

# **The Development of the Historical Criticism Approach in Contemporary Western Studies<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the historical and methodological development of Western academic studies on hadith, tracing its roots from the seventeenth century to the present. It examines how European interest in hadith evolved alongside economic, social, and intellectual advancements, as well as the expansion of colonialism, which piqued curiosity about other cultures, including Islamic civilization. By applying historical criticism theory, Western scholars have significantly contributed to the understanding of hadith and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The methodology section delves into the historical criticism approach, detailing its origins and objectives. It differentiates between external criticism, which focuses on verifying the authenticity of documents, and internal criticism, which analyzes the meaning and content of texts. The application of these methods to hadith studies has transformed the field, allowing for more nuanced evaluations of the reliability and authenticity of hadith literature. The paper also categorizes the stages of Western criticism of early Islamic history into four phases: Early Orientalists, Philo-Islamic Apology, Revisionist Approach, and Western Reevaluation. Each stage reflects different attitudes and methodologies towards hadith, from the skepticism of early Orientalists to the more balanced and contextualized analyses of modern scholars.

In conclusion, the paper highlights the dynamic evolution of Western hadith studies, emphasizing the impact of historical criticism in shaping contemporary understandings of Islamic texts. By rigorously applying both external and

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internal criticism, Western scholars have uncovered complex layers of historical development within hadith literature; contributing to a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of early Islamic history. This ongoing scholarly endeavor underscores the importance of methodological rigor and critical analysis in the study of religious texts.

**Keywords:** Hadith Studies, Historical Criticism, Orientalism, Islamic Texts, Western Scholarship

### المخلص

تستكشف هذه الورقة التطور التاريخي والمنهجي للدراسات الأكاديمية الغربية عن الحديث، متتبعاً جذورها من القرن السابع عشر إلى الوقت الحاضر. تفحص كيف تطورت الاهتمامات الأوروبية بالحديث جنباً إلى جنب مع التقدم الاقتصادي والاجتماعي والفكري، وكذلك توسع الاستعمار، الذي أثار الفضول حول الثقافات الأخرى بما في ذلك الحضارة الإسلامية. من خلال تطبيق نظرية النقد التاريخي، ساهم العلماء الغربيون بشكل كبير في فهم الحديث وحياة النبي محمد.

تتعمق قسم المنهجية في نهج النقد التاريخي، مفصلة أصوله وأهدافه. تفرق بين النقد الخارجي، الذي يركز على التحقق من صحة الوثائق، والنقد الداخلي، الذي يحلل معنى ومحتوى النصوص. إن تطبيق هذه الأساليب على دراسات الحديث قد حول الميدان، مما سمح بتقييمات أكثر تفصيلاً لموثوقية وأصالة الأدبيات الحديثة.

تصنف الورقة أيضاً مراحل النقد الغربي للتاريخ الإسلامي المبكر إلى أربع مراحل: المستشرقون الأوائل، الاعتذار الفيلوإسلامي، النهج التصحيحي، وإعادة التقييم الغربية. كل مرحلة تعكس مواقف ومنهجيات مختلفة تجاه الحديث، بدءاً من شكوك المستشرقين الأوائل إلى التحليلات الأكثر توازناً وسياقية للعلماء المعاصرين.

في الختام، تسلط الورقة الضوء على التطور الديناميكي للدراسات الغربية عن الحديث، مشددة على تأثير النقد التاريخي في تشكيل الفهم المعاصر للنصوص الإسلامية. من خلال تطبيق دقيق للنقد الخارجي والداخلي، كشف العلماء الغربيون عن طبقات معقدة من التطور التاريخي داخل الأدبيات الحديثة، مما ساهم في تصوير أكثر شمولية ودقة للتاريخ الإسلامي المبكر. يؤكد هذا الجهد العلمي المستمر على أهمية الصرامة المنهجية والتحليل النقدي في دراسة النصوص الدينية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** دراسات الحديث، النقد التاريخي، الاستشراق، النصوص الإسلامية،

الدراسات الغربية.

## Introduction

Interest in hadith, its narrations, and its important collections and narrators can be traced back to seventeenth-century Europe. However, it was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that serious, academic studies of hadith gained momentum as an outcome of Europe's economic, social, and intellectual advancements. It was also encouraged by the expansion of colonialism, which led to a growing fascination with other cultures and civilizations.

In the West, scholars of theology and history made great strides in their fields by applying historical criticism theory to written works. While they used these methods to reconstruct the historical biography of Jesus Christ in his life stories, they also attracted scholars to devote their attention to studying Islamic texts.<sup>(1)</sup> As a result, interest in Islamic sciences grew, especially concerning compilations of sunnah and stories about the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Thus, Western studies of hadith have developed out of the work of researchers who dedicated themselves to scrutinizing the biography of the Prophet Muhammad through the lens of new historical criticism theory. They recognized that the corpus of hadith is integral to understanding the Prophet's life and the early years of Islam. This opened the field to academic discussions about the authenticity and reliability of hadith, transforming it from a subject of critical analysis to an accepted source for understanding the origins of the Islamic faith.

These methodologies were subsequently adopted by Orientalists who were interested in Islamic legislation, jurisprudential schools, and their relationship to hadith. Their research techniques for examining Islamic narratives, particularly hadiths, and accounts of the Prophet's life evolved and multiplied. Consequently, Orientalists directed their attention toward studying and dissecting narrations found within Ḥadīth collections,

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biographies of the Prophet, and Islamic legal texts. They also extended their analysis to include those narrations cited in historical and literary works.<sup>(2)</sup>

### ***Definition, Origin, and Purpose of Historical Criticism Approach:***

In his book *Manhaj al-naqd* (The Methodology of Criticism), Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī emphasizes the inseparability of scholarly research methodology from the prevailing ideas and beliefs of the time and locality. He traces the development of Western thought from ancient Greek and Roman times when most people believed in a pantheon of gods. Later, during the ninth century AD, Western thought shifted towards an ecclesiastical Christian faith, with a hierarchical church organization. This change led to challenges to the church's authority, giving rise to new intellectual perspectives, and even to atheism.

At the same time that this secular and irreligious trend emerged, contemporary Western thought also began to flourish.<sup>(3)</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, a formal method of historical criticism, also known as higher criticism, began to take shape. With its conceptual roots tracing back to German intellectual circles, over time it continued to evolve and develop until eventually, in the nineteenth century, it gained recognition and acceptance as an approved method, extensively used in studying the textual origins of various historical and literary texts.

Its main objective is to distinguish between accurate and incorrect information from the past. Thus, when a historical critic examines a work from the past, they raise questions about its authenticity, meaning, and authority. For example, Western scholars often evaluate hadith materials as historical sources, seeking to establish their reliability to determine the historical period to which they belong.<sup>(4)</sup> If a hadith cannot be traced back to the Prophet, it becomes an interesting source for exploring the ideas and developments that occurred after the Prophet's death.

In the context of Biblical studies, historical criticism has been used as a tool to analyze the various books of the Bible. In classical studies of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, its use was primarily geared toward the critical collection and chronological arrangement of source texts. However, whether applied to Biblical, Classical, Byzantine, or Medieval texts, historical criticism focused on ascertaining the authorship, circumstances of composition, and geographical origins of the works.

### **Classifications of the Historical Criticism Approach:**

#### *External Criticism*

Also known as "lower criticism," external criticism is a fundamental aspect of the historical criticism approach. It involves determining the author of a reference or document, specifying when and where it was written, and verifying its authenticity. External criticism is further divided into two categories: source criticism and redaction criticism<sup>(5)</sup>

- Source criticism focuses on examining the chain of transmission, also known as the *isnad* when referring to hadiths. Through this aspect of historical criticism, scholars meticulously assess the validity of the chain of transmission of the text, as well as the reliability and honesty of the transmitter who related the chain. Verification of the author's name, personality, biographical facts, and historical context becomes paramount, as does understanding the writer's relationship with the events they described - whether they personally witnessed them or passed down information from others.<sup>(6)</sup>
- Redaction criticism, on the other hand, is designed to ensure the credibility of the reference or document. It seeks to identify any potential distortions or inaccuracies in the information, data, occurrences, texts, or facts presented within the document. The

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ultimate objective of rectification criticism is to obtain the most accurate and reliable version of the text or reference under scrutiny.<sup>(7)</sup>

### *Internal Criticism*

Also known as higher criticism, internal criticism focuses on the meaning and content of the document. Its features can be divided into two categories: positive internal criticism and negative internal criticism.

- Positive internal criticism involves understanding the explicit and implicit meanings of the document, as well as assessing the writer's competency and ability to report events accurately.
- Negative internal criticism evaluates the credibility and accuracy of the document, considering the writer's likelihood of unintentional errors and the circumstances in which it was written.<sup>(8)</sup>

In conclusion, the combination of internal and external criticism empowers scholars to navigate the complexities of historical research with precision and integrity. By rigorously examining the content's internal coherence and external sources, researchers can confidently unravel the truths of the past, contributing to a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the texts they are examining.

### **The Stages of Western Criticism of Early Islamic History:**

The Western scholars' method of examining hadiths, as part of their investigation into early Islamic history and the religion's origins, sets their approach apart from that of Muslims, who have their own distinct science of hadith. While both are concerned with the authenticity of hadith literature, the focus of Western studies can be categorized into three main areas: early Islamic political and sectarian history, the origins of the Quran, and the development of Islamic law. From its early beginnings, Western academia's scrutiny and critique of Islamic history and sources has gone through four distinct stages:

**1- The Early Orientalists:** This is the first application of the Historical-Critical method to early Islamic history. These scholars questioned various aspects of traditional Islamic law and historical narratives while accepting that general framework of the validity of the Qur'an as a source, along with those hadith with strong isnads.

**2- Scholars of the Philo-Islamic Apology:** A response to Orientalist critiques of hadiths by some non-Muslim and Muslim thinkers educated in the West.

**3- The Revisionists:** An academic trend that emerged in the late 1970s, the Revisionist Approach questioned the larger narrative of early Islamic history, the origins of the Quran, and Islamic law, largely based on critical assumptions of the early Orientalists.

**4- The Western Revaluation:** Since the 1980s, this perspective rejects the extreme skepticism of the Revisionists while continuing to view the early Islamic period through the lens of historical-critical analysis. These scholars acknowledge the weaknesses of the early Orientalists, as well as the sophisticated nature of the Muslim hadith tradition.<sup>(9)</sup>

### **The Early Orientalists<sup>(10)</sup>**

Early European scholars of Islamic studies made bold claims against hadiths in collections like *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, considered to be some of the most authentic hadiths of the Islamic faith. Orientalists such as Alois Springer<sup>(11)</sup>, and William Muir<sup>(12)</sup> echoed the skepticism expressed by Gustav Weil<sup>(13)</sup> who suggested, “The European critic should refute half of the Ḥadīths in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*”.<sup>(14)</sup> This viewpoint was prevalent in the academic sphere from the 19th century until 1969 CE<sup>(15)</sup>, which marked the passing of Joseph Schacht, who was the last prominent voice in this school. In the following pages, we will explore the perspectives and influence of notable Orientalists from this era.

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### **Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921)<sup>(16)</sup>**

Having been granted a scholarship by the Hungarian Minister of Education, Ignaz embarked on a path of rigorous studies and research for an academic career. He completed his Ph.D. at the young age of 19 at German universities in Leipzig and Berlin when he went abroad for the first time. Subsequently, he became a guest lecturer at the University of Budapest.

From 1873 to 1874, Goldziher traveled to the Middle East and spent much of his time in Cairo and Damascus. Notably, he became the first non-Muslim to enroll at al-Azhar Mosque University in 1874. Although he was born a Jew, his exposure to Islamic culture and teachings had a profound impact on him. After attending the communal prayer at Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, he noted, "In the midst of the thousands of the pious, I rubbed my forehead against the floor of the mosque. "Never before in my life had I been more pious, genuinely devout, than on that wonderful Friday."<sup>(17)</sup>

Goldziher's scholarly work gained recognition, and he earned a prominent place among Orientalists and became known as the father of contemporary Islamic science. He received prestigious honors, such as becoming an Extraordinary Member of the Hungarian Academy in 1876 and a Professor in 1894. His academic writings were acknowledged and celebrated, earning him a gold medal at the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists in 1889.<sup>(18)</sup>

One of his significant academic works is "Muhammedanische Studien," considered a masterpiece in Western academic scholarship. This book is divided into two parts: the first part discusses general information about the Islamic religion, the pre-Islamic period, and Arab and non-Arab lineages. The second part focuses on hadiths and the Sunnah; analyzing the status of hadith and discussing issues related to recording the hadith and determining the veracity of Sunnah sources.<sup>(19)</sup>



In "Muhammedanische Studien," Goldziher acknowledges the authority of the Prophet among Muslims but accuses some followers of fabricating hadiths for political and social reasons. He argued that the followers of the Prophet diligently passed down his sayings and actions, preserving them for the benefit of the community. However, he contended that after the Prophet's death, additional sayings were added to the corpus, which were believed to be in accordance with his sentiments, but were not genuinely from him. These fabricated hadiths, according to Goldhizer, dealt with religious and legal practices that did not exist during the Prophet's time but were considered normative for the entire Islamic world. He writes:

The Prophet's pious followers have reverently repeated the enlightening sayings of the master and have endeavoured to preserve for the edification and instruction of the community everything that he said, both in public and private, regarding the practice of the religious obligations prescribed by him, the conduct of life general, and social behavior, whether in relation to the past or the future. When the rapid succession of conquests led them to distant countries, they handed on these ḥadīths of the Prophet to those who had not heard that with them their own ears, and after his death they added many salutary sayings which were thought to be in accord with his sentiments and could therefore, in their view, legitimately be ascribed to him, or of whose soundness they were in general convinced. These ḥadīths dealt with religious and legal practices which had been developed under the Prophet and were regarded as setting the norm for the whole Islamic world.<sup>(20)</sup>

In his work, Goldziher identified four major motives that led to the fabrication of hadiths by Muslims during the first three centuries of

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Islam. He asserted that the primary incentive for hadith falsification was political in nature. According to him, the abundance of fabricated hadiths, along with the structure of the early hadith tradition, left little doubt that the Umayyad monarchy actively engaged in a political propaganda campaign in which hadith fabrication played a significant role.<sup>(21)</sup> Furthermore, Goldziher also highlighted legal objectives, sectarian motives, and communal historical agendas as contributing factors that led to the creation of additional hadiths over time.

### **Joseph Schacht (1902-1969)<sup>(22)</sup>**

A well-known figure in both European and American Islamic academia, Joseph Schacht is most renowned for his work on the origins and early development of Islamic law. He earned his D.Phil. *summa cum laude*, with a focus on the discrepancy between theory and practice in Islamic law at the age of twenty-one. Following this achievement, he received an invitation from Freiburg Im Breisgau University to complete his Habilitation there. Serving as a private instructor, or *Privatdozent*, for two years, Schacht's dedication and academic excellence led to his appointment as an associate professor at the age of twenty-five in 1927. Subsequently, in 1929, he attained the prestigious position of a full professor, which he held for the following three years.

In his academic pursuits, Schacht built on the work of two esteemed scholars, Ignac Goldziher and Snouck Hurgronje. Delving into traditions with legal content, which, in conjunction with the Qur'an formed the primary material sources for Islamic law, Schacht meticulously analyzed their origins. He asserted that these traditions were not the product of the milieu of Muhammad but, rather, represented opinions and practices from two to three centuries after his death. Schacht's contributions to the field of Islamic studies included the publication of "A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions" in 1949, followed by his most important work, "The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence", a year later.<sup>(23)</sup>

Schacht's approach to studying hadith was considerably influenced by his predecessor's observations and theories. Likewise, his method of interpretation and criticism of Islam was undeniably built on Goldhizer's foundations. Like many of Goldziher's successors, Schacht did not subject his predecessor's arguments to critical examination; instead, he embraced and integrated them into his own studies on Islam. In doing so, Schacht asserted that a considerable number of hadiths attributed to the Prophet were documented later, after his death, or during the time of al-Shāfi'ī.

As a notable successor to Goldziher, Schacht's work is widely acknowledged for adopting and reinforcing Goldziher's conclusions. In his book, Schacht affirms that many hadiths attributed to the Prophet were put into circulation later, after the prophet's death or during the time of al-Shāfi'ī:

This book will be found to confirm Goldziher's results and to go beyond them in the following respects: a great many traditions in the classical and other collections were put into circulation only after al-Shāfi'ī's time; the first considerable body of legal traditions from the Prophet originated towards the middle of the second century in opposition to slightly earlier traditions from companion and other authorities and to the Living tradition of the ancient schools of law;<sup>(24)</sup>

Furthermore, subsequent scholars studying Islam also adopted Schacht's ideas without subjecting them to criticism, expanding upon them and incorporating additional historical sources into their research. Thus, the theories and premises put forward by Schacht in his work became fundamental pillars for subsequent researchers studying Islamic law and hadith.<sup>(25)</sup>

### **The Philo-Islamic Apology**

During the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, a notable shift occurred in the field of oriental studies. A new generation of Western-trained scholars, many of whom had Muslim or Middle Eastern backgrounds, emerged with a new perspective. These scholars challenged the conclusions of earlier Orientalists, in whole or in part, presenting alternative viewpoints and interpretations.

The writings and studies of the first-stage Orientalists evoked diverse reactions within academic circles, varying from approval to outright rejection. Amidst this diverse response, Nabia Abbott, a prominent and influential Orientalist, responded with a more in-depth critique of the criticisms posed by scholars like Goldziher and Schacht. Her insightful perspective added depth and complexity to the ongoing academic discussions, marking her as the foremost challenger to the prevailing Orientalist viewpoints.

#### **Nabia Abbott (1897-1981)<sup>(26)</sup>**

From a young age, Nabia Abbott was immersed in the culture and geography of the Middle East and the Subcontinent as she moved with her family from one country to another. It wasn't until she reached the age of 36, however, that she discovered her true home when she became a part of the prestigious Oriental Institute. The Institute became the bedrock of her scholarly pursuits, offering an environment where she could delve into the study of early Islamic and Arabic documents. Her time at the Institute was marked by her tireless dedication to her research, leading to the publication of numerous works on early Islamic writings. Her scholarly passion was so unwavering that she seldom left the institution, dedicating herself to the pursuit of knowledge. Only once did she go on a sabbatical, a year-long venture to the Middle East in 1946, where she continued her academic explorations.<sup>(27)</sup>

Nabia Abbott's contributions to academia extended across a variety of disciplines, leaving an indelible mark on the field of Islamic studies. She was one of the pioneering experts to document the history of Muslim women, breaking new ground in her field. Her extensive research on the origins of the Arabic language and her dissertations on Egyptian early Islamic papyri brought her widespread recognition. Moreover, her volumes on the history of the North Arabic alphabet and its evolution in the Qur'an solidified her scholarly reputation.

Nabia Abbott's work reflected her distinct objection to Goldziher's claim regarding the Umayyad government's alleged involvement in forging a substantial portion of the hadith corpus for their political objectives through agents like al-Zuhri<sup>(28)</sup>. Her position was based on the premise that acknowledging basic authenticity does not automatically guarantee scientific reliability or factual accuracy.<sup>(29)</sup> She argues:<sup>(30)</sup>

At this point one is faced with two alternative but contradictory positions: either to insist, with the skeptics, that even this advanced stage of historiography was largely oral and anonymous or forged or, in the light of our new knowledge, to accept the historians to whom the Islāmic sources credit this achievement and to regard their works as basically authentic. In taking the second position the writer must hasten to caution the reader that basic authenticity is not to be equated with scientific reliability or factuality. In other words, to accept *Akhbār 'Ubaid, Kitāb al-mubtadā'*, and a *Kitāb al-maghāzāt* as basically authentic works of 'Ubaid ibn Sharyah, Wahb ibn Mubabbih, and 'Urwa ibn al-Zubair or -Zuhrī, respectively, is not in itself proof enough to indicate that these works are factual histories or that their authors are reliable historians. There must be adequate supporting evidence for materials thus transmitted - a branch of

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historical criticism that calls for its own special treatment.

Abbott's nuanced perspective shed light on the need for supporting evidence when evaluating transmitted materials. Moreover, her insights beckoned Western scholarship to consider the perspective of historians who viewed the Umayyad-era works as fundamentally authentic. In doing so, she opened new avenues of exploration and contemplation within the realm of Western scholarship, enriching the discourse on Islamic history and the complexities of its transmission.

### The Revisionist Approach

Revisionist Approach historians Patricia Crone<sup>(31)</sup> and Michael Cook<sup>(32)</sup> proposed a fresh perspective on early Islamic history by studying the earliest written sources on Islam, which were not authored by Muslims. Their seminal work, "*Hagarism*" (1977), presented a theory based on a collection of surviving Christian theological literature from 634 CE, suggesting that Islam was a later version of apocalyptic Judaism. According to this theory, Arabs in the Hejaz region rediscovered their Abrahamic roots and sought to reclaim the Holy Land of Palestine. This narrative contrasts with the detailed account of Muhammad's life and teachings found in hadith literature.<sup>(33)</sup>

What made the Revisionist approach distinct was not merely its critique of the hadith tradition, but the extent of its skepticism. Crone, for instance, supported Schacht and Juynboll's views regarding back growth of Isnād, leading her to conclude that hadiths cannot provide reliable information about Islamic events before the year 100 AH/720 CE. About this, Brown writes, "Crone seconds the Orientalist critique that hadiths transmitted by Muslims reflect what the Prophet meant to them, not what the generation before them had taken him to say, let alone what he had said or done in his own particular time and place."<sup>(34)</sup>

Crone (*Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 1987), as well as British Orientalists John Wansbrough<sup>(35)</sup> (*Quranic Studies*, 1977) and

John Burton<sup>(36)</sup> (Introduction to Ḥadīth, 1994), emphasized hadith's exegetical origins. They argued that hadiths were frequently produced by Muslim scholars to assist in understanding the meaning of the Quran. Because early Muslims disagreed on the interpretations of numerous Quranic verses, the explanatory hadith they produced differed as well.<sup>(37)</sup>

### **The Western Revaluation**

The term "Revaluation" is used to describe a modern school whose critique of Orientalists and Revisionists focuses on two aspects. Firstly, they argue that the basic premise of these two groups is fundamentally incorrect. Secondly, Revaluation scholars emphasize that earlier Western criticisms failed to consider the vast scope and complexity of the Islamic hadith tradition. When viewed from this more humble perspective, many arguments put forth by Orientalists and Revisionists lose their validity. However, this does not mean that Revaluation scholars fully accept the Sunni view of hadiths and their reliability, but as Brown notes, "Nonetheless, the tone of Revaluation scholars is less combative than [that of] earlier generations."<sup>(38)</sup>

The Western Revaluation marks a crucial and contemporary stage in Oriental scholarship. Although Orientalists of this persuasion tended to look at hadith from a more objective and scholarly perspective, they still criticized Islamic concepts and Muslim approaches to textual analysis, dismissing them as not being academically credible.<sup>(39)</sup> However, they were more concerned with determining the date when a hadith was in circulation, rather than determining if it was forged and identifying who produced it.<sup>(40)</sup>

### **Fred Donner (1945-)**<sup>(41)</sup>

One of first voices to respond to the Orientalists of the previous stage<sup>(42)</sup>, Fred Donner proposes that Islam as a religious doctrine was quite diverse until the time of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Mālik (d. 705 CE - 85 AH). Both Christians and Jews could embrace Muhammad's teachings without

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having to betray their own faiths. As Fred Donner mentions in his criticism of the Revisionists, it seems unimaginable that the early Muslim society, which was divided and decentralized, could have organized such a massive effort to censor the Islamic tradition as a unified whole without leaving significant historical evidence. He states:  
(43)

There existed in the community of Believers no “authorities” who had the power to impose a uniform dogmatic view. Scholars who champion the skeptical outlook speak loosely of extensive redaction of the tradition, but they seldom bother to identify the people or group(s) who are supposed to have implemented this redaction, or exactly what purpose was served by doing so. Yet, without such identifications the thesis of a comprehensive redaction of the tradition as a whole into a unified form remains merely an abstraction with no visible historical support.

### **David Powers (1951-)**<sup>(44)</sup>

David Powers is another prominent critic of the established Orientalist and Revisionist perspectives concerning the general authenticity of hadiths. Notably, he challenges the notion put forward by scholars like Crone, Goldziher, Schacht, and Juynboll who questioned the credibility of hadith as a representation of Muhammad’s genuine words. He is also a pioneer in the methodology of ‘Large-scale’ identification of common links which suggests that when all available transmissions of a hadith are examined, its common link can be traced back to much earlier than assumed by Schacht and Juynboll.<sup>(45)</sup>

In an article regarding wills and bequests in early Islamic law, Powers criticizes Crone and Cook's rejection of a famous hadith



involving the Prophet and the Companion Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in which the Prophet admonishes Sa‘d that he may not bequest more than one-third of his fortune<sup>(46)</sup>. Powers argues that the *Isnād* and *Matn* of the hadith support that it does actually trace back to Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. Moreover, he finds fault in Crone’s inaccurate examination of the hadith and dismisses her conclusion that Prophetic hadith should be presumed to be incorrect, asserting that the burden of evidence "is on those who would challenge the authenticity of accounts ascribed to the Prophet. The default assumption is that a hadith is genuinely authentic."<sup>(47)</sup>

### **Harald Motzki (1948-2019)**

The 'Large-scale' investigation of transmission and the questioning of Orientalist and Revisionist assumptions continued in Harald Motzki's work. Brown wrote about Motzki, "He is the first Western scholar to accord hadiths the same respect as Muslim hadith experts such as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī<sup>(48)</sup>, for example. His judgments regarding the authenticity of hadiths are based on gathering all available narrations of the report, not just those in well-known collections."<sup>(49)</sup>

Motzki's study criticizes three major aspects of past Western hadith studies. Firstly, he argues that the *e silentio* argument<sup>(50)</sup> made by Schacht, Juynboll, and Crone is invalid. Secondly, he demonstrates that Common Links are much older than previously assumed, going back to the Companions in the second part of the seventh century. Finally, Motzki contends that significant hadith transmitters, like al-Zuhrī and Ibn Jurayj, were generally reliable in passing on reports from the preceding generation, rather than being expert forgers of hadiths.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of the historical criticism approach in modern Western studies of Hadith has revealed a dynamic and multifaceted journey, shaped by shifting intellectual paradigms and evolving methodologies. The origin and purpose of this approach can be traced

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back to the changing conceptual frameworks of Western thought, driven by historical and doctrinal influences. Notably, the secular and religious trend in the 18th century paved the way for the formalization of historical criticism as a recognized and approved method of studying the origins of various historical, religious, and literary texts,

Throughout Western academic history, four manifestations of the historical criticism approach emerged, each marked by influential figures and distinct viewpoints. The Early Orientalist approach, spanning from the 19th to the early 20th centuries, saw scholars such as Gustav Weil, Alois Springer, and William Muir expressing skepticism towards significant portions of Hadith, including Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Ignaz Goldziher's influential works added a critical perspective to Hadith studies, challenging their authenticity and attributing the emergence of fabricated Hadiths to post-Prophetic periods.

During the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Philo-Islamic apology emerged as a noteworthy shift in the field of Oriental studies. Scholars like Nabia Abbott offered alternative viewpoints, questioning earlier claims and cautioning against wholesale dismissal of hadith. Scholars of this school sought a balanced approach, acknowledging the importance of authentic sources while recognizing the complexities and challenges in determining historical accuracy.

The Revisionist approach, represented by scholars like Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, brought about a radical reevaluation of early Islamic history, suggesting links between Islam and apocalyptic Judaism. This perspective, while challenging traditional views, prompted deeper scrutiny of Hadith traditions, raising questions about authenticity and reliability.

In contrast, the Western Reevaluation stage demonstrated a more objective and scholarly approach. Scholars critiqued earlier assumptions, emphasizing the complexity of the Islamic Hadith tradition. Scholars like Fred Donner, David Powers, and Harald Motzki advocated for a more

comprehensive analysis of Hadith sources and a cautious acceptance of their authenticity.

The evolution of the historical criticism approach in modern Western studies of Hadith showcases the dynamic nature of academic inquiry. Each stage of development has contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding Hadith traditions. This diversity of perspectives within Western studies calls for a more nuanced and balanced approach to studying Hadith.

Thus, it is evident that the historical criticism approach has profoundly influenced contemporary Western studies of Hadith. It has led to critical examinations, challenging assumptions, and fresh insights. The journey of historical criticism in Hadith studies is one that exemplifies the pursuit of truth in academic discourse, irrespective of evolving paradigms and viewpoints. Moreover, as scholars continue to engage with Hadith traditions, by adopting a comprehensive and scholarly approach they will gain a deeper understanding and more profound appreciation of this essential aspect of Islamic history and tradition.

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### Notes:

- (1) Mohammed S. Al-Shighaibi Al-Shehri, "Western Works and Views on Hadith: Beginnings, Nature, and Impact," *Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 46 (April 2014): 204.
- (2) Mohammed S. Al-Shighaibi Al-Shehri, "Al-mustashriq Harald Motzki wa muqārabatuhu fī ta'rikh al-marwīyāt al-ḥadīthīyah," *Al-Majallah al-'Ilmiyyah liKulliyat al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah wa al-'Arabīyah lil-banīn bi-al-Qāhirah*, (December 2020), 39:1717.
- (3) Akram Diyā' al-'Umarī, *Manhaj al-naqd 'inda al-muḥaddithīn maqārnan bālmnhj al-naqdī al-gharbī*, (Riyadh: Dār Ishbīliyyā lil-nashr wa-al-tawzī', 1997), 6.
- (4) <sup>1</sup> Mohammed S. Al-Shighaibi Al-Shehri, *A Critical Study of Western Views on Hadith With Special Reference to the Views of James Robson and John Burton* (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham, 2011), 60- 61.
- (5) " al-Naqd al-dākhilī wa al-khārijī fī al-manhaj al-tārikhī," accessed 14/7/2023, <https://mobt3ath.com/dets.php?page=879&title>,
- (6) Ḥasan 'Uthmān, *Manhaj al-baḥth al-tārikhī*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2005) p.83; Charles. V. Langlois and Charles Seignobos, "Introduction Aux études Historiques" in *Al-Naqd al-tārikhī*, trans. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Badawī, (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1981) p. 65.
- (7) Charles. V. Langlois and Charles Seignobos, "Introduction Aux études Historiques" in *Al-Naqd al-tārikhī*, trans. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Badawī, (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1981), 53-54.
- (8) 'Uthmān, *Manhaj al-baḥth al-tārikhī*, 124.
- (9) Jonathan Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 204.
- (10) I have used the qualifier "early" here to denote that this was the early dawn of Orientalism which was characterized by their perspective regarding Islamic sources, but at the same time, it should be understood that the scholars of the next three stages are Orientalists as well, although they differed in their perspectives and methodology.
- (11) **Aloys Sprenger** (1813–1893) was an Austrian scholar with a medical degree who joined the British East India Company's medical service in order to pursue the study of Oriental literature in India. He became the Principal of Delhi College in 1845 and presided over a learning experiment at Delhi College, an institution that taught both Eastern and Western literature and sciences through the medium of Urdu. The college attempted to bring about a creative synthesis of the two curricula, via an active program of translation and publication. Sprenger was instrumental in launching a series of scholarly journals published by the college, thus contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and the nurturing of a group

- of students and faculty with whom he maintained an active correspondence after leaving the college. Minault, G. (2011). Aloys Sprenger: German Orientalism's 'Gift' to Delhi College. *South Asia Research*, 31(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272801003100102>
- (12) **Sir William Muir** (1819 – 1905) was born in Scotland where he ended his career as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Edinburgh University, after serving in India from 1837 until 1876. Following a series of junior appointments, he became Secretary to the Government of the North West Provinces in 1852, a middle-ranking post. As a scholar, his fame rests securely on his great work, *The Life of Mahomet*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1858, and the last two in 1861. The preface is dated Agra, January 2, 1857, on the eve of the Indian Mutiny. The work had been preceded by a long preparatory study, the results of which were communicated in a series of articles, commencing in 1845, to the *Calcutta Review*. Some of these were republished many years later in a volume entitled *The Mohammedan Controversy and Other Indian Articles* (1897). Lyall, C. J. "Sir William Muir." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37, no. 4 (1905): 875–876. doi:10.1017/S0035869X00033955.
- (13) **Gustav Weil** (1808–1889), Orientalist. Born in Salzburg, Baden, to a rabbinical family, he was schooled at home and at Metz, and later studied at Heidelberg, where he began his work in Arabic which he continued in Paris. Weil's contributions to the study of Islam place him in the vanguard of what Martin Kramer has dubbed *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (1999). In the 19th century, German-Jewish scholars made an extraordinary contribution to the study of Arabic and Islam, which fell under the rubric of what was then called Orientalism. He produced several works of lasting significance, among them a popular German translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, a biography of Muhammad, a historical-critical introduction to the Qur'an, and a multi-volume history of the Caliphate, all based on Arabic sources. Johnston- Bloom, Ruchama. "Jews, Muslims, and Bildung: the German- Jewish Orientalist Gustav Weil in Egypt." *Religion Compass* 8, no. 2 (2014):50.
- (14) Kamaruddin Amin, *Al-Dirāsah al-Gharbīyah lil-Ḥadīth wa-rudūd al-mustashriqīn: dirāsah fī muqārabah Fu'ād Sezkin li-'Ilm al-ḥadīth*, translated by: Yahyá ibn Qadīm, (Kuwait: Markaz nuḥūd lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Buḥūth, 2022), 5.
- (15) Zubayrī, *Ārā' al-mustashriqīn wa-manāhijihim fī Naqd al-ḥadīth*, p.80.
- (16) **Ignaz Goldziher** was a Hungarian Orientalist of Jewish origin. He studied under two of the major renowned Orientalists; the French de Sacy and the German Fleischer. Goldziher traveled to numerous Arab nations such as Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In 1873, he was accepted as the first European to study at al-Azhar in Cairo where he heard several lectures by al-Azhar's sheikhs. Since he was appointed to Budapest University, he became increasingly expert in medieval Judeo-Arabic and Islamic studies. By producing many academic investigations on

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Islamic religious traditions and legislation, he was acclaimed as a founder of the modern study of Arabic-Islamic studies in the West. Goldziher died on 13th November 1921.

- (17) David Green, "This Day in History, Jewish Scholar of Islamic Studies Dies" accessed on May 29, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2013-11-13/ty-article/.premium/this-day-islamic-studies-pioneer-dies/0000017f-dbed-db5a-a57f-dbef86c90000>
- (18) Talal Maloush, *Early Hadith Literature and The Theory of Ignaz Goldziher*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2000), 2.
- (19) Zubayrī, *Ārā' al-mustashriqīn wa-manāhijihim fī naqd al-hadīth*, p.81.
- (20) Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies II*, translated and ed. S.M. Stern and G.R. Barber (London: Halle, Max Niemeyer 2017), 19-20.
- (21) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 226.
- (22) **Joseph Schacht** was born on March 15, 1902, in Ratibor, Upper Silesia (now in Racibórz, Poland). He began his academic journey at Ratibor's Humanistisches Gymnasium from 1911 until 1920. He started his university training in theological studies at Breslau (now Wrocław), specializing in classical and Semitic languages in 1920, where he focused on classical and Semitic languages. In 1922, he won a university prize for an essay he wrote on an issue related to the Old Testament. Bergsträsser (1836–1933), one of Schacht's Breslau professors, attracted Schacht's interest in the study of Islamic law; Schacht would later revise and edit Bergsträsser's law lectures in 1935, not long after his death. From 1925 onward, Schacht spent his vacations and breaks in Leiden, to study under Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), or in the Middle East and North Africa, to collect information for his seminal work in Islamic jurisprudence. Schacht died on 1 August 1969 at the age of sixty-seven after suffering a fatal brain hemorrhage in Englewood. Wakin Jeanette, *Remembering Joseph Schacht (1902-1969)*, (Cambridge: Harvard College, 2003) p.2-4
- (23) Wakin, Jeanette, *Remembering Joseph Schacht (1902-1969)*, (Cambridge: Harvard College, 2003), 18.
- (24) Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, (London: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975), 4-5.
- (25) Harald Motzki, *Hadith: Origins and Developments*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), xxiv.
- (26) **Nabia Abbott** was born on January 31, 1897, in Mardin, Turkey. As a child, she traveled to Mosul with her family in a horse-drawn covered wagon with a caravan. Later, she proceeded down the Tigris River to Baghdad, and then over the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea to Bombay, India, in 1907. There she studied in British schools and left a lasting impression with her outstanding performance in the Overseas Matriculation test offered by the University of Cambridge in 1915. Her

academic journey led her to Isabella Thorburn College for Girls, an affiliate of the University of Allahabad, where in 1919 she earned an A.B. degree with honors. Among her colleagues were a number of India's future women leaders. Subsequently, she worked alongside Gertrude Bell in a program fostering future female leaders in Iraq. This experience abroad had a profound influence on her scholarly path. Her published research includes *The Monasteries of the Fayyum* (The University of Chicago Press, 1937); *The Qurrah Papyri from Aphrodite in the Oriental Institute* (The University of Chicago Press 1938); *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Qur'anic Development, with a Full description of Quranic Manuscripts In the Oriental Institute*, (The University of Chicago Press 1939); *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed* (The University of Chicago Press, 1942); *Two Queens of Bagdad, the Mother, and Wife of Harun al Rashid* (The University of Chicago Press, 1946); *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri I. Historical Texts*, (University of Chicago Press, 1957); *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II. Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1967); *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri III. Language and Literature*. (Oriental Institute Publications, University of Chicago Press, 1972).

- (27) Ahmad W. Shaker, "Remembering Papyrologist Nabia Abbot," accessed May 30, 2023, [https://quranmss.com/2021/11/25/abbott\\_nabiya/](https://quranmss.com/2021/11/25/abbott_nabiya/)
- (28) He is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Shihāb ibn 'Abdullāh ibn al-Hārith ibn Zuhrah ibn Kilāb ibn Murrah ibn Ka'b ibn Lu'ay ibn Ghālib al-Qurayshī al-Zuhrī al-Madanī. Abū Zinād said, "al-Zuhrī would write everything when he sought knowledge. I saw him with my eyes with slates which he used to write ḥadīth on." Abū Zinād said, "He used to carry with him wooden slates and paper on which we would write what he heard, and we used to laugh at him." <https://dusunnah.com/article/the-biography-of-imam-ibn-shihab-al-zuhri/> accessed on 9/8/2023.
- (29) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 218.
- (30) Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1:36.
- (31) **Patricia Crone** was Professor Emerita at the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Studies, where she was the Andrew W. Mellon Professor from 1997 to 2014. Crone's profound work, which is known for its daring and unusual language, sheds significant new light on the crucial role of the Near East in historical studies, particularly on the cultural, theological, and intellectual history of Islam. She, along with Oleg Grabar (1929-2011), was instrumental in establishing the Institute as a recognized center for the study of Islamic culture and history. <https://www.ias.edu/scholars/patricia-crone>, accessed on 30-5-2023.
- (32)<sup>1</sup> **Michael Cook** is a scholar of the history and theological thinking of Islam. He has influenced Ottoman studies, the emergence of early Islamic politics, and Islamic law, ethics, and theology. His work emphasizes the relevance of religious

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values in the building of Islamic culture. Some of his major works are *Population Pressure in Rural Anatolia, 1450-1600* (1972); *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (1981); *Muhammad* (1983); and *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (2000).

<https://holbergprize.org/en/holberg-prize/prize-winners/michael-cook#:~:text=Michael%20Cook%20is%20one%20of,law%2C%20ethics%2C%20and%20theology>, accessed on 30-5-2023.

- (33) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 221.
- (34) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 223.
- (35) **John Wansbrough** made significant contributions to the history and culture of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, but he was most notable for encouraging innovative methods to the study of early Islam. Wansbrough established new and significant views on how the birth of Islam should be understood and examined, beginning with the belief that Islam's own stories of its beginnings are religiously motivated interpretations of history rather than accurate records of events. He was primarily recognized for his contributions to Quranic Studies. He incorporated concepts and methodologies developed by academics in the study of the Bible and early Christianity, drawing on his extensive understanding of classical and modern literary and historical theory. His literary research of the Qur'an and its commentators led him to conclusions that differed greatly from those held by traditional Muslims and the majority of non-Muslim scholars. "Professor John Wansbrough; Obituary" *The Times* ( June 14, 2002)
- (36) **John Burton** (1929-) was the Chairman of the Department of Arabic Studies at the University of St Andrews and a professor of Islamic studies. From the beginning of his academic career, Burton's study aimed at promoting a new style of analyzing Islamic texts. He concentrated on Muslim traditional accounts of the Quran's compilation and came to the conclusion that the Quran was not compiled by the Companions, but by the Prophet himself, and hence the Quran which exists today is Muhammad's. Furthermore, he argued that all Muslim historical accounts of the Quran's compilation were forgeries. His fundamental argument regarding the Qur'an, which was published in the first of his three-notable works, "The Collection of the Quran " in 1977, has been widely criticized by scholars, particularly those interested in the early era of Islam, such as Uri Rubin and Daniel Brown. Mohammed S Alshahri, *A Critical Study of Western Views on Ḥadīth with Special Reference to The Views of James Robson And John Burton*, (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham, 2011), 173.
- (37) Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 109-110, 181, 203-231; Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 222.
- (38) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 225.
- (39) Zubayrī, *Ārā' al-mustashriqīn wa-manāhijihim fī naqd al-ḥadīth*, 91.
- (40) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 224.



- (41) **Fred M. Donner** studied at Princeton University (BA Oriental Studies, 1968; Ph.D. Near Eastern Studies, 1975) as well as at the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in Shimplan, Lebanon (1966-67, for Arabic language). After finishing his studies, he served in the military from 1968 to 1970 and was sent to the US Army Security Agency in Germany. He was later appointed to teach Islamic and contemporary Middle Eastern history at Yale University (1975-1982) and has been at the University of Chicago (NELC and The Oriental Institute) since 1982, where he teaches early and medieval Islamic history, Islamic law, and Arabic paleography and epigraphy. Donner's early study concentrated on the interactions between pastoral nomads and established culture in the Near East, but his interests have now evolved to Islamic history, Qur'anic studies, Arabic papyrology, and the roots of Islam. His major works include *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton University Press, 1981); *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Darwin Press, 1997); and *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2010); he has also written several dozen scholarly articles on early and medieval Islamic history, Qur'anic studies, and more. <https://nelc.uchicago.edu/faculty/donner> accessed on 1-6-2023.
- (42) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 224; Fred Donner, *From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community, Al-Abhath* (2002-2003) 50-51: 9-53.
- (43) Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, (New Jersey: Princeton Darwin Press, 1998), 27.
- (44) **David S. Powers** is a native of Cleveland, Ohio. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1979 and began teaching at Cornell in the same year. He currently holds positions as a Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Studies and is an Adjunct Professor at the Cornell Law School. His courses deal with Islamic civilization, Islamic history and law, and classical Arabic texts, and his research focuses on the emergence of Islam and Islamic legal history. He is the founding editor of the *Journal of Islamic Law and Society*. <https://neareasternstudies.cornell.edu/david-stephan-powers> accessed on 7/8/2023.
- (45) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, p.227.
- (46) The rest is distributed to the inheritors as determined by the Islamic laws pertaining to inheritance.
- (47) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, 225; Powers, David, "On Bequests in Early Islam" *Journals of Near Eastern Studies* 48, no. 3, (1989): 195, 199-200.
- (48) His name is Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad 'Ali al-Kinani al-Asqalani. His great grandparents lived in Asqalan where they entered in the year 583H. The word Hajar is the name of one of his grandfathers. His kunya is Abul-Fadl and his Laqab is Shihabuddin. In the year 786H, Ibn Hajar moved from Makkah to Egypt where he memorized a number of small summarized books like Al-'Umda al-Hadith and also Al-Hawi which is a book in Shafi'i Fiqh and also

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Mukhtasir al-Hajib which is a book on Usul ul-Fiqh and other books like in grammar. The scholars of Islam would give Ibn Hajar precedence and they would honor him whether they be the scholars of his time or those who came after him. Al-Buqa'i said about him that he is the leader of the people, the Imam of the Muslims. Ash-Shawkani said about him, that he is the great famous hafidh well knowledgeable about hadith. So if the word Al-Hafidh is given to anyone, then by ijma' or after him is given to Ibn Hajar and Ibn Hajar alone. So if the word Al-Hafidh is said, then it indicates Ibn Hajar, unless the word Al-Hafidh is qualified by someone else. This shows the great level and rank that Ibn Hajar reached. <https://sunnahonline.com/library/biographies/370-ibn-hajar-al-asqalani> accessed on 9/8/2023.

(49) Brown, *Muhammad's Legacy*, p.226.

(50) The best way of proving that a tradition did not exist at a certain time is to show that it was not used as a legal argument in a discussion which would have necessarily made reference to it had it existed. See: .

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*Developments*”, Der Islam, 2001, Vol. 78.

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