

Reconstructing the Epistemology of Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī as a Model of Ḥadīth Matn Criticism: An Analysis of al-Zarkashī's al-Ijābah

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Inputted : July 9, 2026

Revised : July 20, 2026

Accepted: August 20, 2026

Published: August 29, 2026

Abstract

Research on ḥadīth criticism has so far concentrated mainly on the authentication of the chain of transmission (*isnād*), while criticism of the text itself (*matn*) has not received proportionate scholarly attention. Yet the practice of evaluating the substance of ḥadīth can be traced back to the generation of the Companions through *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī*, most notably as practiced by Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah. This study aims to reconstruct the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as an epistemological model of ḥadīth matn criticism based on an analysis of al-Zarkashī's *al-Ijābah li-Ṭrād Mā Istadrakathu 'Ā'ishah 'alā al-Ṣaḥābah*. The study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research and applies Theory-Building Research as its data-analysis technique. The primary data the text of *al-Ijābah* were analyzed through the stages of identifying cases of *istidrāk*, abstracting concepts, classifying critical instruments, and reconstructing theory. The findings show that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* is a practice of matn criticism possessing a systematic methodological structure. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah drew on a range of epistemic sources the Qur'an, the Sunnah, historical fact, empirical experience, linguistic analysis, and rational consideration as the basis for evaluating the substance of ḥadīth. On the basis of these findings, the study reconstructs the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* into three principal components: epistemic sources, critical instruments, and the mechanism of matn validation. This reconstruction demonstrates that matn criticism has been an integral part of ḥadīth methodology since the period of the Companions and broadens the understanding of the epistemology of classical ḥadīth criticism. The study offers a new conceptual model that enriches the development of theory in ḥadīth matn criticism and contributes to contemporary studies of ḥadīth epistemology.

Keywords: *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī*; matn criticism; ḥadīth epistemology; *al-Ijābah*; al-Zarkashī; Theory-Building Research

Citation:

Tresna, Y. R., Lensa, H. W., Najib, M., & Kosasih, E. (2026). Reconstructing the epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a model of ḥadīth matn criticism: An analysis of al-Zarkashī's *al-Ijābah*. *MSJ: Majority Science Journal*, 4(3), 142–156. <https://doi.org/10.61942/msj.v4i3.643>

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1. Introduction

Ḥadīth is the second source of Islamic teaching after the Qur'an and occupies a fundamental position in the formation of Islamic law, creed, and ethics. Preserving the authenticity of ḥadīth has therefore been a central concern of Muslim scholars from the generation of the Companions through the period of the codification of ḥadīth studies. Within the Islamic scholarly tradition, this concern has been realized through ḥadīth criticism (*naqd al-ḥadīth*), a set of methods for testing the validity of a report in order to ascertain that it truly originates from the Prophet ﷺ. The tradition of ḥadīth criticism developed into one of the most systematic disciplines in the Islamic intellectual heritage, giving rise to branches of knowledge such as *jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* (impugnment and validation of narrators), *ilm al-rijāl* (the science of narrators), and *ilal al-ḥadīth* (the science of hidden defects) (Itr, 1997, pp. 23–45).

Nevertheless, the development of classical ḥadīth scholarship shows that the attention of the *muḥaddithūn* was directed far more toward *isnād* criticism than toward *matn* criticism. Most works in *ulūm al-ḥadīth* discuss the continuity of the chain of transmission, the reliability of narrators, and the various forms of defect in transmission, whereas discussion of methods for evaluating the substance of ḥadīth is comparatively sparse and scattered across various discussions. This state of affairs has produced the impression that, in the classical tradition, the validity of a ḥadīth is determined more by the quality of its *isnād* than by an examination of its content (al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 17–41).

The predominance of *isnād* criticism subsequently became one of the objects of criticism among orientalists and some modern scholars. Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, for example, argued that classical ḥadīth methodology placed greater emphasis on authenticating transmission than on examining the content of a report, and thus, in their view, had not adequately developed *matn* criticism (Goldziher, 1971, pp. 17–89; Schacht, 1950, pp. 149–198). Although this view has since been extensively criticized and revised by subsequent research, the question of the place of *matn* criticism remains an important issue in contemporary ḥadīth studies. Indeed, several recent studies show that ḥadīth scholars, from the earliest period onward, practiced criticism of the *matn* by testing its conformity with the Qur'an, with other, stronger ḥadīth, with historical fact, with empirical reality, and with the rules of Arabic (al-A'zamī, 1978, pp. 45–67; al-Khaṭīb, 1981, pp. 343–356; Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298).

One of the most prominent forms of *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions was the practice of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī*—the correction or clarification made by one Companion of a report or understanding held by another Companion, on the basis of more reliable knowledge. This practice shows that the Companions did not receive every report passively but subjected the substance of ḥadīth to a process of verification through argumentation that was at once normative, historical, linguistic, and empirical in character. *Istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* thus reflects the fact that *matn* criticism was an integral part of the tradition of ḥadīth verification from the very first generation of Islam (Abū Syuhbah, 1989, pp. 201–218).

Among the Companions, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah (may God be pleased with her) stands out as the figure most prominent in the practice of *istidrāk*. Numerous reports show that she corrected a number of ḥadīth or understandings held by other Companions, basing her arguments on verses of the Qur'an, on more authoritative ḥadīth of the Prophet, on her own direct experience with the Prophet ﷺ, on historical knowledge, and on a profound understanding of the Arabic language. This intellectual activity attests to the breadth of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's learning while also revealing a methodological pattern in her criticism of ḥadīth *matn* (al-Zarkashī, 2004, Introduction by the editor, pp. 5–20).

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's many acts of *istidrāk* were subsequently compiled systematically by Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH) in his work *al-Ijābah li-Īrād Mā Istadrakathu 'Ā'ishah 'alā al-Ṣaḥābah*. Until now, this work has generally been understood merely as a historical record of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's corrections of other Companions. Yet a conceptual analysis shows that the book not only records individual cases of *istidrāk* but also displays a pattern of argumentation, a set of critical instruments, and an epistemological foundation that can potentially be reconstructed as a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism. On this basis, the present study treats *al-Ijābah* not merely as a collection of reports but as a methodological

representation of the tradition of *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions—one that deserves to be re-examined from the perspective of ḥadīth epistemology.

The development of research on ḥadīth *matn* criticism shows a shift in focus from discussions of general methodology toward analyses of the practice of ḥadīth criticism during the period of the Companions. In general, previous research can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) research on the methodology of ḥadīth *matn* criticism; (2) research on the *istidrāk* of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah; and (3) research on al-Zarkashī’s *al-ljābah*. Nevertheless, all three groups of studies still leave room for a theoretical reconstruction of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as an epistemological model of *matn* criticism.

Table 1. Comparison of Previous Studies and the Position of the Present Study

No.	Researcher	Research Focus	Main Findings	Limitations	Gap Addressed by This Study
1	al-Idlibī (1983)	Methodology of <i>matn</i> criticism	Formulated the principles of <i>matn</i> criticism according to classical ḥadīth scholars	Did not examine <i>istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī</i> as a stand-alone model of <i>matn</i> criticism	Reconstructs <i>istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī</i> as a theory of <i>matn</i> criticism
2	’ltr (1997)	<i>Isnād</i> and <i>matn</i> criticism	Showed that ḥadīth scholars used <i>matn</i> criticism in the authentication of ḥadīth	Discussion remains general and has not developed an epistemological framework for <i>istidrāk</i>	Identifies the epistemological structure of <i>istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī</i>
3	al-A’zamī (1978)	Early history of ḥadīth transmission	Demonstrated that the verification of ḥadīth had taken place since the period of the Companions	Focuses on the history of transmission rather than on reconstructing a theory of <i>matn</i> criticism	Explains the mechanism of <i>matn</i> criticism practiced by the Companions
4	al-Khaṭīb (1981)	The ḥadīth tradition prior to codification	Explained the practice of ḥadīth verification in the earliest generation of Islam	Does not systematically examine the pattern of argumentation in <i>istidrāk</i>	Analyzes the pattern of argumentation and the critical instruments used in <i>istidrāk</i>
5	Abū Syuhbah (1989)	Defense of the Sunnah and the role of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah	Showed Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s contribution to preserving the authenticity of ḥadīth	More apologetic than analytical; does not construct a methodological framework	Uncovers the methodological structure of <i>matn</i> criticism in Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s practice
6	Studies on <i>al-ljābah</i> (various articles and theses)	Biography of al-Zarkashī, method of compilation, inventory of <i>istidrāk</i> cases	Positioned <i>al-ljābah</i> as a historical record of the practice of <i>istidrāk</i>	Has not treated <i>al-ljābah</i> as an object for theory building	Uses <i>al-ljābah</i> as the basis for building a theory of <i>istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī</i>

The table above shows that previous research has made an important contribution to the development of studies on ḥadīth *matn* criticism. Research on the methodology of *matn* criticism has demonstrated that the *muḥaddithūn* did not confine themselves to *isnād* criticism but also developed various mechanisms for evaluating the substance of ḥadīth. Meanwhile, studies of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah and of *al-ljābah* have enriched our understanding of the practice of *istidrāk* during the period of the Companions and of its historical documentation.

Nevertheless, a number of research gaps remain insufficiently addressed. First, *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* has not been examined as a methodological model of *matn* criticism possessing a coherent conceptual and epistemological structure. Second, most research on Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah remains oriented toward cataloguing individual cases or explaining particular ḥadīth, without identifying the underlying pattern of argumentation and mechanism of verification in the practice of *istidrāk*. Third, *al-ljābah* has more often been treated as a source of historical documentation than as a methodological representation that can be reconstructed into a theoretical framework.

Building on these gaps, the present study treats *al-ljābah* as an object of conceptual analysis for reconstructing the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī*. Through a Theory-Building Research approach, the study not only describes Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s corrective practice toward other Companions but also identifies the epistemic sources, critical instruments, patterns of argumentation, mechanisms of verification, and criteria of *matn* validity that together constitute a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

The novelty of this study lies in its reconstruction of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a theory of ḥadīth *matn* criticism through a systematic analysis of Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī’s *al-ljābah*. Unlike previous studies by Goldziher, Schacht, Brown, and Motzki, which examined the development of ḥadīth criticism chiefly from a historical perspective concerned with the transmission of reports and the formation of ḥadīth authority (Goldziher, 1971, pp. 17–89; Schacht, 1950, pp. 149–198; Brown, 2017, pp. 127–154; Motzki, 2002, pp. 1–38), this study focuses on reconstructing the epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* on the basis of al-Zarkashī’s *al-ljābah*. Using a Theory-Building Research approach, the study not only describes the practice of *istidrāk* but also reconstructs an epistemological model of *matn* criticism composed of epistemic sources, critical instruments, and a mechanism of *matn* validation.

This article is thus the first study to reconstruct the epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* on the basis of al-Zarkashī’s *al-ljābah* through a Theory-Building Research approach, producing a conceptual model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism composed of epistemic sources, critical instruments, and a mechanism of *matn* validation.

2. Method

Type of Research

This study is a qualitative study in the form of library research oriented toward theory building (Theory-Building Research). Library research was chosen because all of the data used in this study derive from scholarly texts, particularly classical ḥadīth literature, without involving field observation or experimentation. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the concepts, patterns of argumentation, and epistemological structure contained in the practice of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as documented in *al-ljābah* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 253–259).

Unlike descriptive library research, this study adopts a Theory-Building Research orientation in order to produce a new conceptual construction based on the synthesis of textual empirical data. In this approach, theory is built inductively through the identification of recurring patterns, a process of conceptual abstraction, and the synthesis of relationships among concepts until a coherent theoretical framework emerges (Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 532–550; Newbert, 2007, pp. 926–950). This approach was considered relevant to the aim of the study, namely to reconstruct the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

Data Sources

This study uses two types of data sources: primary and secondary.

The primary data consist of Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī's *al-Ijābah li-Īrād Mā Istadrakathu 'Ā'ishah 'alā al-Ṣaḥābah*. This work was selected because it specifically compiles Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's acts of *istidrāk* toward other Companions, thereby providing a corpus of data representative enough to identify the critical instruments, patterns of argumentation, and epistemological foundations of *matn* criticism.

The secondary data comprise the principal collections of ḥadīth (*al-kutub al-sittah*, *Musnad Aḥmad*, *al-Muwaṭṭa'*), works of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, works of *'ilal al-ḥadīth*, commentaries (*shurūḥ*) on ḥadīth, and academic literature dealing with *matn* criticism, ḥadīth epistemology, and ḥadīth research methodology. This literature was used as a basis for verification, comparison, and conceptual triangulation of the primary data (Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298; al-Ṭaḥḥān, 1996, pp. 9–54).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through documentary study—a technique of data collection that systematically examines various written documents in accordance with the focus of the research. This technique is commonly used in library research because it allows the researcher to obtain historical, conceptual, and textual data in a comprehensive manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 253–259; Darmalaksana, 2020, pp. 64–76).

The stages of data collection were as follows.

First, all of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's cases of *istidrāk* contained in *al-Ijābah* were catalogued. Every case was recorded systematically together with information on the ḥadīth being corrected, the Companion who was the object of the *istidrāk*, the form of the correction, and the argumentation used.

Second, the data were classified according to the theme of the ḥadīth, the form of argumentation, the *matn*-criticism instrument employed, the epistemic basis, and the type of correction made. This stage aimed to identify recurring patterns of argumentation as the basis for forming conceptual categories.

Third, *takhrīj al-ḥadīth* was performed on the ḥadīth that were the object of *istidrāk* by tracing the reports in the principal ḥadīth collections, works on *'ilal*, commentaries, and *rijāl* literature where necessary. This stage aimed to obtain the full wording of each ḥadīth, to establish the context of its transmission, and to verify the relationship between the original ḥadīth and the form of *istidrāk* made by Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah.

Fourth, supporting literature on *matn* criticism, ḥadīth epistemology, the theory of *istidrāk*, al-Zarkashī's methodology, and Theory-Building Research methodology was gathered as a conceptual foundation for the analysis (Darmalaksana, 2020, pp. 64–92; al-Zarkashī, 2004, Introduction by the editor, pp. 5–20).

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using a Theory-Building Research approach—a research method aimed at producing a theoretical construction through conceptual synthesis based on empirical data. Unlike theory-testing approaches, which test existing theory, Theory-Building Research seeks to generate new theoretical formulations through the interpretation of patterns emerging from the data (Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 532–550; Swedberg, 2014, pp. 16–35).

The stages of analysis were as follows.

Data Reduction and Categorization.

All catalogued cases of *istidrāk* were reduced and grouped according to shared characteristics, including ḥadīth theme, form of correction, critical instrument, epistemic basis, and pattern of argumentation. This stage aimed to construct the analytical categories that form the basis for concept development.

Conceptual Abstraction.

The categories obtained were then analyzed to identify higher-order concepts. Through this process of abstraction, individual cases were no longer treated as isolated phenomena but as representations of methodological principles sharing similar characteristics. This process made it possible to identify a conceptual structure concerning the sources of knowledge, critical instruments, mechanisms of verification, and the grounds of argumentation that constitute the practice of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* (Strauss & Corbin, 2015, pp. 199–230).

Theory Reconstruction.

The final stage involved a process of conceptual synthesis, linking all identified concepts into a coherent theoretical framework. This reconstruction was carried out by identifying relationships among conceptual variables so as to produce a formulation of the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism. The resulting theoretical structure comprises three principal components: (1) epistemic sources (sources of knowledge), (2) critical instruments, and (3) the mechanism of *matn* validation (validation process). The contribution of each of these three components to the broader development of ḥadīth-criticism epistemology was then analyzed.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was carried out by comparing the data in *al-Ijābah* with the reports found in the principal ḥadīth collections and with scholarly explanations found in commentaries and works of *ʿilal al-ḥadīth*. In addition, theoretical triangulation was used by placing the results of the analysis in dialogue with theories of *matn* criticism developed by both classical scholars and contemporary researchers, so as to arrive at a theoretical reconstruction possessing conceptual validity and scholarly coherence (Denzin, 1978, pp. 291–307; Darmalaksana, 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī in the Early Tradition of Ḥadīth Criticism

One of the important findings of this study is that the practice of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* forms an integral part of the tradition of ḥadīth criticism that developed from the generation of the Companions onward. This finding shows that the process of verifying ḥadīth in the early period of Islam was not oriented solely toward the transmission of reports (*riwāyah*) but also involved a critical evaluation of the understanding, wording, and substance of ḥadīth. Ḥadīth criticism during the period of the Companions thus encompassed two dimensions at once: the preservation of the continuity of transmission and the testing of the validity of a ḥadīth's meaning.

Etymologically, the word *istidrāk* derives from the root ادرک, which carries the sense of “to catch up with,” “to rectify,” or “to set right something that is not yet complete.” In the Islamic scholarly tradition, the term *istidrāk* is used to denote an effort to correct, perfect, or clarify an opinion, a report, or a conclusion regarded as inaccurate, on the basis of stronger argumentation (al-Fīrūzābādī, 2005; Ibn Manẓūr, 1993). *Istidrāk* is therefore not synonymous with the rejection of a report but is rather a scholarly mechanism for arriving at a more accurate understanding of a ḥadīth of the Prophet.

Within the science of ḥadīth, *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* can be understood as the correction or clarification made by one Companion of a report or an understanding held by another Companion, on the basis of the knowledge in his or her possession. Such a correction may take the form of an explanation of the context of a ḥadīth, a refinement of its wording, a qualification of its meaning, or the rejection of an understanding judged inconsistent with the Qurʾān, the Sunnah of the Prophet, historical fact, or direct experience with the Messenger of God ﷺ. The object of *istidrāk*, then, is not the *isnād* of a ḥadīth alone but, above all, its substance (*matn*) and the understanding attached to it (ʿItr, 1997, pp. 247–298; al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 41–88).

The practice of *istidrāk* is, in fact, a logical consequence of the character of ḥadīth transmission during the period of the Companions. The Companions received ḥadīth under

differing circumstances, at different times, and with varying degrees of interaction with the Messenger of God ﷺ. Some Companions witnessed an event directly, while others obtained their information through transmission. This difference in experience gave rise to variation in the understanding and the wording of ḥadīth. Under such conditions, the Companions did not accept every report unreflectively but engaged in a process of clarification whenever they possessed more complete or more authoritative information (al-Aʿẓamī, 1978, pp. 45–67; al-Khaṭīb, 1981, pp. 343–356).

This phenomenon shows that ḥadīth criticism was already taking place while the Messenger of God ﷺ was still alive and continued after his death. The Companions cross-checked reports with one another, sought corroborating witnesses for a given ḥadīth, and not infrequently corrected another Companion's understanding when it was thought to conflict with knowledge they themselves possessed. This scholarly tradition subsequently became the foundation on which the methodology of ḥadīth criticism developed among the generation of the *Tābiʿūn* and the *muḥaddithūn* who followed them. *Matn* criticism cannot, therefore, be regarded as a product of modern methodology; rather, it is an inherent part of the mechanism of ḥadīth verification from the very earliest period of Islamic history (Brown, 2017, pp. 127–154; Motzki, 2004, pp. 1–18).

Among the Companions, Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah occupied a truly distinctive position in the practice of *istidrāk*. This was due not only to her closeness to the Messenger of God ﷺ as Umm al-Muʾminīn but also to the breadth of her knowledge of the Prophet's personal life, her profound understanding of the Qurʾān, and her intellectual capacity for legal reasoning (*istinbāṭ*). Numerous reports indicate that senior Companions frequently turned to Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah when confronted with questions of ḥadīth concerning the Messenger of God's ﷺ domestic life or with matters requiring more detailed clarification (Abū Syuhbah, 1989, pp. 201–218; al-Khaṭīb, 1981, pp. 347–352).

This distinction is reflected in the sheer number of *istidrāk* practices attributed to Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah. Her corrections were never built on mere conjecture or personal preference but on argumentation that could be scholarly justified. In some cases she corrected a report by grounding her argument in a verse of the Qurʾān; in others she drew on a more complete ḥadīth of the Prophet, on empirical experience gained in the company of the Messenger of God ﷺ, on historical knowledge, or on linguistic analysis. This variety of argumentation shows that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions already drew, in an integrated manner, on multiple epistemic sources (al-Zarkashī, 2004, Introduction by the editor, pp. 5–20).

Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah's practices of *istidrāk* were subsequently compiled systematically by Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī in *al-ljābah li-ṭrād Mā Istadrakathu ʿĀʾishah ʿalā al-Ṣaḥābah*. The compilation of this work holds an important place in the history of ḥadīth scholarship, for it does not merely gather reports of correction but also documents the intellectual tradition of the Companions in verifying the substance of ḥadīth. A close reading of the work reveals that its many cases of *istidrāk* display a recurring pattern of argumentation, a consistent use of critical instruments, and a relatively systematic epistemological foundation. In other words, *al-ljābah* is not merely a historical record of Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah's corrections but also a representation of a tradition of *matn* criticism possessing a definite methodological structure.

This conceptual finding carries important implications for contemporary ḥadīth studies. *Matn* criticism has often been understood as a set of rules formulated by ḥadīth scholars during the period of codification. Analysis of the tradition of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī*, however, shows that the practice of *matn* criticism existed at an earlier stage, in the form of the Companions' scholarly activity. The difference lies in the fact that this practice had not yet been formulated as an explicit theory. Analysis of *al-ljābah* is therefore essential for identifying the conceptual patterns implicit in the practice of *istidrāk*, so that they may be reconstructed into an epistemological model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

On the basis of these findings, this study regards *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a critical system possessing methodological components that can be identified scientifically. To demonstrate this, the following section systematically analyzes the instruments of *matn* criticism used in each case of *istidrāk* compiled in *al-ljābah*.

This analysis provides the basis for the process of conceptual abstraction and the reconstruction of the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

2. Instruments of *Matn* Criticism in *al-ljābah*

Analysis of a number of representative cases of *istidrāk* compiled by Imām al-Zarkashī in *al-ljābah li-ṭrād Mā Istadrakathu ‘Ā’ishah ‘alā al-Ṣaḥābah* shows that Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s *matn* criticism was not built upon a single form of argumentation. On the contrary, the practice of *istidrāk* displays the use of a variety of mutually reinforcing epistemic instruments in the process of ḥadīth verification. This finding reinforces the view that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions employed a multidimensional approach that integrated textual proof (*dalīl naqlī*), historical fact, empirical experience, linguistic analysis, and rational consideration (al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 41–88; ‘Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298).

Based on an initial analysis of several representative cases in *al-ljābah*, the instruments of *matn* criticism can be mapped into six main categories, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Preliminary Classification of *Matn-Criticism Instruments in al-ljābah*

Sample Code	Critical Instrument	Characteristics	Example Case
IJ-01	The Qur’an	Testing the <i>matn</i> against a verse of the Qur’an	The ḥadīth on the deceased being punished for his family’s weeping
IJ-02	Another ḥadīth of the Prophet	Comparison with a more complete or stronger report	The ḥadīth on the Prophet’s vision (<i>ru’yah</i>) of his Lord
IJ-03	Historical fact (historical evidence)	Testing conformity with historical chronology	Several reports concerning particular events during the Prophet’s lifetime
IJ-04	Empirical experience (direct observation)	Based on Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s own witnessing of the Prophet’s life	The ḥadīth on the Prophet’s manner of worship at home
IJ-05	Arabic linguistic analysis	Explaining the meaning of a term on the basis of linguistic context	Correction of a literal understanding of a ḥadīth’s wording
IJ-06	Rationality and <i>maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah</i>	Removing contradiction with the principles of the sharia	Several ḥadīth understood in a disproportionate manner

The table shows that Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah employed a range of instruments suited to the character of each report she corrected. This indicates that *istidrāk* was not merely an act of transmission but a scholarly process of evaluating the validity of a ḥadīth’s meaning.

a. Criticism Based on the Qur’an

The most prominent instrument in the practice of *istidrāk* is the testing of a *matn* against the Qur’an. In Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s view, the Qur’an is the highest normative standard, one that cannot possibly contradict the Sunnah of the Prophet. Consequently, when a report was understood to contradict a Qur’anic principle, what required correction was not the Qur’an but the manner in which the ḥadīth had been understood.

The best-known example concerns the report from ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar of the Prophet’s saying: “Indeed, the deceased is punished on account of his family’s weeping over him.” Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah rejected a literal reading of this ḥadīth, citing God’s words: “*No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another*” (Qur’an 6:164). In her view, the ḥadīth concerned an unbeliever who was already being punished, and the weeping of his family merely coincided with that punishment rather than causing it (al-Zarkashī, 2004; al-Bukhārī, 2002, Kitāb al-Janā’iz; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, 2006, Kitāb al-Janā’iz).

This case shows that, for Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah, the Qur’an functioned as a hermeneutic parameter for understanding ḥadīth, not as an instrument for rejecting the Sunnah.

b. Criticism Based on Other Ḥadīth of the Prophet

The second instrument is the use of a more complete ḥadīth of the Prophet as a tool for clarifying another report.

One example is the debate over the ḥadīth concerning *ru'yat Allāh* (the vision of God). Some Companions reported that the Prophet had seen his Lord. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah corrected this understanding by citing a number of ḥadīth of the Prophet together with Qur'anic verses—chiefly Sūrat al-Najm and Sūrat al-An'ām—which, in her view, indicate that what the Prophet had seen was the angel Gabriel, not God directly (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, 2006, Kitāb al-Īmān; al-Zarkashī, 2004; Brown, 2017, pp. 127–154).

This method demonstrates a form of intertextual criticism, in which one report is compared with another so as to arrive at a fuller understanding.

c. Criticism Based on Historical Fact

A number of instances of *istidrāk* were carried out through the verification of historical fact. In several reports, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah corrected information regarding the time, place, or chronology of an event on the basis of the historical knowledge she possessed as a direct witness to the life of the Messenger of God ﷺ.

This instrument shows that the validity of a ḥadīth was measured not only by its *isnād* but also by its conformity with verifiable historical fact—an approach that bears some resemblance to the concept of historical criticism in modern historiography, although it was built upon the framework of Islamic epistemology.

d. Criticism Based on Empirical Experience

Having lived with the Messenger of God ﷺ for many years, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah had direct access to the Prophet's domestic life. Consequently, many of her acts of *istidrāk* were grounded in empirical experience (direct observation), especially with respect to the Prophet's manner of worship, his habits, and his family life.

This instrument carries considerable epistemic weight because it rests on direct observation (*mushāhadah*) rather than on oral transmission alone.

e. Criticism Based on Linguistic Analysis

The next instrument is linguistic analysis. In several cases, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah explained that the error lay not in the ḥadīth itself but in the way its wording had been understood.

She drew on her knowledge of the Arabic language, the context of the utterance (*siyāq*), and the intention of the speaker (*maqṣūd al-mutakallim*) to correct an interpretation regarded as inaccurate.

This shows that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions already took account of the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of language.

f. Criticism Based on Rationality and the Principles of the Sharia

The final identifiable instrument is the use of rational consideration that nonetheless remains within the bounds of the revealed text (*naṣṣ*).

In some cases, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah rejected an understanding of a ḥadīth that produced implications contrary to the justice of God, to the objectives of the sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), or to established fact.

Rationality in this context did not function as an independent source of law but as a tool for understanding the revealed text proportionately, so as to avoid internal contradiction.

g. Synthesis of Findings

The preliminary analysis of the sample cases of *istidrāk* in *al-Ijābah* shows that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions drew on a variety of instruments in an integrated manner. The Qur'an served as the principal normative parameter, other ḥadīth functioned as a tool of intertextual verification, while history, empirical experience, the Arabic language, and

rationality served as supporting instruments in arriving at a comprehensive understanding of a ḥadīth.

This finding indicates that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* was not merely a correction of an individual report but a scholarly practice with a consistent pattern of argumentation. These various instruments then provide the basis for the conceptual abstraction undertaken in the following section, enabling their reconstruction into a theoretical model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

3. Reconstructing the Epistemology of *Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī* as a Model of *Matn* Criticism

Analysis of the various forms of *istidrāk* compiled by Imām al-Zarkashī shows that Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s practice of correction did not occur incidentally but followed a relatively consistent pattern of argumentation. These patterns reveal a systematic relationship among the sources of knowledge, the critical instruments, and the mechanism for establishing the meaning of a ḥadīth. The practice of *istidrāk* can thus be understood not only as a historical phenomenon within the tradition of the Companions but also as an epistemological model of *matn* criticism possessing a definite methodological structure (al-Zarkashī, 2004).

To arrive at this conceptual structure, the study uses a Theory-Building approach as its analytical framework, so that the various patterns of argumentation emerging from the data can be abstracted into a theoretical construction. Under a Theory-Building Research approach, theory is not built through deduction from existing theory but through a process of pattern identification, conceptual abstraction, and the synthesis of relationships among concepts, resulting in a new conceptual framework (Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 532–550; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, pp. 25–32).

a. Conceptual Abstraction

Analysis of the sample cases of *istidrāk* shows that, although the objects of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s corrections varied considerably, they all share a similar argumentative structure. This structure shows that every act of *istidrāk* begins with the use of a particular epistemic source, which is then applied through a relevant critical instrument, before finally producing a clarification of the ḥadīth’s meaning.

Cases of *istidrāk* that appear different at the empirical level turn out, upon comparative analysis, to share a common argumentative structure (Swedberg, 2014, pp. 45–67). The study therefore does not stop at identifying types of correction but abstracts them into the basic concepts that constitute the mechanism of *matn* criticism.

Table 3. Conceptual Abstraction into Three Principal Constructs

Conceptual Dimension	Components
Epistemic sources (sources of knowledge)	The Qur’an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, direct observation, historical fact, competence in the Arabic language
Critical instruments	Textual comparison, historical confirmation, empirical verification, linguistic analysis, rational evaluation
Validation mechanism (validation process)	Identification of the report, testing of conformity, clarification of meaning, determination of conclusion

This abstraction shows that the practice of *istidrāk* does not rest merely on Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s personal authority as Umm al-Mu’minīn but on a scholarly mechanism that can be replicated in the process of ḥadīth *matn* criticism.

The Structure of the Theory of *Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī*

Based on the results of the conceptual abstraction, this study reconstructs the theory of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a process of *matn* verification consisting of three interrelated principal components (Corley & Gioia, 2011, pp. 18–21).

The first component is epistemic sources. The findings show that Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s corrections invariably proceeded from a source of knowledge possessing scholarly legitimacy (‘Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298). These sources include the Qur’an as the highest normative authority, the more comprehensive Sunnah of the Prophet, empirical experience as a direct witness to

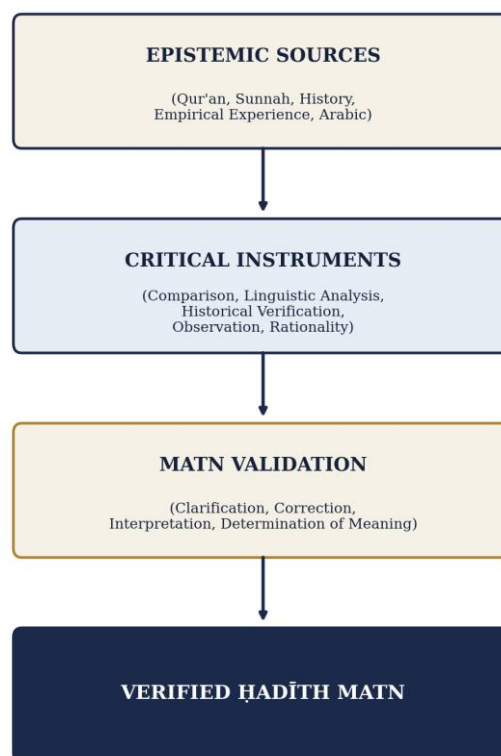
the life of the Messenger of God ﷺ, historical fact, and linguistic competence in Arabic. The basis of criticism was thus never personal opinion but evidence-based reasoning.

The second component is critical instruments. These epistemic sources were then operationalized through a set of analytical instruments comprising comparison between ḥadīth texts, confirmation against Qur’anic verses, verification of historical chronology, empirical observation, semantic analysis, and rational consideration that remained within the bounds of the revealed text (al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 41–88). These instruments were applied contextually, in accordance with the characteristics of each report.

The third component is the mechanism of *matn* validation (validation process). This study finds that the process of *istidrāk* followed a relatively consistent sequence: identification of the report requiring clarification, testing through the relevant epistemic source, argumentative analysis of the substance of the ḥadīth, and, finally, the determination of a more accurate meaning. This mechanism shows that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions already possessed a scholarly procedure, even though it had not yet been formulated as a formal theory.

The relationship among these three components can be represented as follows.

Figure 1.
Reconstructed Model of the Theory of Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī



Source: Adapted from the research findings.

Figure 1. Reconstructed Model of the Theory of Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī

This model shows that the validity of a *matn* is determined not only by the authenticity of its *isnād* but also by the successful verification of its content through the combined use of various epistemic sources and critical instruments.

Characteristics of the Theory of Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī

The reconstructed theory exhibits at least four principal characteristics (Suddaby, 2010, pp. 346–357).

First, the theory is evidence-based, since every correction rests upon textual or factual evidence rather than individual preference.

Second, the theory is integrative, in that it combines multiple epistemic sources simultaneously. In the practice of *istidrāk*, the Qur'an is never positioned apart from the Sunnah, history, language, and empirical experience; instead, these sources form a mutually reinforcing network of argumentation.

Third, the theory is contextual. The choice of critical instrument was never mechanical but was adapted to the particular character of the issue at hand. Not every case, therefore, was resolved with the same instrument.

Fourth, the theory is dynamic, since it opens a space for the critical evaluation of the understanding of a ḥadīth without diminishing the authority of the Sunnah as a source of Islamic teaching. *Istidrāk* is thus understood not as a rejection of ḥadīth but as a scholarly mechanism for arriving at a more accurate understanding.

Theoretical Propositions

As the final outcome of the Theory-Building Research process, this study formulates three theoretical propositions (Corley & Gioia, 2011, pp. 12–32).

Proposition 1. *Istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* is an epistemological mechanism of *matn* criticism grounded in the integration of multiple sources of knowledge—the Qur'an, the Sunnah, historical fact, empirical observation, and linguistic analysis.

Proposition 2. The validity of a ḥadīth's *matn* in the practice of *istidrāk* is determined by a process of argumentative verification through the use of a critical instrument suited to the characteristics of the report, and not by the authenticity of its *isnād* alone.

Proposition 3. The practice of *istidrāk* represented in *al-ljābah* shows that the tradition of ḥadīth criticism during the period of the Companions already possessed a systematic methodological structure, one that can be reconstructed as a conceptual model of *matn* criticism within ḥadīth epistemology.

These three propositions together show that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* is no longer to be understood as a mere collection of individual corrections but as a theoretical model explaining how the process of *matn* verification took place among the generation of the Companions. This reconstruction thereby provides a conceptual foundation for the further development of a theory of *matn* criticism rooted in the intellectual practice of the earliest generation of Islam, while also broadening the understanding of the relationship between *isnād* and *matn* within ḥadīth-criticism methodology.

Theoretical Implications of the Reconstructed Epistemology of *Istidrāk al-Ṣaḥābī* for the Development of Ḥadīth Criticism

The findings of this study contribute to the development of the epistemology of ḥadīth criticism by showing that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* is not merely a historical phenomenon within the tradition of transmission but also represents an epistemological model of *matn* criticism possessing a systematic methodological structure. Discussion of *istidrāk* has generally been situated within the intellectual history of the Companions or treated as documentation of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's corrections of particular reports. This study shows that these practices in fact embody a pattern of argumentation that can be reconstructed into an epistemological framework for ḥadīth criticism (al-Zarkashī, 2004, Muqaddimah; 'Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298).

The first contribution of this study is the broadening of the paradigm of ḥadīth criticism from an *isnād*-oriented focus toward the integration of *isnād* and *matn*. The classical ḥadīth tradition undoubtedly devoted considerable attention to *isnād* criticism as the principal instrument of authentication. Nevertheless, scholars also developed a set of rules for *matn* criticism, even though this discussion was not always organized systematically into a stand-alone theory. Analysis of *al-ljābah* shows that Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's practice of *istidrāk* involved a methodological process of *matn* verification through testing against the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, historical fact, empirical experience, linguistic analysis, and rational consideration that remained within the bounds of the revealed text. This finding reinforces the

view that *matn* criticism has been an inherent part of the tradition of ḥadīth criticism since the generation of the Companions, rather than a methodological construction that first emerged among later (*muta'akhhirūn*) scholars (al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 41–88; al-Khaṭīb, 1981, pp. 343–356).

The second contribution is the reconstruction of the epistemic sources of *matn* criticism. This study shows that the validity of a ḥadīth's *matn* in the practice of *istidrāk* is determined not only by the continuity of its *isnād* but also by the conformity of the ḥadīth's substance with various sources of knowledge possessing epistemic authority. Within this framework, the Qur'an functions as the highest normative authority, the Sunnah of the Prophet serves as a mechanism of intertextual verification, while empirical experience, historical fact, and linguistic competence serve as supporting instruments for arriving at a more comprehensive understanding of a ḥadīth. This reconstruction shows that classical ḥadīth epistemology possesses an integrative character that combines multiple sources of evidence in the process of *matn* validation (al-A'zamī, 1978, pp. 45–67; Brown, 2017, pp. 127–154).

The third contribution concerns the reconstruction of the mechanism of ḥadīth *matn* validation. On the basis of the analysis, this study proposes that the process of *matn* criticism within the tradition of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* proceeds through three principal stages: identification of the report requiring clarification, testing using the relevant epistemic source, and the determination of meaning through the synthesis of multiple pieces of evidence. This mechanism shows that *matn* criticism was carried out neither intuitively nor on the basis of individual preference but through an argumentative procedure with methodological consistency. *Istidrāk* can therefore be understood as a form of evidence-based criticism oriented toward finding the meaning of a ḥadīth most consistent with the entirety of Islamic teaching ('Itr, 1997, pp. 247–298; al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 89–131).

The fourth contribution of this study is a strengthening of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah's position as one of the earliest architects of *matn*-criticism methodology. Discussion of her role has generally focused on her capacity as a prolific narrator of ḥadīth or as a legal reference for other Companions. Analysis of *al-Ijābah* shows that her contribution extends well beyond the function of transmission. Her many practices of *istidrāk* demonstrate her capacity to evaluate the substance of a report through systematic, evidence-based argumentation. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah therefore deserves to be regarded not only as *al-rāwiyah* (the narrator) but also as one of the central figures in the development of the epistemology of ḥadīth criticism in the early period of Islam (Abū Syuhbah, 1989, pp. 201–218; al-Khaṭīb, 1981, pp. 347–352).

Beyond its contribution to classical ḥadīth studies, this study also holds relevance for contemporary discourse on ḥadīth criticism. A number of modern scholars have argued that classical methodology places excessive emphasis on *isnād*, leaving insufficient room for *matn* criticism. The findings of this study suggest that this view requires reconsideration. The practice of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* demonstrates that the generation of the Companions had already developed a comprehensive mechanism for evaluating *matn*, even though it had not yet been formulated as an explicit theory. This study thus reinforces the argument that *matn* criticism is an organic part of classical ḥadīth methodology rather than an adoption from modern critical approaches (Brown, 2017, pp. 127–154; Motzki, 2004, pp. 1–18).

From the perspective of the development of ḥadīth scholarship, the reconstructed epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* also offers a methodological contribution to present-day studies of *matn* criticism. The model produced in this study offers an analytical framework applicable to the study of problematic ḥadīth (*mushkil al-ḥadīth*), apparently contradictory ḥadīth (*mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*), and research on the authenticity of ḥadīth meaning in a contemporary context. By treating the various epistemic sources as a mutually complementary whole, this model opens the way for developing a methodology of *matn* criticism that remains rooted in the classical scholarly tradition while remaining responsive to the needs of modern ḥadīth studies (al-Idlibī, 1983, pp. 131–180; Darmalaksana, 2020, pp. 64–92).

From a research-methodology perspective, this article also demonstrates that the Theory-Building approach can be productively adapted for ḥadīth studies. Unlike its use in management studies, where it is oriented toward organizational theory, in this study Theory-Building serves as an analytical tool for identifying the conceptual patterns dispersed

throughout a classical corpus and then reconstructing them into a coherent epistemological model. The contribution of this study therefore lies not only in the substance of the theory produced but also in demonstrating that a theory-reconstruction approach can enrich research methodology within the field of ḥadīth studies. Nevertheless, the Theory-Building approach in this study functions solely as a method of analysis, while its epistemological foundation remains entirely grounded in the classical scholarly tradition of ḥadīth (Corley & Gioia, 2011, pp. 12–32).

Overall, this study affirms that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* constitutes one of the important foundations in the history of the development of ḥadīth *matn* criticism. The resulting reconstruction shows that the tradition of ḥadīth criticism during the period of the Companions already possessed an epistemological structure comprising interrelated sources of knowledge, critical instruments, and a mechanism of validation. This study thus not only broadens the understanding of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s role within the Islamic scholarly tradition but also offers a new perspective for developing the epistemology of ḥadīth criticism grounded in the intellectual practice of the generation of the Companions. This contribution satisfies the requirements of originality and scientific utility expected in the development of scholarly theory, in that it produces a new conceptual framework arising from the analysis of a classical ḥadīth corpus while retaining relevance for the development of contemporary ḥadīth studies..

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

This study set out to reconstruct the epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* as a model of ḥadīth *matn* criticism through an analysis of Imām al-Zarkashī’s *al-Ijābah li-Īrād Mā Istadrakathu ‘Ā’ishah ‘alā al-Ṣaḥābah*. In response to the tendency of ḥadīth scholarship to concentrate on *isnād* criticism, this study sought to demonstrate that the tradition of *matn* criticism has developed since the generation of the Companions through Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s practice of *istidrāk*. Using a Theory-Building Research approach, the study not only describes the practice of *istidrāk* but also abstracts the patterns of argumentation found in the corpus of *al-Ijābah* into an epistemological framework of *matn* criticism.

The findings show that *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* is a practice of ḥadīth verification with a systematic methodological structure. Analysis of the representative sample in *al-Ijābah* shows that Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah made integrated use of multiple critical instruments—the Qur’an as the highest normative authority, the ḥadīth of the Prophet as a mechanism of intertextual verification, historical fact, empirical experience, linguistic analysis, and rational consideration that remained within the bounds of the revealed text. This finding confirms that *matn* criticism during the period of the Companions was neither intuitive nor merely case-based but was grounded in the use of multiple, mutually complementary epistemic sources.

Through the process of conceptual abstraction, this study successfully reconstructs the epistemology of *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* into three principal components: (1) epistemic sources, (2) critical instruments, and (3) the mechanism of *matn* validation. Together, these three components constitute a conceptual model that explains how the process of *matn* verification was carried out within the tradition of the Companions. This model shows that the authenticity of a ḥadīth is determined not only by the validity of its *isnād* but also by the process of testing its meaning through various forms of evidence possessing scholarly legitimacy.

These findings carry important implications for the development of the epistemology of ḥadīth criticism. The study shows that *matn* criticism has had a methodological foundation since the period of the Companions, and that the assumption that classical ḥadīth methodology is oriented solely toward *isnād* criticism therefore requires reconsideration. Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah’s practice of *istidrāk* demonstrates that the evaluation of the substance of ḥadīth has been an integral part of the classical ḥadīth scholarly tradition, even though it had not previously been formulated explicitly as a formal theory.

This study therefore offers a new perspective within ḥadīth studies—one that positions *istidrāk al-ṣaḥābī* not merely as a collection of corrections of Companions’ reports but as an epistemological model of *matn* criticism that may serve as one of the foundations for the development of contemporary ḥadīth-criticism methodology.

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