

# THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHENTICITY THE ENDLESS DEBATE BETWEEN REVISIONIST AND TRADITIONALIST NEW PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract:** The authenticity of hadith is an endless debate between the western and Islamic worlds, mainly due to different points of view. The nonconformity arose because the study of the Islamic world focused on dogmatic ideological nuances, while western world studies adopted a more critical and academic methodology. The present study aimed to explore how these two opposing viewpoints assessed the hadith of the Prophet. The studies conducted by Goldziher and Schacht were selected as representatives of the Western world and those of Azami for Islam. Azami, a leading traditionalist Islamic scholar, had tried to counter both from an academic perspective. Furthermore, other Islamic scholars often reiterate the opinion of Azami when rejecting theses of Goldziher and Schacht. This study attempted to answer three main questions using the abductive method, namely, How do the Western and Islamic perspectives view the hadith of the Prophet? What argument was put forward by Azami for refuting the views of Goldziher? Why does Goldziher opinion continue to get stronger despite the numerous attacks

**Keyword:** Revisionist, Tradisionist, Goldziher, Schacht, M. M. Azami

## Introduction

Azami's critique was based on the work of Goldziher *Muhammedanische Studien*, which was perceived as an important

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reference in Western Islamic studies. From the moment it was published in 1890, the work had been distinguished as a holy book for orientalists interested in Islam.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent analyses, such as the work of A. Guillaume titled *The Traditions of Islam*, repeated the views of Goldziher without introducing new insights.<sup>2</sup> Guillaume supported the works of Goldziher. When these two scholars were compared, Goldziher was proven more prominent, as supported by the work of D. S. Margoliouth titled *The Early Development of Mohammedanism*.

Josep Schacht did not only agree with the predecessors, Goldziher and Margoliouth, as stated in the book titled, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, which was published three centuries ago. The argument was also supported by the new concept Common Link Theory, focused on the criticism of Azami. This theory was used to challenge the sanad system deified by Muslim scholars. The study focused on dating hadith to determine the origin, dissemination and popularity. Subsequently, the theory proposed by Schacht was modified by Joynboll with the concept of partial common link.<sup>3</sup>

Azami critically examined the theory proposed by Schacht in the book entitled *On Schacht Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the following scholars Abu Zahrah and Zafar Ishaq Ansari also voiced the same concerns. Schacht also faced internal criticism from orientalists, such as Motzki.<sup>5</sup> The diverse perspectives concentrated on the complex nature of Orientalist studies, as categorized by Brown into four classes, namely orientalist,

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<sup>1</sup> Wael Hallaq, Lawrence Conrad, and Harald Motzki, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Hadith :," *Studia Islamica* 99, no. 12 (1999): 75–90.

<sup>2</sup> AlfredGuillaume-  
*TheTraditionsOfIslamAnIntroductionToTheStudyOfTheHadithLiterature.Pdf*,"  
n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Kamaruddin Amin, "Non-Muslim (Western) Scholars' Approach to Hadith. An Analytical Study on the Theory of 'Common Link and Single Strand,'" *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 40, no. 1 (2002): 34–55,  
<https://www.aljamilah.or.id/index.php/AJIS/article/view/2794>.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Melchert, M. Mustafa al-Azami, and Norman Calder, "On Schacht's "Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence," *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 15, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051525>.

<sup>5</sup> Kamaruddin Amin, "The Reliability of the Traditional Science of Hadith: A Critical Reconsideration," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 43, no. 2 (2005): 255, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2005.432.255-281>.

philo islamic apology, revisionist, and western revaluation methods.<sup>6</sup> However, there remained a gap in the literature concerning material testing and argumentation of these hypotheses using abductive methods, as the present study aimed to address.

### Goldziher and Schacht's thesis

The thesis by Goldziher, stated that majority of the hadiths did not originate from the Prophet. While Goldziher acknowledged the possibility of companions recording hadith during the lifetime of the Prophet, it was extremely few.<sup>7</sup> This perspective is in line with Islamic scholars who stated that the companions had personal records, called *sahifah*.<sup>8</sup> However, Goldziher viewed the hadith as a reflection of the interactions and conflicts between the various sects during the newly established Umayyad dynasty. Schacht further stated that the initial codification of the hadith in the study conducted focused on Malik al-Muwaththa' and mainly served jurisprudential purposes.

Azami focused on seven points proposed by Goldziher, deduced from various sources such as Sunan Abu Daud concerning the people of Syria, who allegedly lacked knowledge of the *witr* prayer, *Sahih al-Bukhari* discussions on how to pray *Tarikh al-Tabari* and the early spread of false hadith.<sup>9</sup> The following section focused on how Azami refuted the accusations of Goldziher regarding the early falsification of hadith as quoted from *al-Tabari*.

### Azami's Rebuttal

Goldziher, stated that the falsification of hadith occurred in the earliest times before it was officially codified during the era of Omar bin Abdul Aziz. The fabrication stated when Muawiya assumed sole leadership of the Islamic world. Muawiya sent letters to governors throughout the territory to contact Uthman supporters and publish

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (London: Curzon Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Daud Rasyid et al., "The Writing of Hadith in the Era of Prophet Muhammad A Critique on Harun Nasution's Thought," *Al-Jami'ah* 59, no. 1 (2021): 191–220, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.191-220>.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*, 1978.

hadiths about the alleged virtues. This effort aimed to counter the several hadiths about the virtues of Ali.

Goldziher stated that the companions were responsible for falsifying the hadith, and this was proven by the letters written by Muawiyah. However, Azami disagreed, stating that the letters did not show the slightest falsification. In conflict situations, each of the parties naturally tries to attract as many supporters as possible. According to Azami, it is only normal to hold anyone responsible for the murder of Uthman accountable.<sup>10</sup>

The investigation by Azami lacked concrete facts and was perceived as ideological and subjective. However, Goldziher study was based on data extracted from al-T{abari}. This critique focused on the vulnerability of the assumption proposed by Azami. A fundamental weakness was the disintegration of the assumption, based on concrete evidences presented by Goldziher. Despite the constant criticism from Muslim scholars, the thesis published by Goldziher remained unaltered because it was in line with historical facts extracted from sources also recognized by critics, including Azami.

The document *al-Ab{da>th*, mentioned in the study conducted by Abu> al-H{asan al-Madi>ni>, a mentor to Bukhari, was another historical fact that supported Goldziher. It was more comprehensive than al-T{abari> as well as referenced by Ibn al-H{adi>d al-Mu'tazili> in the work titled *Sharh{ Nahj al-Bala>ghab*.<sup>11</sup> Al-Madi>ni supported Goldziher on the falsification of hadith by the companions of Prophet Muawiya. Furthermore, historical artefact and the excerpts from al-T{abari> were thoroughly examined.

The documentation challenges the Azami assumption that denied the role of Muawiyah and the companions in falsifying hadith. It was strange Azami overlooked the account of the famous Ali> al-Madi>ni>, which provided crucial insight. In reality, the falsification of hadith occurred even long before Muawiya came to power.

Ideological bias was evident in the defense of Azami, as the Sunni tendencies were inherent in every argument proposed. Furthermore, the following contemporaries Mustafa al-Sibai and Abu Shuhbah, Azami defended the companions doctrine of justice,

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<sup>10</sup> Azami.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Abi al-Hadid Al-Mu'tazili, *Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah*, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadhl Ibrahim (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, n.d.).

interpreted as freedom from falsifying hadith. Accepting the opinion of Goldziher weakened the traditional view of justice. Azami wanted to avoid this type of inference. To avoid such consequences, it was hastily as there is not a single word suggesting the slightest hint of any hadith fabrication. It depicted a cognitive dissonance in the argument.

In rejecting the thesis by Goldziher, Azami adopted the historical critical method commonly used by western scholars, which focused on analogy as a main principle. This was evident in the defense of Muawiya Machiavelli politics. Azami stated that all rulers, including Muawiya, would definitely resort to any means necessary to win the loyalty of supporters and destroy the rebels. Therefore, Azami stated that the actions of Muawiyah were justified within this framework.

Azami showed certain potential by using methods of historical criticism to counter attacks by Western scholars, who adopted similar methodologies. However, Azami was inconsistent and relied more on classical methods. The preference limited Azami in effectively challenging the theories of western scholars. According to Kamaruddin, the reliance of Azami on information collected without in-depth testing, led to failure.<sup>12</sup>

The study by Azami reflected the general opinion of Islamic scholars, particularly regarding the dominance of the traveling theory in this field.<sup>13</sup> It was exemplified by the isnad theory. Azami refuted the study by Schacht that the isnad theory was applied after the second century of the Hijri. In respect to Ibn Sirrin (d. 110/728), *Lam yaku>nu> yas'alu>na 'an al-isnad fa-lamma> waqa'at al-fitnah qa>lu> sammu> la-na> rija>lakum fa-yunz}ar ila> abl al-sunnah fa-yu'kbadh` b}adi>thubu wa-yunz}ar ila> abl al-bida' fa-la> yu'kbad b}adi>thubum*. According to Azami, the isnad was already in use following the event that led to the assassination of Caliph Uthman in 35 AH/656 AD.

Schacht opposed the statement made by Ibn Sirrin after dying in 110 A.H. Additionally, Schacht interpreted the term slander as the assassination of Caliph Walid ibn Yazid (d. 126). Azami challenged the interpretation by Schacht, focusing on the numerous slanders that took place before the assassination. These included the slander of Ibn

<sup>12</sup> Kamaruddin Amin, *Menguji Kembali Keakuratan Metode Kritik Hadis* (Bandung: Hikmah, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Edward W Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Zubayr around 70 A.H. as well as the conflicts between Ali versus Muawiya, and Ali versus Aisha. Azami, like the majority of Muslim scholars, defined the word slander as the political event that accompanied the assassination of Caliph Uthman. Furthermore, Azami supported this definition with a grammatical analysis of the phrase, *lam yakun>nu> yas'alu`>na...* implying that Ibn Sirrin referred to an older tradition before the current period. The statement also meant that the practice of using Isnad existed, although it was not an absolute requirement.

The argument of Azami showed certain weaknesses when confronted with Orientalist claims. By adopting the isnad theory, which Orientalists rejected, the debate remained unresolved. Both parties adopted distinct methodologies with different characteristics. This method cannot be used as the only tool to determine the quality of hadith. Therefore, it was absolutely critical to adopt an alternative method that complemented the existing ones and considered the subjectivity of hadith critics. Karcic suggested by resorting to social sciences methods, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies.<sup>14</sup> This interdisciplinary method can be applied to various major themes of hadith to overcome methodological stagnation.

## Conclusion

Differences in the study patterns of Islamic and Western scholars was observed. Although both focused on examining past reports, it was from different perspectives and basic assumptions. Islamic scholars viewed hadith and other Prophet-related materials as genuine and reliable, and were often used as a legal foundation without hesitation. This ideological conviction, led to a dogmatic scholarly viewpoint, where reports of doubtful authenticity were valued over personal opinion. Western scholars critically investigated all past reports. The method was based on historical criticism originally used to conduct biblical studies, which were later applied to the investigation of hadith.

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<sup>14</sup> Fikret Karcic, "Textual Analysis in Islamic Studies: A Short Historical and Comparative Survey on JSTOR."

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