is appropriate to understand the elements that make up a hadith of the Prophet. First, there is the *sanad*, meaning something that is used as a basis, so it can be said that the hadith is based on it. This is because there are many sequences, chains, and paths connecting people to the Prophet. Second, there is the *matan*, meaning a sentence or material that serves as the endpoint of the *sanad*, and is commonly referred to as the wording of the hadith itself (Suparta, 2014). Meanwhile, a *rowi* is someone who narrates hadith, writes them down, and compiles them. Therefore, when someone merely narrates hadith without writing them down or compiling them, it is called a *sanad*.

From the explanation above, it can be said that the elements of hadith consist of *rowi*, *sanad*, and *matan*. When these elements of hadith are compiled, they are ultimately categorized into five types (Agus Suyadi & Solahudin, 2008). First, *Qauli hadith*, namely hadith whose support focuses on the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad regarding morals, *aqidah*, and sharia. For example, regarding the hadith that there is no prayer for those who do not read the *ummul* book (*alfatihah*) and the hadith about lying in the name of the Prophet. Second, *Fi'li Hadith*, namely, hadith whose support focuses on the actions of the Prophet. An example is prayer hadith.

Third, the *taqiriri* hadith, which is based on the Prophet's decree (silence). For example, regarding the hadith of the Asr prayer in Bani Quroidzoh. Fourth, the Hadith is one that focuses on the Prophet's wishes, which have not yet been realized. For example, a hadith regarding the Prophet's desire to fast on *Tasu'a* day. Fifth, the *Ahwali* hadith, which relies on the personality, nature, and character of the Prophet. For example: Hadith about the good morals and face of the Prophet.

4.2. Hadith based on Quantity and Quality.

Hadith, when viewed from the quantity or number of narrators, are divided into two: *Mutawatir Hadith* and *Ahad Hadith*. *Mutawatir* hadith itself is a hadith narrated by several narrators in each *tobaqot*, which makes it impossible to lie in it. The criteria for a *mutawatir* hadith include the five senses as the means of transmission, a large number in each *tobaqot/level*, so that there is no possibility of lying. Hadith experts divide them into *Mutawatir Lafzy*, which means the wording and meaning are the same and consistent between one narration and another, for example, a hadith related to lying in the name of the Prophet. Meanwhile, *Mutawatir Ma'nawy* is a hadith whose wording and meaning are different but have the same content, for example, praying when asking for rain in an open field (Zahro & Fatoni, 2023).

Then there is *Ahad Hadith*, which means a hadith that is narrated by 1 or 2 people or more, but its degree has not yet reached the degree of *mutawatir* (Al-Ghauri, 2007). It is divided into three categories: "*masyhur*," meaning the hadith was narrated by three or more people, but does not meet the requirements of *mutawatir*. For example, a hadith related to the removal of knowledge from scholars. Then, "*aziz*," meaning the hadith was narrated by at least two people in each *tobaqot*. For example, a hadith related to love for the Prophet must surpass anything, including one's children and parents. Finally, "*garib*," meaning the hadith was narrated by one person in each *tobaqot*. For example, a hadith about intention (Abbas, 2016).

Hadith, when viewed from the quality of both their text and their chain of transmission, are divided into three types. The first is an authentic hadith, meaning it must have a continuous chain of transmission, integrity of the narrator, strong memorization, and no irregularities (*syudzudz*) or defects (*illat*). Authentic hadith itself is divided into two types: authentic hadith and *hasan hadith*, but is corroborated by other hadith narrations, thus elevating its status (Shalahuddin bin Ahmad Al-Adlabi, 1983). Second, a *Hasan Hadith*, meaning the hadith must have a continuous *sanad* (chain of narrators), a just narrator, a memorization strength below *sahih* (authentic), no irregularities (*syudzud*), and no illness/illness. This *hasan hadith* is also divided into *li dzatihi* and *li ghairihi* (*dhoif hadiths*, but because they are narrated by several *rowis* and strengthen each other, their status increases).

The third is *Dha'if Hadith*, which means that the hadith does not meet the requirements of *shohih hadith* or *hasan hadith*, so that the criteria or characteristics of the hadith include, among other things, that the *sanad* is broken, the verse is not fair, the memorization is not perfect, it contains irregularities, and it definitely has defects. It is divided into 2 types, namely broken *sanad*, which includes *munqoti'* (broken by 1 person *rowi*), *mu'dhol* (broken by 2 people or more *rowi*), *mursal* (*tabiin* directly relying on the Rosul), *muallaq* (broken by 1 or more people at the beginning of the narration), *mudallas* (something

is hidden either from the *rowi* or his eyes), and *muallal* (there is a defect in the *sanad perowi* or his eyes)(Hasyim, 2017).

Furthermore, *da'if* hadiths, in addition to the disconnection of the *sanad* as mentioned above, include *mudhooaf* (unconfirmed *dha'ifan*), *mudhtorib* (contradictory), *maqlub* (twisting of *sanad* and *rowi*), *al-mushohhaf* (editing changes due to periods), *al muharraf* (editing changes due to *harokat*), *munkar* (differences between *tsiqqoh* narrations), and *matruk* (abandoned because the narrator often lies). From the explanation of the division of hadiths both in terms of quantity and quality, it can be said that for the current era, verification and clarification of *sanad* and *matan* are needed. The hope is that this will make the position of the hadith clearer, whether it is authentic, false (*maudhu'*), or others, by means of hadith criticism (*naqdul hadith*).

4.3. Criticism of Hadith

Criticism, if translated etymologically into Arabic, نقد, besides that, also ميرة, which means examining in detail and thoroughly. Terminologically, it is defined as assessing whether a hadith is reliable or not, thus distinguishing between *dhoif* and *sahih* hadiths (Al-A'zhamiy, 1990). In addition, it is also said that hadith criticism means setting a special standard of assessment so that the meaning of the text and its *sanad rowi* can be examined, where it can indirectly reveal any irregularities or contradictions between the text and its application (Al-Jawabiy, 1986).

From the explanation above, it can be said that hadith criticism aims to ensure the quality of the hadith, whether it is *dhoif* or *sahih*, through certain standards, which include an assessment of the *sanad rowi* or the text of the hadith, so that it can identify any oddities or contradictions between the essence of the meaning and the application of the theory.

Hadith criticism itself is divided into two types: external criticism/*naqd al-kharijiy*, which is manifested in the criticism of the *sanad* (chain of transmission), and internal criticism/*naqd al-dakhiliy*, which is manifested in the criticism of the text (*matan*). Criticism of the *sanad* involves examining the flow and sequence of narrations of those who have transmitted the text from their source, using certain standards. Examples of *sanads* that can be examined include the following:

حدثنا عثمان بن أبي شيبة حدثنا يزيد بن هارون حدثنا [أخبرنا] حماد بن سلمة عن حماد عن
ابراهيم عن الأسود عن عائشة أن رسول صلى الله عليه وسلم قال : رفع القلم عن ثلاثة عن النائم حتى
يستيقظ و عن المبتلى حتى يراء الصبى حتى يكبر

In the hadith narrated by Abu Dawud above(A.-H. al-M. al-MA Dawud & Al-Azliy, 1988), the *perowi sanad* who received it directly from Rosul was Uthman bin Abi Syaibah, who was counted as the first *sanad* until Aisyah's mother was counted as the last *sanad*. The example of the presence of *sanad* above shows how the ulama really give great concentration so that it will really determine whether a hadith will be accepted or rejected. Many scholars have explained the importance of *sanad*, including Sufyan al-Tsauri (*Sanad* is like a weapon for the believer) and A'bd Allah ibn Mubarak (*Sanad* prevents someone from saying whatever they want because it is part of the religion). If the *sanad* (hadith) is lost, knowledge is automatically lost(Itr, 1979).

What is meant by *sanad* criticism means trying to find, research, and assess the truth of the *perowi* chain starting from the *mutakhorrij* to the last genealogy of the companions with the *ar-ruwah* date (to assess the connection of the *sanad*), *al-jarh wa at-ta'dil* science (to examine the fairness of the *perowi* and the perfection of memorization), to the science of *illat al-hadith* (to examine *syad* or *illat* not). Next is intrinsic criticism (*naqd ad-dzakhiril*), which refers to the text or wording of the hadith. *Matan* refers to the wording, text, or narrative of the hadith. For example:

حدثنا عثمان بن أبي شيبة حدثنا يزيد بن هارون حدثنا [أخبرنا] حماد بن سلمة عن حماد عن
ابراهيم عن الأسود عن عائشة أن رسول صلى الله عليه و سلم قال : رفع القلم عن ثلاثة عن النائم حتى
يستيقظ و عن المبلى حتى يبرأ الصبي حتى يكبر

In the hadith above, *matan* refers to the wording of the text, which is blocked in black, so that to ensure and minimize the existence of incorrect wording, *tashhif*, etc., *naqd* must be carried out (Al-Ihlibiy, 1983). Because the forms of insertions in the *matan* vary, from *idhthirab*, *maqlub*, *idraj*, and so on. Any oddities in the *matan* can be identified by comparing the *matan* narration of hadith 1 with other hadiths.

From the explanation above, it can be said that hadith criticism has a very strategic influence, impact and urgency due to several factors, namely Not all hadith were written in the Prophet, the Prophet's Hadith is the second source in Islamic teachings, the many forgeries of hadith, the number of various hadith books, the emergence of hadith narrations in terms of meaning, lastly there is a long process in collecting hadiths. Due to these several factors, the *sanad* and *matan* of hadith complement each other to be able to observe the accuracy of hadith both in terms of quality and quantity, both in terms of *matan* and *sanad*, due to concerns about the existence of narrators who lack integrity.

4.4. History of Hadith Criticism

4.4.1. Periodization of Hadith Criticism: The Era of the Prophet Muhammad

If hadith criticism is understood as an effort to select the truth, then this activity actually emerged alongside the birth of hadith itself, namely, since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In this era, hadith criticism was very easy to carry out. Companions who had doubts or needed clarification regarding a hadith simply had to go and meet the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in person (Abbas, 2016). Because the Prophet was still alive and present among them, the characteristic activity of hadith criticism during this period tended to use the form of direct confirmation of the primary source.

One of the real evidences of the practice of critical verification of information is recorded in the story of Dhimam bin Tsa'labah, who traveled a long way just to ensure the truth of the news brought by the Prophet's messenger to his people. As narrated in Sahih Bukhari (No. 63), Dhimam asked very carefully:

أَسْأَلُكَ بِرَبِّكَ وَرَبِّ مَنْ قَبْلَكَ ، اللَّهُ أَرْسَلَكَ إِلَى النَّاسِ كُلِّهِمْ ؟ فَقَالَ: اللَّهُمَّ نَعَمْ which means, "I ask you by your Lord and the Lord of those before you, what is Allah who sent you to all mankind?" The Prophet replied: "O Allah, it is true." Through this dialogue, it can be seen that Dhimam practices "testing" of points of Islamic teachings directly to the source to achieve complete conviction of the heart, an action which is essentially an early form of hadith criticism.(Al-Bukhari, 1992).

In addition to verifying the veracity of news, criticism in this era also encompassed aspects of editorial accuracy or the way the narration was presented (*matan*). Umar ibn Khattab experienced this when he heard Hisham ibn Hakim reciting Surah Al-Furqan in a manner different from the one he had learned. According to a narration in Sahih Bukhari (No. 4992), Umar engaged in "critical action" by bringing Hisham to the Prophet for verification. In front of them, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) gave legitimacy through his statement:

“كَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْتُ ، إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أَنْزَلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرَفٍ” That is how it was revealed. Indeed, the Qur'an was revealed in seven letters." This incident proves that the Prophet Muhammad acted as a mediator and a decision maker in the process of criticizing the accuracy of the narrations, while also showing that the companions were very careful in guarding the originality of the revelations and the words of the Prophet (Al-'Asqolānî, 1997).

4.4.2. The Development of Hadith Criticism in the Era of the Companions (1st Century Hijriah)

Entering the era of the Companions, hadith criticism experienced significant developments compared to previous periods. This was triggered by the expansion of Islamic preaching and the emergence of irresponsible narrators, resulting in reports often being presented that did not originate from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In response to this situation, prominent Companions such as Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Umar ibn al-Khattab, and Ali ibn Abi Talib paid special attention. They established specific guidelines or requirements for determining whether a hadith was acceptable, one of which was requiring testimony from other Companions for corroboration.

A vivid example of this meticulousness is recorded in the incident when an old woman came to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq to inquire about her inheritance rights. Abu Bakr, a firm believer in the principle of verification, did not immediately pass judgment until he had obtained authentic evidence from the Prophet's Sunnah (A. Dawud, nd). This event is narrated in the books of Al-Muwatta', Imam Malik, and Sunan Abi Dawud as follows:

جَاءَتِ الْجَدَّةُ إِلَى أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ تَسْأَلُهُ مِيرَاثَهَا فَقَالَ لَهَا: مَا لَكَ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ شَيْءٌ، وَمَا عَلِمْتُ لَكَ فِي سُنَّةِ نَبِيِّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ شَيْئًا، فَارْجِعِي حَتَّى أَسْأَلَ النَّاسَ. فَسَأَلَ النَّاسَ، فَقَالَ الْمُغِيرَةُ بْنُ شُعْبَةَ: حَضَرْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَعْطَاهَا السُّدُسَ. فَقَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ هَلْ مَعَكَ غَيْرُكَ؟ فَقَامَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مَسْلَمَةَ فَقَالَ مِثْلَ مَا قَالَ الْمُغِيرَةُ بْنُ شُعْبَةَ، فَأَنْفَذَهُ لَهَا أَبُو بَكْرٍ

“A grandmother came to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq to ask about his inheritance. Abu Bakr said to her: ‘I did not find a section for you in the Book of Allah, nor do I know of any provision for you in the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW. So go back first until I ask people.’ Abu Bakr then asked the other companions, and Al-Mughirah bin Syu’bah said: ‘I was with the Messenger of Allah SAW, and he gave one-sixth share to my grandmother.’ Abu Bakr asked: ‘Was there anyone else with you (who witnessed it)?’ “Then Muhammad bin Maslamah stood up and gave the same testimony as Al-Mughirah bin Syu’bah. After that, Abu Bakar just implemented the decision (to give one-sixth of the inheritance) to his grandmother.” (HR. Abu Dawud No. 2894).

Abu Bakar's action in asking for corroborating witnesses from Muhammad bin Maslamah was not a form of doubt about the integrity of Al-Mughirah bin Syu’bah, but rather a preventive procedure to close the gap for anyone who intended to lie in the name of Rasulullah SAW. Apart from this method of testimony, the friends also developed other methods of criticism, such as using sound reasoning, comparing the contents of the history with the text of the Koran to ensure the consistency of the message, and comparing one history with the history of other friends who were considered to have a closer or deeper understanding of the context of the hadith (Sulaiman, 2004). All these methods became the initial foundation for the birth of the more complex discipline of hadith science in later periods.

4.4.3. Dynamics of Hadith Criticism Post-Slander and the Tabi'in Era (II-III Hijri Century)

During the reign of Ali ibn Abi Thalib, criticism of hadith became increasingly stringent, especially after the slander (the murder of Uthman ibn Affan) and the political dispute between Ali and Mu'awiyah. During this turbulent period, many hadith were manipulated and falsified for political gain or to gain closer ties with the ruler. The socio-political conflict that continued through the Tabi'in generation resulted in the purity of hadith being contaminated by forgers, both from within the Muslim community and from outside, who aimed to divide the unity of the community. This concerning situation prompted the Tabi'in scholars to be extra strict in accepting hadith. They began undertaking scholarly journeys (*rihlah*) to various regions to research the authenticity of hadith and tighten the standards for authenticity.

The dynamics of hadith criticism entered a crucial phase during the reign of Ali ibn Abi Thalib and the Tabi'in generation, especially after the tragedy of the assassination of Uthman ibn Affan, which

sparked political strife between Ali's and Mu'awiyah's groups. During this turbulent period, hadith began to be massively manipulated and falsified to legitimize political interests or to seek closeness with the ruler. This concerning condition forced the Tabi'in scholars to be extra strict and begin to question the origins of every piece of information they received. One of the most iconic statements that marked the birth of the era of formal *sanad* research was the statement of Imam Muhammad ibn Sirin (a great Tabi'in) as recorded in the Muqaddimah Sahih Muslim:

لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَسْأَلُونَ عَنِ الْإِسْنَادِ، فَلَمَّا وَقَعَتِ الْفِتْنَةُ قَالُوا: سَمُّوا لَنَا رِجَالَكُمْ، فَيُنْظَرُ إِلَى أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ فَيُؤْخَذُ حَدِيثُهُمْ، وَيُنْظَرُ إِلَى أَهْلِ الْبِدْعِ فَلَا يُؤْخَذُ حَدِيثُهُمْ

“Previously, they (the companions) never asked about the sanad. However, after the fitnah (political chaos), they said: ‘Tell us the names of your transmitters (sources of your news).’ (An-Naisabury, 1953).

This quote demonstrates that hadith criticism was no longer solely focused on the text's content (*matan*) but had expanded systematically to include the transmission channels (*sanad*). The Tabi'in scholars began undertaking scholarly journeys (*rihlah*) to various regions simply to verify a single name in a chain of narrations. Standards were also set very rigidly; they rejected hadith from ambitious individuals who prioritized their own desires, ignorant individuals who frequently lied, and pious individuals who lacked the intellectual capacity to memorize (whose narrations were unknown).

Entering the 3rd century AH, hadith criticism became much more methodological with the birth of the discipline of Jarh wa Ta'dil (the science of assessing the flaws and credibility of narrators). One of its primary references was the work of Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi. In the preface to his book, he explains the urgency of distinguishing truthful narrators from lying ones with a clear statement:

فَوَجِبَ أَنْ نُمَيِّزَ بَيْنَ الصَّادِقِ وَالكَاذِبِ، وَبَيْنَ الْحَافِظِ وَالْمُغْفَلِ، لِكَيْ لَا يُؤْخَذَ عَنْ غَيْرِ أَهْلِهِ، وَلَا يُقْبَلَ إِلَّا مَا ثَبَتَ بِرِوَايَةِ الْعَدْلِ الصَّادِقِ

“So it is obligatory for us to differentiate between truthful narrators and lying ones, and between narrators who are strong in memory and those who are negligent, so that hadith are not taken from people who are not experts, and are not accepted except what has been established through the narrations of just and honest people.” (Al-Razi, 1952).

Some of the standards for accepting hadith established during this period include: (1) not taking hadith from ambitious people who prioritize their desires, (2) not taking hadith from stupid people who often lie, and (3) not taking hadith from pious people whose narrations are unknown. Criticism activities no longer only focus on the *matan* (content), but also extend to the *sanad* (transmitter) aspect. In the 3rd century AH, hadith criticism became more systematic and methodological, marked by the birth of various written works that became the main references. One important development was the effort to separate the study of *matan* and *sanad* specifically, as done by Ibn Abi Hatim, who formulated the book Jarh wa Ta'dil. This book contains guidelines for assessing the credibility of the transmitter in order to determine the authenticity of the hadith.

This development demonstrates that hadith criticism during this period had transformed into a well-established discipline. The scholars' efforts to specifically separate the study of *sanad* and *matan* (transmitted texts) were a major step in safeguarding religious integrity from the distortions of political interests and the rampant spread of fabricated hadith at that time.

4.4.4. Post-Codification Era (IV-VII Hijri centuries)

Although previous periods had advanced, the 4th to 7th centuries Hijri faced new challenges. Many hadith books have appeared, but they often contain the words of the Prophet (*marfu'*), the words of the companions (*mauquf*), and the words of the tabi'in (*maqtu'*). The mixing of these narrations has confused the public regarding which are truly the words of the Prophet and which are not (Al-'Asqalānī, 1997). Apart from that, the circulation of fake hadith continues to increase along with the emergence of zindiks and poets who lie in the name of the Prophet to attract public attention.

To address this, scholars needed specialized disciplines that were not limited to the science of *dirayah* (religious narration), but also included the science of *riwayah* (chain of transmission), or *sanad* (translation), such as the science of Rijal al-Hadith. This science was crucial during this period to perfect critical activities and separate the contaminated hadith. Rijal was used to examine the biography of the narrator: when he was born, when he died, and whether he ever met the teacher who narrated the hadith (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). If there is no possibility of physical contact (impossible to meet), then the hadith can be considered fabricated or its narrator unreliable. Figures like Imam al-Bukhari are known for being very strict in this selection process, yet remaining polite in assessing weak narrators. Ultimately, hadith are classified as *sahih* (authentic) and *daif* (weak) based on strict rules.

One example of a *marfu' sahih hadith* that passes the strictest chain of transmission is the hadith about intention narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab. This hadith is recorded in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the most authoritative book of hadith in Islam. The original text reads:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَىٰ

“Indeed, deeds depend on intentions, and everyone gets according to what he intended.”

This hadith is considered authentic because its chain of transmission is continuous (*ittishāl*), its narrators are just and reliable, and there is evidence of direct encounters between the narrators. This thoroughness reflects Imam al-Bukhari's rigorous scientific methodology in selecting hadith (Al-'Asqalānī, 1997).

On the other hand, in much hadith and historical literature, we also find accounts of *mauqūf*, namely the words of friends which are often misunderstood as the words of the Prophet. An example is the words of Ali bin Abi Talib, which are narrated in the historical hadith books:

كُنَّا نَعْرِفُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ عَلَىٰ عَهْدِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ بِبُغْضِهِمْ عَلَيَّا

“We used to know the hypocrites during the time of the Prophet from their hatred of Ali.”

This statement is not a hadith of the Prophet, but rather the assessment of a companion based on empirical experience during the prophetic period. In the post-codification era, hadith scholars emphasized the importance of distinguishing between such narrations to avoid misattribution to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Furthermore, there are also *maqtū'* sayings from tabi'in circles, which are very popular but are often mistakenly considered hadith (Al-Baghdadi, 1989). Among them are the words of Muhammad bin Sirin, which are quoted in the Muqaddimah Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim:

هَذَا الْعِلْمُ دِينٌ، فَانظُرُوا عَمَّنْ تَأْخُذُونَ دِينَكُمْ

“This knowledge is religion, so be careful who you take your religion from.” (Muslim, Muqaddimah Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

This statement confirms the methodological awareness of the generation of the tabi'in regarding the importance of *sanad*, but scientifically it should not be categorized as a hadith of the Prophet, but rather as a scientific principle in the transmission of religion.

In addition to the mixing of narrative genres, the post-codification era was also marked by an increase in fabricated hadith (*maudū'*), fabricated by heretics, supporters of certain political parties, and poets seeking to garner public sympathy. One frequently cited example is:

اطُّبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصِّينِ

"Seek knowledge even if you go to China."

This hadith is considered fake or very weak by hadith scholars because the *sanad* contains an unknown narrator and does not have the possibility of meeting the teacher attributed to him. This assessment can be found in the narrator's critical books, such as *Lisān al-Mizān* by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani. The methodological strictness of hadith scholars in this period is reflected in Imam al-Bukhari's own statement:

مَا أَدْخَلْتُ فِي كِتَابِي هَذَا إِلَّا مَا صَحَّ، وَتَرَكْتُ مِنَ الصَّحِيحِ كَثِيرًا

"I have not included in this book of mine anything except the truly authentic hadith, and I have left out many other authentic hadith."

This statement shows that in the post-codification era, hadith criticism has reached a very high level of scientific selection, so that not all authentic hadith are automatically accepted without strict methodological consideration (Al-Naysābūrī, 1990).

4.4.5. Middle Period (VII-XIII Hijri centuries)

From the 7th to the 13th centuries, hadith criticism reached a peak of perfection. This century is known as the era of preservation, organization, and compilation of the Prophet's hadith. Scholars no longer focused solely on initial selection for originality, but instead shifted their attention to compiling and researching existing books. This period is characterized by the emergence of hadith schools and the numerous scholars who provided explanations or commentaries (*syarh*) on the quality of hadith in earlier books (Hanbal, 1993). This is the phase in which the legacy of previous scholars is maintained and perfected.

One of the important events reflecting the character of this period was the emergence of hadith commentary on the authoritative works of previous generations, such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. The great 9th-century Hijri scholar Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī wrote *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, which is considered the most comprehensive commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. In his introduction, Ibn Hajar explains the purpose of writing this commentary with the following statement:

وَقَصْدِي فِي هَذَا الشَّرْحِ بَيَانُ مَا يُسْتَنْبَطُ مِنْ فَوَائِدِ الْحَدِيثِ، وَتَمْيِيزُ صَحِيحِهِ مِنْ غَيْرِهِ

"My aim in this syarah is to explain the benefits that can be extracted from hadith and distinguish authentic hadith from others."

This statement shows that in the middle period, hadith criticism did not stop at the *sanad*, but also included analysis of the content (*matan*) as well as comparisons between narrations to ensure the accuracy of the meaning.

Besides Ibn Hajar, another scholar who embodied the spirit of this period was Imam al-Nawawī, who wrote a commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. In the introduction to his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, he emphasized the importance of critical *sanad* (chain of transmission) criticism and caution in accepting hadith (Al-Nawawī, 2004):

أَجْمَعَ أَهْلُ الْعِلْمِ أَنَّ الْحَدِيثَ الضَّعِيفَ لَا يُحْتَجُّ بِهِ فِي الْأَحْكَامِ

“*Ulama have agreed that weak hadith cannot be used as evidence in determining law.*”

This statement illustrates that in the middle period, a methodological consensus (*ijmā’ ilmī*) had been formed regarding the standards for accepting hadith, the result of a long process of criticism and evaluation of hadith in previous periods.

Another example of hadith preservation activities during this period is the writing of books on the interpretation of hadith and the reclassification of hadith, such as the work of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. In his book *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, al-Suyūṭī summarized and organized the principles of hadith science scattered throughout the works of previous scholars (Al-Suyūṭī, 2003). He wrote:

عِلْمُ الْحَدِيثِ مِنْ أَشْرَفِ الْعُلُومِ، لِتَعَلُّقِهِ بِحِفْظِ السُّنَّةِ النَّبَوِيَّةِ

“*The science of hadith is one of the most noble sciences because of its connection with preserving the Prophet’s sunnah.*”

This statement emphasizes that the middle period was a phase of institutionalization of the science of hadith, where the rules of criticism of *sanad* and *matan* were systematically compiled to be passed on to the next generation.

4.4.6. Dynamics of Hadith Criticism in the Modern Era (13th Century - Present)

The study of hadith continues to evolve and never remains static. In the modern era, scholars have collaborated between hadith criticism and understanding (*syarh*), resulting in the emergence of numerous books of hadith commentary that not only assess the quality of the *sanad/matan* but also explain the intent of the hadith’s wording. One significant development is the emergence of books of *takhrij*, which attempt to critique and assess the quality of hadith contained within a particular book, such as the *takhrij* of al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ Ulumuddin*. (Al-Sibā’ī, 2014). Apart from that, thematic hadith books were also born, such as *Bulugh al-Maram*, which contains jurisprudential legal hadiths.

One concrete example of the dynamics of modern hadith criticism is the emergence of hadith *takhrij* works, namely the tracing of sources and assessment of the quality of hadith contained in non-hadith books. The most famous example is the hadith criticism of al-Ghazali’s *Ihyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*. The 8th-century AH hadith scholar, Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī, compiled the book *al-Mughnī ‘an Ḥaml al-Asfār*, which contains *takhrij* of hadith in *Ihyā’*. In his introduction, al-‘Irāqī asserts:

وَالْتَزَمْتُ فِي هَذَا الْكِتَابِ تَحْرِيجَ أَحَادِيثِ الْإِحْيَاءِ وَبَيَانَ صَحِيحِهَا وَضَعِيفِهَا

“*I am committed in this book to interpreting the hadiths in Ihya’ and explaining which ones are valid and which ones are weak.*”

This statement reflects the spirit of the modern era in maintaining the authority of popular Islamic books with a scientific approach to hadith, without destroying the moral and spiritual values they contain (Al-Adlabi, 1983).

Furthermore, the modern era was also marked by the development of thematic hadith books, which organize hadith based on specific themes, particularly in the field of Islamic jurisprudence. One particularly influential work is Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s *Bulūgh al-Marām*. In the introduction to the book, Ibn Hajar states:

هَذَا كِتَابٌ جَمَعْتُ فِيهِ أَحَادِيثَ الْأَحْكَامِ مِنْ بُلُوغِ الْمَرَامِ

“*This is a book that I compiled by collecting legal hadiths which became the basis for establishing the Shari’a* (Ibn Ḥajar, *Bulūgh al-Marām*)

This book was later reviewed and re-interpreted by many modern scholars, showing that hadith criticism in this era is continuous and dialogical, not final and closed. However, the modern era has also brought serious controversy to the study of hadith. Sharp criticism from Western Orientalists who doubted the authenticity of hadith has prompted academic advocacy from Muslim scholars (Al-A'zamī, 1990). Orientalists such as Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht have accused the hadith of being a socio-political product of the second century of the Hijri era. This accusation has been countered by modern Muslim scholars, such as Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, in his book *al-Sunnah wa Makānatuhā fī al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī*. He asserts that (Al-Siba'iy, 2014):

إِنَّ السُّنَّةَ النَّبَوِيَّةَ مَحْفُوظَةٌ بِسُنَدِهَا وَنَفْسِهَا، كَمَا حُفِظَ الْقُرْآنُ

“Indeed, the Prophet’s sunnah is preserved through his sanad and scientific criticism, just as the Koran is guarded.”

This statement shows that modern criticism of hadith is not an attempt to destroy the sunnah, but rather to strengthen its scientific validity to face global intellectual challenges (Brown, 2009). Thus, the dynamics of hadith criticism in the modern era are characterized by three main characteristics: the integration of criticism and commentary, the development of the *takhrij* tradition of non-hadith texts, and academic responses to Orientalist criticism. This era demonstrates that hadith scholarship is adaptive, defensive, and productive, without losing its methodological roots established by classical scholars. Jonathan Brown notes that the attention of Muslims was diverted by the influence of Christian missionaries and orientalists who were critical of the hadith, especially in the Indian region (Brown, 2014).

4.5. Four Periods of Development of Modern Hadith Thought

According to Jonathan A.C. Brown, the development of hadith thought in the modern era can be mapped into four major periods that demonstrate the dynamics of the relationship between Muslims and the authority of the sunnah. The first period was the reform movement of the 18th century CE, marked by tensions between traditionalists and early modernists. During this phase, important figures such as Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi emerged, who attempted to reconstruct a proportional understanding of the Sunnah (Al-Dihlawī, 2005). In his work *Ḥujjat Allah al-Bālighah*, the Waliullah distinguishes between the Prophet’s actions as a Messenger and those of a mere human being. He states:

إِنَّ أَفْعَالَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ لَيْسَتْ كُلُّهَا لِلتَّشْرِيعِ، بَلْ مِنْهَا مَا هُوَ عَلَى سَبِيلِ الْجِبَلَّةِ الْبَشَرِيَّةِ

“Indeed, not all the actions of the Prophet are of a legal nature; some of them are acts born of human nature.”

This view represents an early attempt to limit the normative function of hadith, without denying the authority of the sunnah as a whole. In the same period, Muhammad al-Syawkānī emerged with a more radical approach (Al-Syawkānī, 1999). In the book *Irshād al-Fuḥūl*, he emphasizes the opening of the door to *ijtihad* and criticism of the authority of the classical school:

لَا يَحِلُّ لِأَحَدٍ أَنْ يُقَلِّدَ أَحَدًا فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ

“It is not lawful for anyone to submit to anyone in the religion of Allah.”

This statement reflects a major shift in the authority of hadith, from the collective tradition of scholars to interpretive independence based on direct evidence. The second period, according to Brown, is the hadith-based reformation of the 19th century CE, which attempted to combine the ideas

of Waliullah and al-Syawkānī. During this phase, some hadith scholars began to prioritize the purification of authentic hadith, even tending to dismiss classical scholarly traditions deemed irrelevant. This phenomenon is evident in the emergence of the *ahl al-ḥadīṣ* movement, which prioritizes authentic hadith and rejects the authority of the madhhab (Goldziher, 1971). However, this approach is often criticized for oversimplifying the complexities of classical methodology and breaking the historical continuity of Islamic scholarship.

The third period is the Early Modernist era, which was marked by a more fundamental emergence of doubts about the authenticity of the hadith. The central figure of this period was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who responded to the criticisms of Orientalists such as William Muir (Sirīn, 2006). Muir doubted the hadith and dismissed the isnad system as a later reconstruction. Ahmad Khan rejected this view and defended the isnad system as a strong Islamic tradition, but he limited the authority of the hadith to the spiritual aspects (Anas, 2004). In his writing, he stated that the tradition of *isnād* proves the extraordinary memory and honesty of Muslim transmitters, yet not every report can bind reason in every age. Another figure from this period was Muhammad ‘Abduh, who held a more moderate stance. He argued that the only truly binding hadith were the *mutawatir* hadith. This view is reflected in his thinking about the sunnah as a source of law that must be selected rationally and contextually (Ridā, 1947).

The fourth period is Qur’anic Scripturalism, which is characterized by a sharp conflict between the Qur’anic scholars and the hadith scholars. This group believes that pure Islam can only be built on the Qur’an, because it is considered the only source free from historical doubt (Schacht, 1964). This view became the forerunner of the *Ingkar al-Sunnah* movement. In response to this phenomenon, Rashid Rida emerged as a critical defender of the Sunnah. In the magazine al-Manār, he wrote:

إِنَّ هَدْمَ السُّنَّةِ هَدْمٌ لِلْقُرْآنِ نَفْسِهِ، فَلَا يُفْهَمُ أَحَدُهُمَا دُونَ الْآخَرَ

“To destroy the Sunnah is to destroy the Quran itself, because the two cannot be understood separately.”

This statement shows that the response to Qur’anic scripturalism is not a return to blind imitation, but rather a revitalization of rational and responsible hadith criticism.

5. Conclusion

Based on the historical and epistemological descriptions above, it can be concluded that hadith criticism in Islam is a scientific process that emerged gradually and responsively to the challenges of the times. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the era of his companions and successors, hadith criticism began with direct verification mechanisms and personal trust, then developed into a scientific system based on the *sanad* (chain of transmission), the integrity of the narrators, and the analysis of the text (*matan*). This transformation demonstrates that the Islamic tradition is not dogmatic, but rather possesses an epistemic awareness that maintains the Prophet’s authority through rational procedures that can be tested intersubjectively.

The development of hadith criticism from the post-codification era to the medieval period demonstrates the methodological maturity of hadith science. Disciplines such as the science of *rijāl*, *jarḥ wa ta’dīl*, *musthalah al-ḥadīth*, and the traditions of *shari’ah* and *takhrij* demonstrate that Muslim scholars sought not only to collect hadith but also to organize, preserve, and perfect the legacy of previous scholarship. In this phase, hadith criticism was no longer merely reactive to forgery but rather became an established scientific system that maintained the internal consistency of Islamic teachings while ensuring the historical accuracy of the transmission of the sunnah.

In the modern era, hadith criticism has demonstrated an adaptive and dialogical character in facing global intellectual challenges, particularly Orientalist criticism and the emergence of Qur'anic scripturalism. Jonathan A.C. Brown's mapping of four periods in the development of modern hadith thought emphasizes that debates surrounding hadith do not signal a decline in the authority of the Sunnah, but rather an intellectual dynamic that continually tests and strengthens its foundations. Thus, hadith criticism can be understood not as an expression of skepticism toward the Sunnah, but as an instrument of scientific rationality that ensures that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) remain protected from historical distortion and relevant in the course of time.

6. References

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