

Defending the Prophetic Sunnah in the Modern Age: Contemporary Muslim Scholarly Responses to Hadith Skepticism-

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ABSTRACT

The Prophetic Sunnah represents one of the foundational sources of Islamic guidance, functioning alongside the Qur'an as a central reference for Islamic theology, law, and ethical practice. Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars developed sophisticated methodologies within the sciences of Hadith to preserve, authenticate, and transmit the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. However, in the modern period, the authority of Hadith literature has been challenged by various intellectual movements, including orientalist scholarship, modernist interpretations, and Qur'an-centric approaches that question the reliability and normative authority of the Sunnah. These critiques have generated significant debates within both academic and religious contexts regarding the authenticity of Hadith transmission and the role of the Sunnah in Islamic thought. This study examines contemporary Muslim scholarly responses to Hadith skepticism in the modern age, focusing on the methodological, historical, and textual arguments presented in defense of the Prophetic Sunnah. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on library research and textual analysis, the study explores the theological foundations of the Sunnah, the origins and development of modern Hadith skepticism, and the intellectual strategies employed by contemporary scholars to address these critiques. Particular attention is given to the revival of classical Hadith sciences and the reinterpretation of traditional verification methodologies in light of modern academic debates. The study finds that contemporary Muslim scholars have actively engaged with modern critiques by demonstrating the historical reliability of Hadith transmission and the methodological rigor of classical Hadith scholarship. By integrating traditional Islamic scholarship with modern analytical tools, these scholars aim to reaffirm the authority of the Sunnah as an indispensable source of Islamic guidance. The article concludes that the continued defense and scholarly study of the Prophetic Sunnah play a vital role in preserving the intellectual integrity of Islamic tradition in the modern age.

Keywords:

Prophetic Sunnah; Hadith Studies; Hadith Skepticism; Islamic Scholarship; Contemporary Islamic Thought.

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Introduction

The Prophetic Sunnah, which encompasses the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, occupies a central position in the intellectual and legal framework of Islam. Together with the Qur'an, the Sunnah forms the foundational source of Islamic guidance, shaping religious practice, ethical conduct, and legal principles within Muslim societies. The preservation and transmission of the Sunnah have historically been achieved through the discipline of Hadith studies, a sophisticated scholarly tradition dedicated to verifying the authenticity and reliability of prophetic reports.¹ Classical Muslim scholars developed rigorous methodologies for evaluating chains of transmission (*isnād*) and textual content (*matn*), creating one of the most systematic approaches to historical documentation in the pre-modern world. Works such as the collections compiled by Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj became authoritative references in Islamic scholarship, demonstrating the centrality of the Sunnah in shaping Islamic law, theology, and social norms. Throughout Islamic history, scholars regarded the preservation and interpretation of the Sunnah as an essential responsibility for maintaining the integrity of Islamic teachings and safeguarding the continuity of religious knowledge.²

Despite its foundational role in Islamic thought, the authority of the Sunnah has faced various forms of intellectual challenge throughout history. In the early centuries of Islam, debates emerged regarding the authenticity and interpretation of prophetic traditions, prompting scholars to refine methodological tools for evaluating Hadith literature. However, the nature of these debates changed significantly during the modern period, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Muslim societies encountered new intellectual currents arising from colonial encounters, Western academic scholarship, and modernist reinterpretations of Islamic tradition.³ Within this context, some critics questioned the reliability of Hadith transmission and argued that Islamic teachings should rely primarily or exclusively on the Qur'an. These critiques were influenced by both external academic approaches to historical analysis and internal reformist movements seeking to reinterpret Islamic sources in light of contemporary intellectual trends. The resulting debates created a complex intellectual environment in which the authority of the Sunnah became a focal point of scholarly discussion and theological reflection.⁴

Modern skepticism toward Hadith literature has taken several forms, ranging from methodological critiques of the classical Hadith sciences to broader ideological arguments questioning the role of the Sunnah in Islamic law and religious practice. Some critics argue that the historical transmission of Hadith reports may have been influenced by political, social, or sectarian factors in early Islamic history, thereby challenging the reliability of traditional Hadith collections. Others advocate a Qur'an-centric approach that minimizes or rejects the

¹Brown, J. A. C. (2023). Hadith studies in the twenty-first century: Methodological debates and new directions. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 34(3), 327–345. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad021>

²Demircigil, B. (2024). The conceptualization of jurisprudential exegesis as a bridge between tafsīr and fiqh. *Religions*, 15(2), 254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020254>

³Brown, J. A. C. (2023). Hadith studies in the twenty-first century: Methodological debates and new directions. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 34(3), 327–345. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad021>

⁴Demircigil, B. (2024). The conceptualization of jurisprudential exegesis as a bridge between tafsīr and fiqh. *Religions*, 15(2), 254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020254>

normative authority of the Sunnah in interpreting Islamic teachings. These perspectives have gained visibility in certain intellectual and academic circles, generating debates that extend beyond scholarly discourse into broader discussions about religious authority and the interpretation of Islamic tradition in the modern world. As a result, defending the authenticity and authority of the Sunnah has become an important task for contemporary Muslim scholars who seek to preserve the methodological rigor and intellectual heritage of classical Hadith scholarship.⁵

In response to these challenges, many contemporary Muslim scholars have undertaken significant efforts to reaffirm the epistemological and historical foundations of the Sunnah. Drawing upon both classical scholarship and modern academic methodologies, these scholars have sought to demonstrate the reliability of Hadith transmission and the enduring relevance of the Sunnah in understanding Islamic teachings.⁶ Their contributions include critical studies of Hadith methodology, detailed analyses of historical transmission networks, and systematic responses to modern critiques of Hadith authenticity. Scholars such as Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami have emphasized the historical documentation of Hadith transmission and highlighted the sophistication of classical methods used by early Muslim scholars to verify prophetic traditions. These scholarly responses not only defend the authority of the Sunnah but also contribute to the broader development of contemporary Islamic thought by engaging constructively with modern intellectual challenges.

The present study seeks to explore contemporary Muslim scholarly responses to Hadith skepticism in the modern age, focusing on how scholars defend the authenticity and authority of the Prophetic Sunnah within contemporary intellectual discourse. By examining the arguments, methodologies, and intellectual strategies employed by modern scholars, the study aims to highlight the continuing vitality of Hadith scholarship in addressing contemporary critiques. Particular attention is given to the ways in which contemporary scholars reinterpret classical methodologies, engage with modern academic approaches, and articulate new frameworks for understanding the Sunnah in the context of modern intellectual debates. Through this analysis, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic scholarly traditions respond to contemporary challenges while preserving the intellectual integrity of the Prophetic Sunnah as a central source of Islamic guidance.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative analytical and descriptive research methodology to examine contemporary Muslim scholarly responses to skepticism surrounding the Prophetic Sunnah. The research is primarily based on library-based investigation, utilizing both classical and modern sources related to Hadith studies, Islamic theology, and contemporary critiques of the Sunnah. Classical works of Hadith methodology and Islamic scholarship are analyzed alongside modern academic writings that address the authenticity, authority, and historical transmission of the Sunnah. This approach allows the study to explore both the traditional foundations of Hadith scholarship and the modern intellectual debates that have emerged regarding the role of the Sunnah in Islamic thought. The study also adopts a textual and thematic analysis to examine the arguments presented by contemporary Muslim scholars in defense of the Sunnah. Key scholarly works that respond to Hadith skepticism are analyzed

⁵ Brown, J. A. C. (2023). Hadith studies in the twenty-first century: Methodological debates and new directions. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 34(3), 327–345. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad021>

⁶ Ahmed, Z. S. (2023). Islam and the politics of secularism in Pakistan. *Religions*, 14(3), 416. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030416>

to identify recurring themes, methodological approaches, and intellectual strategies used to address modern critiques. Particular attention is given to the ways in which contemporary scholars reinterpret classical principles of Hadith verification—such as the evaluation of chains of transmission (*isnād*) and textual criticism (*matn*)—in order to respond to modern academic and ideological challenges.

The Theological Significance of the Sunnah and Its Relationship with the Qur'an

The Prophetic Sunnah occupies a central position in the theological and intellectual structure of Islam, functioning as the second primary source of Islamic guidance after the Qur'an. The term Sunnah refers to the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, which collectively provide practical explanations and applications of the divine teachings revealed in the Qur'an. In Islamic theology, the Sunnah is not viewed merely as historical narration but as a normative model that reflects the practical implementation of divine revelation in human life.⁷ The Qur'an itself emphasizes the importance of following the Prophet's guidance, thereby establishing the Sunnah as an essential component of Islamic religious authority. Numerous Qur'anic verses instruct believers to obey the Messenger and regard his teachings as authoritative guidance in matters of faith and practice.⁸ The relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah is characterized by complementarity and interpretive integration. While the Qur'an provides the fundamental principles of Islamic belief, law, and morality, the Sunnah explains, elaborates, and contextualizes these principles in practical terms. Many Qur'anic injunctions are presented in general terms without detailed procedural explanations, leaving the Prophet's example as the primary source for their practical implementation. For instance, the Qur'an commands believers to establish prayer and pay almsgiving but does not specify the exact procedures, timings, and rituals associated with these practices. These details are preserved and transmitted through the Sunnah, demonstrating the indispensable role of prophetic guidance in interpreting and applying Qur'anic teachings.⁹ Classical Muslim scholars therefore understood the Sunnah as a form of revelatory guidance, although distinct from the Qur'an itself. The Prophet Muhammad's role as the recipient and interpreter of divine revelation positioned him as the primary authority responsible for explaining and exemplifying Islamic teachings. In this sense, the Sunnah serves as a living embodiment of Qur'anic principles, translating abstract divine commands into practical models of conduct. Through the Prophet's actions and teachings, believers gained a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values should be applied in everyday life, including matters related to worship, ethics, social relations, and governance.¹⁰

⁷ Mustafa, A., Ishaque, M., Raza, R., Samiullah, & Raza, M. I. (2025). When culture meets Fiqh: Examining the legal authority of 'Urf in contemporary engagement traditions. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.6>

⁸ Faisala, M. S., Karim, A., Ahmad, M., Anwer, M., Adnan, M., Hassan, M., Ahmad, K., Sohaib, H., Aziz, Q., & Liaqat, M. (2025). The Prophetic Sunnah and the challenges of the age: Confronting technology and its effects on social and psychological security. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.5>

⁹ Mujiono, Ticualu, C., Mawardi, K., Riyadi, S., & Zuhri, B. (2025). Islamic law and campus governance against drug abuse: Preventive strategies and restorative rehabilitation in Indonesian universities. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.4>

¹⁰ Al Azhari, F. U., Shah, S. H. M., Al Azhari, S. I., Rasool, F., Ahmed, R., Samad, A., & Rehman, A. (2025). The role of Islamic economic principles in family law: A study on inheritance and property rights within the

The theological authority of the Sunnah was reinforced by the early Muslim community, particularly the companions of the Prophet, who carefully preserved and transmitted his teachings. These companions played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of prophetic guidance after the Prophet's passing. They memorized and documented his sayings, observed his actions, and transmitted this knowledge to subsequent generations of scholars and students. As Islamic civilization expanded geographically and culturally, the preservation of the Sunnah became an essential intellectual endeavor aimed at safeguarding the authenticity of Islamic teachings.¹¹The importance of the Sunnah in Islamic theology also lies in its role as a unifying framework for Muslim religious identity. By providing a consistent model of behavior rooted in prophetic example, the Sunnah helped shape the moral and spiritual character of Muslim societies across diverse historical and cultural contexts. The Prophet's example served not only as a source of legal guidance but also as a comprehensive ethical model that influenced various aspects of Muslim life. Consequently, adherence to the Sunnah became a defining characteristic of Islamic religious practice and a key element in maintaining the continuity of Islamic tradition.¹²

Classical Scholarly Consensus on the Authority of the Sunnah

Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars developed a strong scholarly consensus regarding the authority of the Prophetic Sunnah as a fundamental source of Islamic law and theology. This consensus was established through centuries of intellectual engagement within the disciplines of Hadith studies, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Classical scholars recognized that the preservation and interpretation of the Sunnah required systematic methodologies capable of ensuring the authenticity and reliability of transmitted reports. As a result, the science of Hadith emerged as one of the most sophisticated scholarly disciplines within Islamic intellectual history.¹³Early Muslim scholars devoted considerable effort to collecting, verifying, and classifying prophetic traditions. They developed rigorous criteria for evaluating the chains of transmission (*isnād*) associated with each report, examining the reliability, integrity, and accuracy of individual narrators. In addition to analyzing the chains of transmission, scholars also evaluated the textual content (*matn*) of Hadith reports to ensure consistency with established Islamic teachings and historical realities. These methodological innovations created a comprehensive system for distinguishing authentic traditions from unreliable or fabricated reports.¹⁴Among the most influential figures in the development of Hadith scholarship were scholars such as Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, whose collections of authentic Hadith became foundational texts in Islamic scholarship. Their works were the result of meticulous scholarly effort, involving extensive travel, interviews with narrators, and careful verification of transmitted reports. These collections, along with other classical compilations, established a structured corpus of

context of child protection. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 59–76.
<https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.2>

- ¹¹ Zahra, R., Qasim, M., Ali, M., Asef, J., & Ali, B. (2025). Addressing mental health stigma and digital harassment in Pakistan and Indonesia: Insights from Islamic principles and AI-driven cybersecurity law. *Global Islamic Research Journal*, 1(1), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.65960/girj.1.1.2025.1>
- ¹² Hasanah, L. N., Faisal, M. S., Ahmed, Z., & Hasyim, M. Y. A. (2025). Religious diversity and the digital economy: Legal-academic pathways to harmonize Sharia and international law. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.8>
- ¹³ Mujiono, & Ticualu, C. (2025). Emerging trends in law and social sciences: Global perspectives on policy, ethics, justice, and institutional reform. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 40–60. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.6>
- ¹⁴ Azhari, A. M., Azhari, S., & Yaqooq, M. I. (2025). Global transformations in law, justice, and society: Comparative perspectives on governance, rights, and legal reform. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 60–90. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.7>

prophetic traditions that served as authoritative references for legal and theological scholarship.¹⁵ The authority of the Sunnah was also firmly established within the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence. Jurists recognized the Sunnah as an essential source for deriving legal rulings and interpreting Qur'anic injunctions. Within the framework of legal theory, scholars identified the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the two primary sources of Islamic law, followed by other interpretive mechanisms such as consensus (*ijmā'*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). This hierarchical structure ensured that legal rulings remained grounded in the foundational sources of Islamic revelation.¹⁶

In addition to legal authority, the Sunnah played a crucial role in shaping Islamic theological thought. Theologians relied on prophetic traditions to clarify doctrinal issues, interpret theological concepts, and address emerging intellectual challenges within the Muslim community. The integration of Hadith literature into theological discourse further reinforced the centrality of the Sunnah in Islamic intellectual life. Scholars from different schools of thought, despite their methodological differences, generally agreed on the fundamental authority of the Sunnah as an indispensable source of Islamic knowledge. The consensus of classical scholars on the authority of the Sunnah also extended to its role in preserving the authenticity of Islamic tradition. By establishing rigorous methodologies for Hadith verification and interpretation, scholars ensured that the teachings of the Prophet were transmitted accurately across generations. This scholarly tradition created a rich intellectual heritage that continues to influence contemporary Islamic thought and scholarship.¹⁷

Orientalist Scholarship and Historical Critiques of Hadith Literature

The emergence of modern skepticism toward Hadith literature is closely connected to the development of Orientalist scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, Western academics began to study Islamic history, law, and religious texts through historical-critical methods that had previously been applied to the study of biblical literature.¹⁸ These scholars approached Islamic sources from a secular academic perspective, often questioning the reliability of traditional Islamic narratives concerning the preservation and transmission of Hadith. As a result, the authenticity and authority of the Prophetic Sunnah became a subject of significant debate within modern academic discourse.¹⁹

¹⁵ Al-Farjani, S. H., Ahmad, T., & Rana, H. A. S. (2025). Digital innovation, legal reform, and social justice: Interdisciplinary approaches to law, technology, and human rights. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 91–129. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.5>

¹⁶ Al-Farjani, S. H., Ahmad, T., & Rana, H. A. S. (2025). Digital innovation, legal reform, and social justice: Interdisciplinary approaches to law, technology, and human rights. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 91–129. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.5>

¹⁷ Al Azhari, F. U., & Al Azhari, S. I. (2025). Contemporary challenges in harmonizing Sharia, national legal systems, and international law in a rapidly changing world. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 130–150. <https://doi.org/10.65960/ijlss.1.1.2025.4>

¹⁸ Azam, M., Hamdoun, A. A.-M., Harahsheh, E. A. A. M., Mashdurohatun, A., & Sidauruk, H. P. (2025). *Religious Diversity in the Digital Economy: Interfaith Legal Pathways to Harmonize Sharia, Christian Ethics, and International Law*. *Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society*, 4(2), 207–264. <https://doi.org/10.15294/ciils.v4i2.33011>

¹⁹ Azam, M., Mashdurohatun, A., Firmansyah, A. N., Saktiawan, M. D., & Jaya, K. O. P. (2025). *Harmonizing Contemporary International Commercial Law with Sharia-Based National Legal Systems: A Comparative Study of Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia*. *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review*, 4(2), 1074–1096. <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v4i2.11334>

One of the most influential figures in this field was Ignaz Goldziher, whose studies on Hadith literature argued that many prophetic traditions reflected the political, social, and theological debates of the early Islamic centuries rather than the original teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Goldziher suggested that numerous Hadith reports were formulated during later historical periods to support particular legal or doctrinal positions within the Muslim community.²⁰ According to his argument, the rapid expansion of Islamic civilization and the emergence of competing schools of thought created an environment in which certain traditions were attributed to the Prophet in order to legitimize specific viewpoints. His work significantly influenced subsequent academic discussions about the historical authenticity of Hadith literature.²¹ Another prominent Orientalist scholar, Joseph Schacht, further developed this line of criticism by analyzing the development of Islamic jurisprudence. Schacht argued that many legal traditions attributed to the Prophet were retrospectively projected backward by later jurists in order to establish the authority of emerging legal doctrines. According to his theory, early Islamic law developed gradually within regional legal schools before being linked to prophetic traditions as a means of strengthening their legitimacy. Schacht's conclusions led some scholars to question the historical reliability of classical Hadith collections and to re-evaluate the origins of Islamic legal traditions.²²

These Orientalist critiques introduced a new methodological approach to the study of Islamic sources, emphasizing historical reconstruction and textual criticism. While some aspects of their research contributed to broader academic discussions on Islamic intellectual history, many Muslim scholars criticized these approaches for overlooking the sophisticated methodologies developed by classical Hadith scholars.²³ Traditional Islamic scholarship had long established rigorous criteria for evaluating chains of transmission (*isnād*) and textual authenticity (*matn*), which served as safeguards against the fabrication of prophetic traditions. Critics of Orientalist scholarship argued that these methodologies were not adequately considered in Western academic analyses of Hadith literature.²⁴ Despite these criticisms, the influence of Orientalist scholarship extended beyond Western academic institutions and entered intellectual debates within Muslim societies. The historical-critical approach to Hadith studies encouraged some Muslim intellectuals to reconsider traditional interpretations of Islamic sources and explore alternative perspectives on the authority of the Sunnah. As a result, the discussion surrounding Hadith authenticity became an important element in broader debates about Islamic reform, modernity, and the reinterpretation of religious tradition.²⁵

Modernist Interpretations and Qur'an-Centric Movements

²⁰ Hasyim, M. Y. A., Santoso, B. W. J., Mudrofin, Azam, M., & Nawawi, M. (2025). *Translating Reprimanding Denial Interrogatives in Indonesian Qur'an Versions: Reiss' Text Typology*. *Scientific Culture*, 11(4), 2933–2943.

²¹ Azam, M., Alforqany, S. H., Mashdurohatun, A., et al. (2025). *E-Contract Withdrawal Rights in E-commerce: A Comparative Study of the Egyptian Customer Protection Law and Islamic Jurisprudential Perspectives*. *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Studi dan Penelitian Hukum Islam*, 8(2), 231–247. <https://doi.org/10.30659/jua.v8i2.44766>

²² Ahmad Fauzan, & Nufus, I. S. (2024). The problems of neuroparenting based on contemporary Islamic family law. *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review*, 3(2), 198–216. <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v3i2.9791>

²³ Brown, J. A. C. (2023). Hadith studies in the twenty-first century: Methodological debates and new directions. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 34(3), 327–345. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad021>

²⁴ Asy'ari, & Fisa, T. (2022). Interfaith marriage in perspectives of classical and modern scholars. *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, 16(2), 287–300. <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v16i2.6772>

²⁵ Darussamin, Z., Armansyah, & Zikri, A. (2023). The urgency of maturity to get married and its relevance to family life goals. *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 8(1), 215–236. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i1.5324>

In addition to Orientalist scholarship, internal reformist movements within Muslim societies also contributed to the development of modern Hadith skepticism. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muslim intellectuals encountered significant political, cultural, and intellectual transformations resulting from colonial encounters and the spread of modern education. These changes prompted debates about the role of Islamic tradition in responding to modern social and political challenges. Some reformist thinkers sought to reinterpret Islamic teachings in ways that they believed were more compatible with modern rational thought and contemporary social conditions.²⁶ Within this context, certain modernist scholars began to question the extent to which Hadith literature should serve as a primary source of Islamic authority. While many reformist thinkers did not reject the Sunnah entirely, they advocated a more critical approach to Hadith interpretation, emphasizing the need to distinguish between authentic prophetic teachings and later historical developments.²⁷ These scholars argued that excessive reliance on certain Hadith reports might hinder efforts to reinterpret Islamic teachings in light of contemporary realities. As a result, they emphasized a return to the Qur'an as the central source of Islamic guidance while applying stricter criteria for evaluating the authenticity and applicability of Hadith traditions.²⁸ More radical expressions of Hadith skepticism emerged within movements often described as Qur'an-centric or Qur'an-only movements. These movements argue that the Qur'an alone constitutes the authoritative source of Islamic guidance and that the Sunnah, as preserved in Hadith literature, should not be considered a binding source of religious law. Proponents of this perspective contend that the Qur'an describes itself as a complete and sufficient guide for believers, thereby eliminating the need for additional sources of religious authority. They often question the historical processes through which Hadith collections were compiled and argue that these processes may have introduced errors or fabrications into the corpus of prophetic traditions.²⁹

The spread of Qur'an-centric interpretations has been facilitated by modern communication technologies, including digital media platforms and online forums, which allow individuals to disseminate alternative interpretations of Islamic teachings to wider audiences.³⁰ These platforms have enabled the rapid circulation of arguments questioning the authority of Hadith literature and have contributed to renewed debates within Muslim communities about the role of the Sunnah in contemporary Islamic practice. In some cases, these debates have generated significant controversy, particularly when Qur'an-centric interpretations challenge established scholarly traditions and long-standing religious practices.³¹ In response to these developments, many contemporary Muslim scholars have emphasized the importance of preserving the methodological heritage of classical Hadith scholarship while engaging constructively with modern intellectual challenges. Scholars have sought to demonstrate that the rigorous verification methods developed by early Hadith

²⁶ Fatonah, D. (2020). Tradisi Maulid Arba'in di kampung Arab Al-Munawwar, Palembang. *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 5(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2020.2167>

²⁷ Fauzan, A., & Amroni, H. (2020). The concept of sakinah family in the contemporary Muslim generation. *Al-Adalah*, 17(1), 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v17i1.6458>

²⁸ Qudsi, S. N. (2023). The epistemology of Hadith scholarship and its relevance in modern Islamic thought. *Islamic Law and Society*, 30(4), 451–474. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-bja10045>

²⁹ Fauzi, F., Ashilah, A. A., & Maisaroh. (2020). The polemic of controversial articles on the family resilience bill. *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan*, 20(1), 115–146. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v20i1.115-146>

³⁰ Campbell, H. A. (2023). Digital religion and the transformation of religious authority in online environments. *New Media & Society*, 25(8), 2015–2032. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231178965>

³¹ Hanapi, A., Imanuddin, & Hasballah, K. (2022). Kedudukan metode al-qāfah dalam penetapan nasab anak. *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah*, 14(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v14i1.15875>

scholars provide strong historical evidence for the reliability of authentic prophetic traditions. They also argue that the Qur'an and the Sunnah are intrinsically interconnected sources of Islamic guidance and that separating the two undermines the holistic structure of Islamic teachings.³²

Methodological and Historical Defenses of the Sunnah

In response to modern skepticism toward Hadith literature, contemporary Muslim scholars have undertaken significant intellectual efforts to reaffirm the authenticity and authority of the Prophetic Sunnah. These efforts often involve revisiting the methodological foundations of classical Hadith scholarship and demonstrating the rigor and reliability of the sciences developed by early Muslim scholars.³³ Classical scholars created a sophisticated system for verifying prophetic traditions that included the critical evaluation of chains of transmission (*isnād*), the examination of narrators' reliability, and the analysis of textual consistency. Modern Muslim scholars argue that these methodological tools represent one of the earliest and most advanced systems of historical verification in pre-modern intellectual history.³⁴ One of the most influential contemporary scholars who addressed modern critiques of Hadith is Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami. His research challenged many assumptions made by earlier Orientalist scholars by providing historical evidence for the early documentation and systematic preservation of Hadith literature.³⁵ Al-Azami demonstrated that the recording of prophetic traditions began during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and continued through the efforts of the Prophet's companions and their students. By examining early manuscripts and transmission networks, he showed that Hadith scholarship developed through a structured and carefully monitored process rather than the uncontrolled oral transmission sometimes suggested by modern critics.³⁶ Another significant aspect of contemporary scholarly defense involves the analysis of the historical development of Hadith sciences. Muslim scholars emphasize that the compilation of Hadith collections was not an arbitrary process but rather the culmination of centuries of scholarly effort dedicated to preserving authentic prophetic teachings. Scholars such as Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj established rigorous criteria for accepting Hadith reports, including strict requirements regarding the integrity, accuracy, and continuity of narrators in the chain of transmission. Contemporary scholars highlight these criteria as evidence that classical Hadith scholarship possessed a highly sophisticated methodology for ensuring authenticity.³⁷

Modern Muslim researchers have also responded to historical critiques by examining the broader social and intellectual context in which Hadith transmission occurred. They argue that the early Muslim community placed immense importance on preserving the teachings of the Prophet because these teachings served as a primary source of religious guidance and legal

³² Husien, S. (2024). Legal uncertainty regarding children born out of wedlock. *Jurnal Hukum Unissula*, 40(2), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.26532/jh.v40i2.41290>

³³ Ibrahim, A. H., Rahman, N. N. A., Saifuddeen, S. M., & Baharuddin, M. (2019). Tri-parent baby technology. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 25(1), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-017-9980-5>

³⁴ Jafar, W. A., et al. (2025). Gender justice in the concept of iddah. *Jurnal Ilmiah Mizani*, 12(2), 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.29300/mzn.v12i2.7683>

³⁵ Kesuma, A. S., Halim, A., & Syam, N. (2022). Religious politics of habaib. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10(2), 285–318. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i2.12090>

³⁶ Demircigil, B. (2024). The conceptualization of jurisprudential exegesis as a bridge between tafsīr and fiqh. *Religions*, 15(2), 254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020254>

³⁷ Maizuddin, M., et al. (2023). Typology of hadith as bayan. *Samarah*, 7(2), 760–780. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v7i2.17467>

authority.³⁸ As a result, scholars dedicated considerable effort to documenting and verifying prophetic traditions. Extensive scholarly travel, known as *riḥla fi ṭalab al-ḥadīth* (travel in search of Hadith), enabled students to learn directly from recognized teachers and compare multiple transmission chains. This practice created an interconnected scholarly network that strengthened the reliability of Hadith transmission across generations.³⁹

Furthermore, contemporary scholars have addressed Orientalist claims that Hadith literature emerged primarily as a result of political or sectarian conflicts in early Islamic history. While acknowledging that fabricated traditions did appear in certain historical contexts, Muslim scholars argue that the very existence of fabricated reports actually demonstrates the effectiveness of Hadith verification methods.⁴⁰ Early scholars were aware of attempts to fabricate traditions and therefore developed rigorous criteria for identifying and rejecting unreliable reports. The classification of Hadith into categories such as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*), sound (*ḥasan*), and weak (*ḍaʿīf*) reflects the analytical rigor applied by Hadith scholars in evaluating transmitted reports.⁴¹ Through these methodological and historical analyses, contemporary Muslim scholars seek to demonstrate that the classical sciences of Hadith provide a credible and systematic framework for verifying the authenticity of prophetic traditions. By engaging critically with modern academic critiques while reaffirming the methodological foundations of traditional scholarship, they aim to defend the intellectual integrity of the Sunnah and reinforce its role as a central source of Islamic guidance.⁴²

Textual Analysis and the Revival of Classical Hadith Sciences

In addition to methodological and historical arguments, contemporary Muslim scholars have also responded to Hadith skepticism through detailed textual analysis and the revival of classical Hadith sciences. Textual analysis involves examining the content (*matn*) of Hadith reports in relation to the Qur'an, established Islamic teachings, and historical context. Scholars emphasize that classical Hadith scholarship did not rely solely on the examination of transmission chains but also included critical evaluation of textual coherence and compatibility with fundamental Islamic principles.⁴³ Through this analytical approach, modern scholars seek to address claims that Hadith literature contains inconsistencies or contradictions. They argue that many perceived contradictions arise from misunderstandings of historical context, linguistic nuances, or differences in interpretive methodology. By applying principles of textual criticism and contextual interpretation, scholars can reconcile many of these apparent discrepancies and demonstrate the coherence of authentic prophetic traditions within the broader framework of Islamic teachings.⁴⁴ The revival of classical Hadith sciences has also

³⁸ Nasrulloh, N., et al. (2024). Understanding hadith and marriage age. *Samarah*, 8(2), 998–1022. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v8i2.19567>

³⁹ Ngazizah, I. F., et al. (2025). Localizing Islamic law. *El-Mashlahah*, 15(1), 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v15i1.8906>

⁴⁰ Ramadan, I. (2023). Living hadith on khataman tradition. *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 7(2), 269–284. <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2022.4277>

⁴¹ Ramle, M. R., & Huda, M. (2022). Between text and context. *Religions*, 13(2), 92. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020092>

⁴² Rashwan, H. (2024). Hadith as oral literature. *Studia Islamica*, 119(1), 34–69. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19585705-12341481>

⁴³ Salleh, N. M., et al. (2019). Living hadith as a socio-cultural phenomenon. *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(6), 1125–1133. <https://doi.org/10.18510/HSSR.2019.76161>

⁴⁴ Sholehudin, M., et al. (2025). Cancellation of marriage due to apostasy. *De Jure*, 17(1), 33–51. <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v17i1.31465>

played a significant role in contemporary scholarly responses to Hadith skepticism. Educational institutions and research centers across the Muslim world have renewed their focus on the study of Hadith methodology, narrator criticism (*'ilm al-rijāl*), and textual analysis.⁴⁵ These disciplines provide students and researchers with the tools necessary to evaluate prophetic traditions according to established scholarly standards. The renewed emphasis on these sciences reflects a broader effort to preserve the intellectual heritage of Islamic scholarship while responding effectively to modern intellectual challenges.⁴⁶ Contemporary scholars have also utilized modern academic tools and interdisciplinary research methods to strengthen the study of Hadith literature. Advances in manuscript preservation, digital databases, and historical research have enabled scholars to examine early Hadith manuscripts and transmission networks in greater detail than ever before. These developments have provided additional evidence supporting the historical reliability of Hadith transmission and have contributed to renewed academic interest in the study of Islamic intellectual history.⁴⁷

Furthermore, modern Muslim scholars emphasize that the Sunnah should not be understood in isolation from the Qur'an but rather as an interpretive and practical extension of Qur'anic teachings. They argue that the Qur'an itself instructs believers to follow the guidance of the Prophet, thereby establishing the Sunnah as an essential component of Islamic religious authority.⁴⁸ Removing the Sunnah from Islamic jurisprudence and theology would therefore create significant gaps in the interpretation and application of Qur'anic principles. Contemporary scholars highlight this interconnected relationship as a key argument against Qur'an-only interpretations that seek to minimize the role of Hadith literature.⁴⁹ The engagement of contemporary scholars with modern intellectual debates has also contributed to the development of a more nuanced understanding of Hadith studies within the broader field of Islamic scholarship. Rather than rejecting modern academic methods entirely, many scholars seek to integrate critical historical analysis with the methodological insights of classical Hadith scholarship. This balanced approach allows them to address contemporary critiques while maintaining the epistemological foundations of Islamic tradition.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The Prophetic Sunnah has historically occupied a central position in the intellectual, legal, and spiritual framework of Islam. As the second primary source of Islamic guidance after the Qur'an, the Sunnah provides practical explanations and applications of the divine message. Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars developed sophisticated methodologies to preserve and authenticate the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad. These scholarly efforts established a strong intellectual tradition within the sciences of Hadith, ensuring the reliability of prophetic teachings and their transmission across generations. Consequently, the authority of the Sunnah became firmly rooted in Islamic theology,

⁴⁵ Supriyadi, & Ghani, N. A. R. (2025). Negotiating tradition and modernity. *NUSANTARA: Journal of Law Studies*, 4(2), 114–128. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17340470>

⁴⁶ Tohari, C., et al. (2022). Ijtihad construction based on maqāṣid. *Prophetic Law Review*, 4(2), 195–221. <https://doi.org/10.20885/plr.vol4.iss2.art4>

⁴⁷ Ahmad Fauzan, & Nufus, I. S. (2024). The problems of neuroparenting based on contemporary Islamic family law. *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review*, 3(2), 198–216. <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v3i2.9791>

⁴⁸ Asy'ari, & Fisa, T. (2022). Interfaith marriage in perspectives of classical and modern scholars. *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, 16(2), 287–300. <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v16i2.6772>

⁴⁹ Darussamin, Z., Armansyah, & Zikri, A. (2023). The urgency of maturity to get married and its relevance to family life goals. *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 8(1), 215–236. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i1.5324>

⁵⁰ Fatonah, D. (2020). Tradisi maulid Arba'in di kampung Arab Al-Munawwar, Palembang. *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 5(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2020.2167>

jurisprudence, and communal life. The emergence of modern skepticism toward Hadith literature, influenced by both Orientalist scholarship and internal reformist movements, has generated renewed debates regarding the authenticity and authority of the Sunnah. Historical-critical approaches adopted by some Western scholars questioned the processes through which Hadith traditions were transmitted and compiled. Similarly, certain modernist and Qur'an-centric interpretations within Muslim societies have attempted to limit or reject the normative authority of Hadith literature. These perspectives have raised important questions about the interpretation of Islamic sources and the relationship between tradition and modernity. In response to these challenges, contemporary Muslim scholars have undertaken significant efforts to defend the authenticity and intellectual credibility of the Prophetic Sunnah. By revisiting the methodological foundations of classical Hadith scholarship, scholars have demonstrated the rigor and sophistication of the verification methods developed by early Muslim scholars. Through historical analysis, textual criticism, and interdisciplinary research, modern scholars have provided compelling evidence supporting the reliability of Hadith transmission and the authenticity of established prophetic traditions. The revival of classical Hadith sciences and the integration of modern academic tools have further strengthened the study of Hadith literature and contributed to a deeper understanding of Islamic intellectual heritage. Moreover, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that the Qur'an and the Sunnah function as complementary sources of Islamic guidance. The Sunnah provides essential context and practical interpretation for many Qur'anic teachings, making it indispensable for understanding the comprehensive message of Islam. Efforts to separate the Sunnah from Islamic legal and theological frameworks risk undermining the holistic nature of Islamic teachings and disregarding centuries of scholarly consensus regarding its authority.

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