



**Riwayah : Jurnal Studi Hadis**

issn 2460-755X eissn 2502-8839

Tersedia online di: [journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/riwayah](http://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/riwayah)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/riwayah.v12i1.35785>

## **REASSESSING HADITH AUTHENTICITY: G.H.A. Juynboll's Common Link Theory and the Integration of Historical Criticism with *Sanad* Theory**

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### **Abstract**

The authenticity of hadith has long occupied a central position in Islamic studies, as it determines the authority of prophetic traditions as the second primary source of Islamic law after the Qur'an. This study examines the validity of hadith through the perspective of G.H.A. Juynboll's common link theory, which challenges the traditional assumption of uninterrupted

transmission by proposing that each hadith can be traced to a single transmitter who serves as the historical nucleus of its dissemination. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, the research draws upon Juynboll's major works and relevant studies by both Western and Muslim scholars. Through a systematic reconstruction of transmission networks and a comparison with the classical methodology of *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil*, the findings demonstrate that although Juynboll's theory offers a significant contribution to historical source criticism, it tends to interpret hadith primarily as historical constructs, thereby overlooking their theological and epistemological dimensions within the Islamic tradition. Comparative analysis with the works of Harald Motzki further indicates that hadiths associated with common links may still exhibit textual and *isnad* coherence extending to the Prophet's era. The study contributes to contemporary hadith scholarship by proposing a balanced framework that integrates modern historical criticism with classical Islamic epistemology, positioning the common link theory as a complementary analytical instrument rather than a definitive criterion for determining hadith authenticity. This approach highlights the possibility of constructive dialogue between Western critical methodologies and traditional Muslim hadith sciences in the evaluation of prophetic traditions.

**Keywords:** Classical Islamic Epistemology, Common Link Theory, G.H.A. Juynboll, Hadith Authenticity, Historical Criticism.

### Abstrak

Keotentikan hadis telah lama menjadi isu sentral dalam studi Islam karena menentukan otoritas tradisi kenabian sebagai sumber hukum Islam kedua setelah Al-Qur'an. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji validitas hadis melalui perspektif teori *common link* G.H.A. Juynboll, yang menantang asumsi tradisional mengenai kesinambungan transmisi dengan mengemukakan bahwa setiap hadis dapat ditelusuri kepada seorang perawi tertentu yang berfungsi sebagai pusat historis penyebarannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-analitis dengan memanfaatkan karya-karya utama Juynboll serta berbagai kajian yang relevan dari sarjana Barat maupun Muslim. Melalui rekonstruksi sistematis terhadap jaringan transmisi dan perbandingan dengan metodologi klasik *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil*, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun teori

*common link* memberikan kontribusi penting bagi kritik sumber historis, teori tersebut cenderung memandang hadis semata-mata sebagai konstruksi sejarah sehingga kurang memperhatikan dimensi teologis dan epistemologis yang melekat dalam tradisi Islam. Analisis komparatif dengan pemikiran Harald Motzki lebih lanjut memperlihatkan bahwa hadis-hadis yang dikaitkan dengan *common link* masih dapat menunjukkan koherensi tekstual dan *sanad* yang menelusur hingga masa Nabi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi kajian hadis kontemporer dengan menawarkan kerangka yang seimbang antara kritik historis modern dan epistemologi klasik Islam, dengan menempatkan teori *common link* sebagai instrumen analitis yang bersifat komplementer, bukan sebagai standar final dalam menentukan autentisitas hadis. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menegaskan adanya kemungkinan dialog yang konstruktif antara metodologi kritis Barat dan ilmu hadis tradisional dalam mengevaluasi tradisi kenabian.

**Kata Kunci:** Epistemologi Islam Klasik, Teori Common Link, G.H.A. Juynboll, Keautentikan Hadis, Kritik Historis.

## Introduction

In recent decades, hadith studies have undergone significant transformations due to the increasing influence of historical criticism advanced by Western scholars concerning the authenticity of the *isnad*. This discourse has expanded beyond international academic circles and has increasingly affected Islamic studies in Muslim universities. As a result, debates over the validity of hadith have become more complex, particularly as historical-critical approaches challenge the construction of *isnad*, which for centuries has been regarded by Muslim scholars as an authentic and authoritative system of transmission (Jamil and Dadah, 2025, pp. 75–76). Given the central position of hadith as the second source of Islamic law after the Qur'an, the question of hadith authenticity involves not only theological concerns but also the historical validity of its transmission.

One of the most influential figures in this discourse is G.H.A. Juynboll, a Dutch Orientalist who developed the common link theory as an instrument for the historical analysis of hadith (Putri et al., 2022, pp. 61–66). This theory is based on the assumption

that the chain of transmission does not represent a continuous and authentic process extending back to the Prophet Muhammad but rather originated from a single transmitter who functioned as the central point of dissemination (Yahya, 2024, pp. 100–106). This transmitter, referred to as the common link, is considered the earliest historically verifiable narrator from whom multiple transmission lines emerged. According to Juynboll, the existence of a common link indicates that many hadiths cannot be historically traced directly to the Prophet but rather to the generation of the *tabi'un* or even later. Consequently, the theory poses a significant challenge to the authenticity claims of hadith collections accepted within the Sunni canon, including *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 62–100).

This approach has generated extensive debate within modern hadith scholarship. For many Western scholars, Juynboll's theory represents a methodological breakthrough because it offers an empirical framework for reconstructing the historical development of hadith transmission (Yahya, 2024, pp. 100–106). In contrast, traditional Muslim scholars have criticized the theory as overly reductionist, arguing that it treats *isnad* merely as a historical construct while neglecting the epistemological and socio-religious foundations of hadith transmission. Several studies have emphasized that the hadith transmission system had already developed rigorous mechanisms of verification during the era of the Companions, long before the formal codification of hadith (Rosyidah et al., 2021, pp. 137–150). From this perspective, Western historical criticism cannot disregard the normative and spiritual dimensions embedded within the Islamic tradition of hadith scholarship.

Although numerous studies have examined Juynboll's common link theory and the criticisms directed against it, most existing works remain either descriptive or normative in nature. Previous studies have largely focused on explaining Juynboll's theoretical framework or refuting it through apologetic arguments rooted in traditional scholarship, without undertaking a systematic comparative analysis of specific hadith cases. Consequently, a significant research gap remains, namely the lack of studies that directly compare the conclusions generated by the common link theory with those produced by the classical methodologies of *sanad* criticism applied to the same hadith material.

More importantly, an unresolved academic problem persists concerning the source of the divergent conclusions reached by historical-critical and classical approaches. It remains unclear whether these differences arise primarily from contrasting historical data or, more fundamentally, from distinct epistemological assumptions regarding the nature and authority of hadith transmission. In other words, the debate over hadith authenticity is not merely a disagreement over empirical evidence but also a contest between competing paradigms of knowledge. Despite the growing interaction between Western and Islamic scholarship, no consensus has yet emerged regarding the extent to which modern historical methods can be reconciled with the epistemological principles of classical hadith sciences.

Recent developments in hadith studies have witnessed attempts to bridge the divide between Western critical scholarship and the Islamic scholarly tradition. Harald Motzki, for example, introduced the *isnad-cum-matn* analysis method, which combines the examination of textual and transmission evidence to reassess the validity of Juynboll's assumptions. Through this approach, Motzki demonstrated that certain hadiths could indeed be traced back to the Prophet or the Companions with a relatively high degree of historical reliability (Motzki et al., 2010, pp. 50–91). These findings suggest that while the common link theory may be useful in identifying patterns of transmission, it cannot serve as the sole criterion for determining hadith authenticity.

Although Motzki's approach is often regarded as a mediating position between Orientalist criticism and the classical tradition, the present study deliberately focuses on G.H.A. Juynboll's common link theory. This choice is based on the methodological consideration that Juynboll's framework represents one of the most systematic and consistent expressions of sceptical historical criticism toward the *isnad*. By taking Juynboll as a representative of radical historical scepticism, this study seeks to rigorously evaluate the resilience of classical *sanad* criticism when confronted with assumptions that fundamentally question the authenticity of early transmission. Meanwhile, Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn* approach is employed as an evaluative tool to assess Juynboll's claims rather than as the primary object of comparison.

Against this background, this article aims to analyze the validity of hadith through a comparative examination of G.H.A. Juynboll's common link theory and the *sanad*

criticism methodology of classical *muhaddithun* in the context of a specific hadith case study. The study seeks to determine whether the common link theory is genuinely capable of undermining classical claims of hadith authenticity or whether it encounters methodological limitations when confronted with the comprehensive verification system developed by Muslim traditionists. By doing so, this research contributes to contemporary hadith studies by proposing a more dialogical framework between modern historical criticism and classical Islamic epistemology. Furthermore, it argues that the divergence between Juynboll and the *muhaddithun* lies not merely in the *sanad* data itself, but more fundamentally in their differing epistemological paradigms concerning the understanding of hadith transmission and historical authority.

## Discussion

### *Reassessing Hadith Authenticity: A Comparative Study of G.H.A. Juynboll's Common Link Theory and Classical Sanad Criticism*

Studies on the authenticity of hadith have occupied a prominent place in contemporary Islamic scholarship, particularly in response to the rise of Orientalist historical criticism concerning the origins and transmission of prophetic traditions (Sunu et al., 2025, pp. 860–862). Within the classical Islamic tradition, the validity of a hadith is established through a comprehensive examination of both the *sanad* (chain of transmission) and the *matn* (textual content), employing the disciplines of *mustalah al-hadith* and *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* to assess the continuity of transmission and the reliability of individual transmitters (Utami, 2025, pp. 39–41; Karina et al., 2025, pp. 83–88). These methodologies rest upon the epistemological assumption that the *isnad* constitutes an authentic and reliable mechanism through which the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad were preserved and transmitted across generations.

A markedly different perspective was introduced by G.H.A. Juynboll through his *common link* theory, which represents one of the most influential historical-critical approaches in modern hadith studies. According to Juynboll, most hadith traditions cannot be directly attributed to the Prophet but should instead be traced to a particular transmitter who served as the principal center for their dissemination (Juynboll, 2024). This transmitter, designated as the *common link*, is understood as the earliest historically

verifiable narrator from whom multiple transmission routes diverge. Earlier transmitters appearing in the isnad are viewed not as historically demonstrable agents but as retrospective constructions added to provide authority and legitimacy to the tradition. Consequently, the authenticity of a hadith is determined not by the formal continuity of the sanad, as maintained in classical scholarship, but by the historical traceability of the common-link transmitter (Yahya, 2024, pp. 101–103).

Juynboll's theory constitutes a systematic development of the pioneering work of Joseph Schacht, who formulated the theory of the “projected-back isnad.” Schacht argued that chains of transmission were retrospectively constructed in order to legitimize legal doctrines that emerged during the second century AH. Building upon this foundation, Juynboll combined isnad criticism with literary and historical analysis, reconstructing transmission networks through major canonical collections such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *Musnad Ahmad* (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 25–30). Through this reconstruction, he identified a pattern of narrator centralization during the period of the Tabi‘in and regarded these transmitters as the actual historical points from which numerous traditions originated and spread.

From Juynboll's perspective, historical authenticity is established not through the existence of an uninterrupted chain extending back to the Prophet but through the ability to identify the earliest transmitter whose existence and circle of students can be historically verified. When several transmission lines converge upon a single Tabi‘i narrator, that individual is considered the earliest historically reliable source of the tradition. Consequently, Juynboll rejects the assumption that such traditions necessarily originate from the Prophet, arguing that the historical evidence required to substantiate earlier stages of transmission is insufficient (Putri et al., 2022, pp. 64–66). In effect, his approach replaces the classical criteria of narrator reliability and memory with a philological-historical methodology centered on chronological traceability. Accordingly, the *common link* theory may be classified as a form of historical source criticism aimed at establishing authenticity through patterns of textual dissemination and historical emergence (Motzki et al., 2010, pp. 53–55).

Despite its contribution to the systematic reconstruction of transmission networks, Juynboll's theory has attracted considerable criticism from Muslim scholars.

Critics contend that his approach reduces hadith to a socio-literary phenomenon while neglecting the epistemological and spiritual dimensions embedded within the Islamic tradition of hadith transmission. They argue that continuity of transmission cannot be evaluated solely through written historical evidence, since early Muslim society relied extensively upon memorization and the established practices of *tahammul* and *ada' al-hadith*, which ensured the preservation and accurate transmission of prophetic traditions (Putri et al., 2022, pp. 59–70).

Another major criticism concerns the theory's limited ability to account for *mutawatir* traditions. Because the common-link model tends to reduce transmission to a single central figure, it encounters difficulties when applied to traditions transmitted through numerous independent channels. A prominent example is the hadith "*man kadhaba 'alayya muta'ammidan fal yatabawwa' maq'adahu min al-nar*" ("Whoever deliberately attributes a lie to me, let him prepare his seat in Hell"), which was transmitted by more than sixty Companions and has long been classified by Muslim scholars as *mutawatir* (al-'Asqalani, 2009, p. 101). In such cases, the identification of a single common-link transmitter becomes methodologically problematic, thereby revealing the limitations of the theory when confronted with traditions characterized by widespread and multiple channels of transmission.

The implications of the *common link* theory are therefore profound. If consistently applied, it shifts the criterion of hadith authenticity from a normative and theological framework to an empirical and historical one. Within Juynboll's paradigm, a *sahih* hadith is no longer defined primarily by an uninterrupted chain of trustworthy transmitters reaching the Prophet, but rather by the historical demonstrability of a common-link transmitter whose existence can be empirically established (Juynboll, 2024). Traditions lacking such identifiable nodes are consequently more likely to be regarded as products of later literary development.

The methodological tension between classical and modern approaches becomes particularly apparent when Juynboll's theory is compared with Harald Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn* analysis. Juynboll begins from a skeptical assumption that the *isnad* evolved retrospectively and concentrates primarily on reconstructing transmission networks in order to identify common links. His analysis emphasizes patterns of dissemination and

structural relationships among narrators, while textual variations within the *matn* occupy a secondary role.

Motzki, by contrast, does not presuppose that the *isnad* is necessarily a later construction. Instead, he analyzes the *sanad* and *matn* simultaneously to investigate textual consistency, editorial variation, and the chronological development of traditions. Through a comparative examination of early sources, he demonstrates that certain hadiths may indeed be traced back to the Prophet or the Companions with a relatively high degree of historical reliability (Motzki et al., 2010, pp. 50–91). Whereas Juynboll interprets the common-link transmitter as the point of origin of a tradition, Motzki understands such a figure primarily as a transmission node rather than necessarily its creator.

Ultimately, the differences between these approaches extend beyond methodological procedures and reflect deeper epistemological divergences. Juynboll adopts a reductive historical paradigm that privileges empirical verification as the principal criterion of authenticity, whereas Motzki represents a more moderate historical-critical approach that allows for the possibility of continuity in transmission reaching back to the earliest Muslim generations. This comparison suggests that historical analysis and classical hadith criticism need not be inherently contradictory. Rather, tensions arise when historical inquiry is accompanied by an a priori skepticism that denies the possibility of authentic early transmission. Consequently, the debate over hadith authenticity is not merely a dispute concerning transmission data, but a broader contest between competing epistemological paradigms regarding the nature of historical evidence, religious authority, and the preservation of prophetic tradition.

### *Revisiting G.H.A. Juynboll's Common Link Theory in the Problem of Authenticity of Hadith*

G.H.A. Juynboll's *common link* theory represents a refinement and systematic extension of the critical approach initially formulated by Joseph Schacht. Whereas Schacht argued that *isnads* were retrospectively projected to legitimize evolving legal doctrines during the second century AH, Juynboll sought to develop a more rigorous methodology for investigating the historical origins of hadith traditions through the

analysis of transmission patterns and the distribution of isnads (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 115–120).

According to Juynboll, each hadith can be examined by reconstructing its transmission network and mapping the relationships among narrators. Through this process, it becomes possible to identify the point at which multiple transmission lines converge upon a single narrator who subsequently transmitted the tradition to numerous students. This narrator, designated as the *common link*, constitutes the earliest historically verifiable stage in the dissemination of a hadith. Consequently, the common link marks the final chronological boundary that can be established through empirical investigation, whereas the upper segments of the isnad leading to the Companions and ultimately to the Prophet are regarded as later literary constructions introduced to provide religious authority and legitimacy (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 74–79).

Methodologically, the theory relies on comparative reconstruction. Researchers are required to collect all available versions of a particular hadith from various sources, including major compilations such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Musnad Ahmad*, and *Sunan Abi Dawud*, and then reconstruct both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the transmission network. Through this process, patterns of dissemination become visible. When all transmission routes converge upon a particular narrator without evidence of earlier parallel branches, that narrator is identified as the *common link* and is considered the earliest historically demonstrable transmitter of the tradition.

Juynboll illustrates this approach through the famous hadith on intention (*innama al-a'mal bi al-niyyat*) narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. In his reconstruction, the majority of transmission lines converge on Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari, whose students subsequently disseminated the tradition widely. Accordingly, Juynboll identifies Yahya as the *common link*, arguing that there is insufficient historical evidence to demonstrate the existence of independent transmission channels prior to his generation (Juynboll, 2024, p. 123).

This conclusion stands in marked contrast to the position of classical hadith scholars. Within the traditional framework, the hadith *innama al-a'mal bi al-niyyat* is universally regarded as authentic and occupies a foundational position in Islamic jurisprudence because its transmitters are considered trustworthy and its chain of

transmission is deemed uninterrupted (al-Bukhari, 1994). The divergence in these assessments highlights a fundamental methodological difference between classical sanad criticism and modern historical analysis. While the former emphasizes the integrity and reliability of transmitters within a continuous chain, the latter prioritizes historical verifiability and patterns of transmission.

Drawing upon Juynboll's principal works, particularly *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadith* and his article "Some Isnad-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Women-Demeaning Sayings from Hadith Literature," the methodological procedures for applying the *common link* theory may be summarized as follows:

1. Identification of the hadith to be studied.

The researcher must select specific hadith that has a sufficient number of *sanad* variants across various sources. This is important because the common link theory cannot be applied to hadiths with only a single strand.

2. Compilation of all textual variants and isnads.

All versions of hadiths from primary hadith collections were compiled, whether in their complete or partial forms. This data includes the names of the narrators, the sequence of *isnad*, and the text of the *matn*.

3. Mapping of *isnad* networks (*isnad* bundles).

Juynboll uses the term *isnad bundle* to refer to a collection of *isnad* chains leading to the same hadith. Through this mapping, the genealogical relationships among narrators can be observed (Juynboll 2024, p. 37–41).

4. Identification of the common link figure.

Once the network is established, the researcher identifies the narrator who serves as the meeting point of various transmission chains. This figure is considered the first widespread disseminator of the hadith.

5. Historical and chronological analysis.

The final step is to determine when the common link lived and whether it is historically plausible that he met with specific generations of the Companions or

the Tabi'in. If there is no strong historical evidence indicating an upward chain of transmission, then the hadith is considered not to be directly attributable to the Prophet Muhammad.

This model establishes the common link theory as a very powerful tool for historical reconstruction to assess the origins of hadith texts. However, the consequence is that many hadiths that have long been accepted as authentic by classical scholars are reduced to "products of the tabi'in period" in Juynboll's perspective.

As a simple illustration, we can compare two different chains of transmission:

1. The traditional chain of transmission (based on classical texts):

Prophet Muhammad → Umar ibn al-Khattab → 'Alqamah → Yahya ibn Sa'id → Malik ibn Anas → Bukhari.

This pattern illustrates a vertically continuous chain of transmission extending from the Prophet Muhammad through successive generations of transmitters to the compilers of hadith.

2. The chain of transmission according to Juynboll's reconstruction:

Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari → a number of students (Malik, Sufyan ats-Tsauri, Hammad ibn Zaid, and others) → 3rd-century AH hadith collectors

In Juynboll's reconstruction of the hadith *innama al-a'mal bi al-niyat*, Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Ansari is identified as the *common link*, since the available transmission data indicate that the hadith spread widely through his students. From a historical-critical perspective, the transmission segment above Yahya, extending through 'Alqamah ibn Waqqas to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and ultimately to the Prophet, cannot be empirically verified and is therefore regarded as a later literary projection intended to provide religious legitimacy for the tradition.

Underlying this approach is a form of statistical reasoning: the greater the number of transmission branches emerging from a particular narrator, the stronger the indication that this narrator represents the historical center of dissemination. As Juynboll argues, "where the tradition begins to spread, there the common link stands" (Juynboll, 2024b, p.

127). Accordingly, the common link marks the earliest stage of transmission that can be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of historical certainty.

Classical hadith scholars, however, arrived at the opposite conclusion. Authorities such as al-Nawawi (d. 676 AH) and Ibn al-Salah (d. 643 AH) maintained that the proliferation of students transmitting from a single trustworthy teacher strengthens rather than weakens the authenticity of a tradition (al-Naysaburi, 1997, p. 25). In the classical framework, the multiplication of transmission channels is considered evidence of preservation and reliability rather than an indication that the hadith originated with the transmitter in question.

This divergence reflects two distinct epistemological paradigms. Juynboll's approach is rooted in modern empirical historiography, which evaluates authenticity primarily through chronological reconstruction and historically verifiable evidence. By contrast, classical hadith scholarship is grounded in an epistemological framework that assesses authenticity through the continuity of transmission, the integrity and reliability of narrators, and the cumulative authority of scholarly verification. Consequently, the disagreement between these approaches concerns not merely the interpretation of *sanad* data but also the underlying assumptions regarding the nature of historical knowledge and religious authority.

Juynboll further argues that the discipline of *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil*, which evaluates the moral integrity and reliability of transmitters, cannot function as an independent historical criterion. In his view, biographical dictionaries of narrators were systematically compiled only during the third century AH, well after the period in which the transmissions themselves occurred. As a result, classifications such as *thiqah* (reliable) and *da'if* (weak) are regarded not as empirical historical judgments but as normative evaluations formulated within the hadith tradition itself (Juynboll, 2024).

The implications of this historical-critical approach are significant. For Juynboll, the authenticity of hadith cannot rest solely upon theological legitimacy or the authority of classical scholars; rather, it must be established through historical reconstruction based on empirically verifiable transmission data. The principal strength of the *common link* theory lies in its ability to systematically map transmission networks and identify central figures in the dissemination of traditions, thereby providing a transparent and replicable

framework for the study of hadith history. Nevertheless, its methodological limitations become apparent when the common link is interpreted as the originator of a tradition, without adequately considering the possibility of pre-codification oral transmission or the sophisticated mechanisms of internal criticism developed within the Islamic sciences of hadith.

This position contrasts sharply with that of classical scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, who regarded the *isnad* as an essential component of religion (*al-isnad min al-din*) and evaluated hadith authenticity through an integrated analysis of narrator reliability, continuity of transmission, and the detection of hidden defects (*‘illah*). From this perspective, the epistemology of hadith criticism is not exclusively historical but also normative and theological (Raffi’u et al., 2023, pp. 11–21).

Juynboll’s criticisms have elicited strong responses from contemporary Muslim scholars. Raffi’u, Arifin, and Dadah (2023, pp. 10–21), for example, argue that *al-jarh wa al-ta’dil* was not merely a retrospective construction but was based on direct observation of narrators’ character, memory, and scholarly conduct during their lifetimes. Moreover, they emphasize that the culture of memorization (*hifz*) characteristic of early Arab society enabled the accurate preservation and transmission of hadith long before the formal process of codification. Consequently, rejecting *al-jarh wa al-ta’dil* as historically unreliable would imply rejecting the oral epistemology that constituted a fundamental feature of early Islamic civilization.

From a methodological standpoint, therefore, the differences between classical sanad criticism and Juynboll’s *common link* theory extend beyond technical procedures to encompass competing conceptions of authenticity, authority, and the transmission of religious knowledge. These differences may be summarized in the following conceptual comparison:

Table 1. Conceptual

Analysis Aspects	Criticism of the Traditional Chain of Transmission	The Common Link Theory (Juynboll)
Epistemological Foundations	Transcendental-normative; based on the narrator’s honesty and memory	Empirical-historical; based on chronological traceability

Main Objective	Assessing the authenticity of the chain of transmission back to the Prophet	Identifying the first narrator who historically transmitted the hadith
Analysis Methods	<i>Al-jarh wa al-ta'dil</i> , the continuity of the chain of transmission, the consistency of the text	Mapping of isnad networks (isnad bundles), identification of common links
Theoretical Implications	Authentic hadith = unbroken in its chain of transmission and narrated by trustworthy narrators	Authentic hadith = can be verified as originating from a common source
Views on the Isnad	Evidence of spiritual and legal authenticity	Historically evolving literary constructions

The comparison presented above demonstrates that Juynboll's approach conceptualizes hadith primarily as a historical phenomenon that can be reconstructed through empirical and rational methods, rather than as a sacred body of revelation transmitted through an inherently authoritative chain. Consequently, the *common link* theory evaluates authenticity in historical rather than normative terms. Within this framework, the central question is not whether a hadith fulfills the theological and methodological criteria established by classical scholars, but rather whether its transmission can be historically verified through the reconstruction of isnad networks and the identification of a common-link transmitter. Thus, authenticity is understood as a matter of historical probability rather than religious authority.

To examine the implications of this approach, the present study employs a case-study method in selecting the hadith under investigation. The choice of the tradition is not arbitrary but is based on several methodological considerations. First, the selected hadith possesses a relatively extensive transmission network and is preserved in major canonical Sunni compilations, thereby providing sufficient material for comparative analysis. Second, its transmission structure exhibits indications of a *common link* pattern that can be investigated through isnad mapping. Third, the hadith has either been explicitly discussed or possesses the characteristics necessary to be examined within the framework of the *common link* theory developed by Western scholars. Finally, the selected tradition occupies a significant normative position within Islamic intellectual and

legal discourse, making debates concerning its authenticity relevant not only to historical reconstruction but also to broader epistemological questions regarding the authority and transmission of religious knowledge.

The analytical procedure is carried out through several interconnected stages. The first stage involves collecting and reconstructing all available transmission lines from the major hadith compilations in order to identify the existence of common links and possible partial common links within the transmission network. This step aims to reveal patterns of dissemination and to determine the earliest historically identifiable transmitters according to Juynboll's methodology.

The second stage consists of a comparative examination of textual variants (*matn*) in order to assess the degree of editorial consistency and to identify possible textual developments across different recensions. Such analysis is necessary to determine whether variations in wording indicate later literary modifications or merely reflect normal processes of transmission.

The third stage evaluates the transmission chains according to the principles of *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* and the criteria of authenticity established by classical *muhaddithun*. Particular attention is given to the reliability of narrators, the continuity of the sanad, and the presence or absence of hidden defects (*'illah*) and irregularities (*shudhudh*). This phase enables the selected hadith to be examined within the normative framework of traditional hadith criticism.

Finally, the results generated by these two methodological approaches are compared in order to assess the explanatory power and limitations of the *common link* theory. Through this comparison, the study seeks to determine whether Juynboll's historical reconstruction is capable of adequately explaining the complexity of hadith transmission or whether, by reducing the transmission process to the identification of a single disseminating figure, it risks oversimplifying the multidimensional nature of the hadith tradition. In this way, the study aims to contribute to contemporary hadith scholarship by fostering a more balanced dialogue between modern historical criticism and the epistemological principles of classical Islamic hadith sciences.

## Case Study of the Hadith “Prohibition of Lying in the Name of the Prophet” from the Perspective of the Common Link Theory

One hadith that is often used as a subject of study to test the common link theory is the hadith regarding the prohibition against lying in the name of the Prophet Muhammad. This hadith is very well known because it has many chains of transmission and is considered *mutawatir* by classical hadith scholars.

The text of the hadith in its commonly narrated version reads:

مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

Man kadhaba ‘alayya muta‘ammidan falyatabawwa’ maq‘adahu mina al-nār.

*Whoever deliberately lies about me, let him take his seat in the Fire (Hell). (Al-Bukhari, 1994)*

According to prominent hadith scholars such as Mahmud al-Tahhan and Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, the hadith “*man kadhaba ‘alayya muta‘ammidan falyatabawwa’ maq‘adahu mina al-nar*” (“Whoever deliberately attributes a lie to me, let him prepare his seat in the Fire”) was transmitted by more than seventy Companions, among them ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, Anas ibn Malik, Abu Hurairah, al-Mughirah ibn Shu‘bah, and ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas. The abundance of transmitters at every level of the sanad has led classical scholars to classify it as a *mutawatir lafzi* tradition, namely a hadith whose wording has been transmitted through numerous independent chains with essentially identical phrasing from the earliest generations onward (Baiquni, 2022, pp. 679–698).

Within the classical science of hadith criticism, this tradition occupies a particularly significant position, serving as one of the principal foundations for the authority and reliability of prophetic traditions. In *al-Kifayah fi ‘Ilm al-Riwayah*, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (p. 125) employed this hadith as an epistemological argument, maintaining that the severe warning against fabricating statements in the Prophet’s name demonstrates that hadith transmission rests upon the moral integrity and scholarly responsibility of the transmitters themselves. Accordingly, the existence of such a warning is regarded as evidence of the rigorous ethical standards underlying the transmission of prophetic traditions.

From the perspective of G.H.A. Juynboll, however, the claim that this tradition is *mutawatir* should be subjected to historical examination rather than accepted solely on theological grounds. Although the hadith appears in numerous major collections, Juynboll argues that a systematic reconstruction of its transmission network may reveal concentrations around certain key transmitters who functioned as common links in the dissemination of the tradition (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 92–95). Consequently, the historical question shifts from the number of narrators alone to the identification of those figures through whom the hadith achieved widespread circulation.

To assess the applicability of the *common link* theory to this tradition, it is therefore necessary to reconstruct the *isnad* network on the basis of the various versions preserved in the primary hadith sources. Such a reconstruction enables the identification of transmission patterns, the location of possible common links, and the extent to which Juynboll's historical analysis corresponds with or diverges from the conclusions reached by classical hadith scholars.

Here are some examples of the transmission chains for this hadith:

1. Sahih al-Bukhari narrates this hadith through the following chain of transmission:

Ali bin al-Madini → Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah → Zuhri → Anas bin Malik → the Prophet.

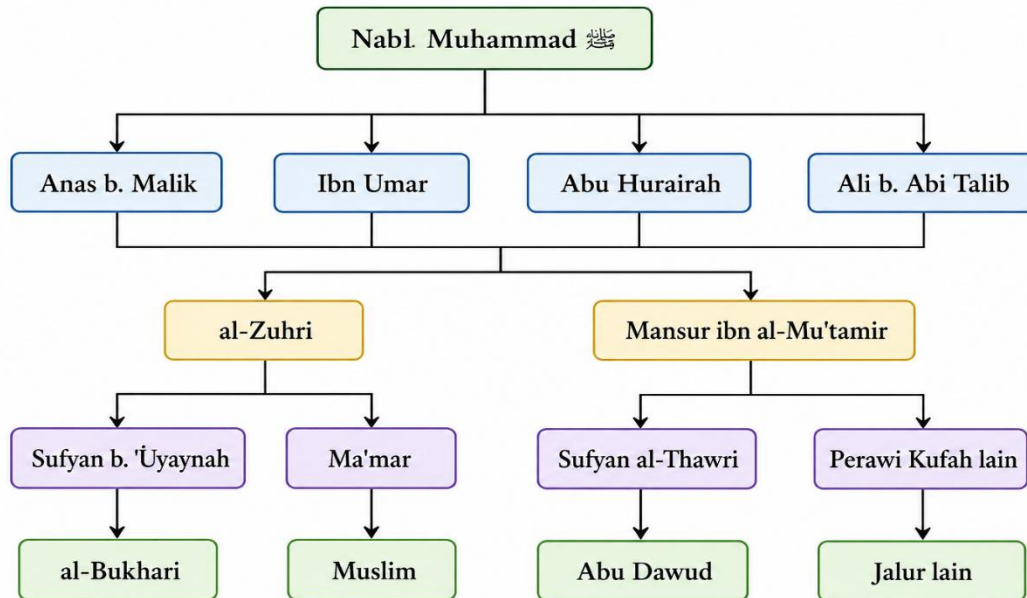
2. Sahih Muslim narrates it from:

Muhammad ibn Rafi' → 'Abdurrazzaq → Ma'mar → Zuhri → Salim bin Abdullah → Ibn Umar → the Prophet .

3. Sunan Abi Dawud through:

Ahmad ibn Hanbal → Sufyan ats-Tsauri → Mansur ibn al-Mu'tamir → Rib'i ibn Hirasy → 'Ali bin Abi Thalib → the Prophet.

Figure 1. Reconstruction of the Isnad Network of the Hadith Man Kadhaba 'Alayya Muta'ammidan Based on Major Transmission Lines.



The diagram illustrates the transmission patterns of the hadith “Whoever deliberately attributes a lie to me, let him prepare his seat in Hell,” beginning with the Prophet Muhammad and continuing through several Companions, including Anas ibn Malik, Ibn Umar, Abu Hurairah, and ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. The network subsequently converges on prominent transmitters such as al-Zuhri and Mansur ibn al-Mu‘tamir, from whom the tradition spread through their students and was ultimately recorded in the canonical hadith collections. This reconstruction provides a basis for identifying possible common links and analyzing the transmission structure in light of Juynboll’s common link theory.

According to Juynboll’s analysis, the convergence of numerous transmission lines upon figures such as al-Zuhri and Mansur ibn al-Mu‘tamir indicates the presence of common links within the isnad network (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 134–136). In his reconstruction, al-Zuhri occupies a pivotal position in the dissemination of hadith during the second century AH. Juynboll regards him not merely as a transmitter but as one of the earliest collectors and systematizers whose activity laid the foundations for subsequent transmission through Imam Malik and later generations of scholars. Consequently, al-

Zuhri functions as a common link for many traditions that eventually entered the canonical collections.

With regard to the hadith prohibiting fabrication against the Prophet—*man kadhaba ‘alayya muta‘ammidan falyatabawwa’ maq‘adahu mina al-nar*—Juynboll argues that the various lines of transmission attributed to Companions such as Anas ibn Malik, Ibn ‘Abbas, and Abu Hurairah ultimately converge upon transmitters belonging to the generation of the *tabi‘ al-tabi‘in*, particularly al-Zuhri and Mansur ibn al-Mu‘tamir. From a historical-critical perspective, therefore, the existence of the tradition can only be established with certainty from the period of these transmitters onward rather than from the Prophet’s lifetime itself. Accordingly, the hadith is considered historically authentic insofar as it demonstrably circulated within the early Muslim community, although its attribution to the Prophet cannot be empirically verified beyond the level of the common link.

Within the framework of the common link theory, authenticity is understood primarily in historical rather than normative terms. Juynboll distinguishes between theological authenticity—namely, the belief that a tradition originated with the Prophet—and historical authenticity, which refers to traditions whose emergence can be reconstructed through identifiable transmitters and transmission networks. In this context, he suggests that traditions warning against fabricating statements in the Prophet’s name may reflect the growing religious consciousness of the Muslim community toward the end of the first century AH, when concerns regarding forged reports became increasingly prominent (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 90–96). Such traditions are thus interpreted as socio-religious responses to the phenomenon of fabrication within political and sectarian circles rather than as direct prophetic utterances.

Similar conclusions are found in the observations of Putri et al. (2022, pp. 59–70), who argue that traditions aimed at safeguarding religious authority frequently emerged alongside the development of Islamic legal institutions. Within this framework, the hadith prohibiting fabrication can be viewed as a form of counter-discourse intended to preserve the integrity of prophetic authority against the spread of spurious traditions.

Nevertheless, these conclusions differ significantly from the findings of contemporary Muslim scholarship. Sahid and Dadah (2025, pp. 10–26), for example,

demonstrate that al-Zuhri maintained direct scholarly connections with senior authorities such as Anas ibn Malik and Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyab. Consequently, al-Zuhri’s role as a common link should not necessarily imply that he originated the tradition; rather, he may have functioned as the principal transmitter who preserved and systematized oral traditions already circulating among the Companions. This interpretation is reinforced by Harald Motzki’s *isnad-cum-matn* analysis, which reveals a remarkable degree of textual consistency among the earliest versions of the hadith and suggests that the tradition was already established during the Companion period (Motzki et al., 2010, pp. 50–91). Such findings challenge Juynboll’s assumption that the tradition emerged only in the second century AH.

These differing conclusions reflect a deeper epistemological divergence regarding the nature of hadith authenticity. In the classical Islamic tradition, authenticity is determined through an integrated evaluation of both *sanad* and *matn*. Authorities such as al-Khatib al-Baghdadi and Ibn al-Salah maintained that a hadith is considered *sahih* when it fulfills five conditions: continuity of transmission (*ittisal al-sanad*), moral uprightness of the transmitters (*‘adalah*), precision and reliability of memory (*dabt*), freedom from irregularity (*shudhudh*), and absence of hidden defects (*‘illah qadihah*) (Pratiwi et al., 2024, pp. 82–92). Within this framework, the *isnad* is not merely a historical record but a manifestation of religious responsibility linking each transmitter to the Prophet through moral integrity and scholarly accountability.

By contrast, Orientalist scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, and later G.H.A. Juynboll regarded *isnads* primarily as mechanisms of retrospective legitimation. Juynboll’s common link theory therefore seeks to establish what may be termed “historical authenticity” rather than the normative authenticity recognized by classical scholars. A tradition is considered historically authentic only insofar as it can be traced to a verifiable common-link transmitter whose existence is demonstrable within a specific chronological setting. Consequently, the greater the chronological distance between the common link and the Prophet, the weaker the historical certainty of the tradition (Juynboll, 2024, pp. 88–94).

The epistemological implications of this approach are profound. By reducing authenticity to historical traceability, the spiritual and normative dimensions of hadith

become subordinated to empirical criteria. In this positivistic framework, truth is determined primarily through documentary and chronological verification rather than through the continuity of religious authority. As a result, hadith are interpreted less as vehicles of prophetic revelation and more as products of social and intellectual developments within particular historical contexts. Authority shifts from the Prophet as the ultimate source of guidance to the community of transmitters as the constructors of meaning. The *isnad*, therefore, ceases to function as a spiritual guarantee of transmission and becomes merely an indicator of textual dissemination.

Despite these criticisms, contemporary scholarship has highlighted both the strengths and limitations of Juynboll's theory. Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn* analysis demonstrates that not all traditions identified by Juynboll as post-prophetic constructions can be reduced to later fabrications. Yahya (2024) further argues that Juynboll tends to underestimate the importance of oral transmission and the mechanisms by which pre-codification Arab society preserved knowledge. Likewise, Putri et al. (2022) point to documentary evidence such as the *Sahifah* of Hammam ibn Munabbih as proof that written transmission existed much earlier than Juynboll assumed. Nadhiran (2021) therefore concludes that while the common link theory possesses considerable value for historical reconstruction, it should function as an analytical instrument rather than as an exclusive criterion for determining hadith authenticity.

From this comparison, it becomes evident that the common link theory offers an important contribution to the historical study of hadith but remains insufficient to replace the classical conception of authenticity. Juynboll's approach provides a sophisticated framework for reconstructing patterns of transmission, yet its emphasis on empirical verification tends to overlook the epistemological foundations upon which the Islamic tradition of hadith criticism is built. In Islamic epistemology, hadith are not merely historical documents but constitute part of the transmission of prophetic knowledge. Consequently, the validity of hadith cannot be reduced solely to chronological traceability but must also be understood in relation to the continuity of scholarly authority, the integrity of transmitters, and the normative framework of revelation.

Accordingly, the common link theory should be regarded as a supplementary tool of historical criticism rather than as a definitive standard for determining the authenticity

of hadith. Its greatest contribution lies not in negating the authority of prophetic traditions but in refining their historical analysis and encouraging greater methodological rigor. Properly employed, Juynboll's approach need not be viewed as a theological adversary to the classical sciences of hadith; instead, it can serve as a critical partner that enriches contemporary hadith studies by fostering a balanced dialogue between empirical historical inquiry and the epistemological principles of the Islamic tradition.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, G.H.A. Juynboll's common link theory offers a significant contribution to contemporary hadith studies by providing a systematic framework for reconstructing the historical development of hadith transmission through chronological and network analysis of isnads. Nevertheless, the theory cannot function as an exclusive criterion for determining hadith authenticity, since its emphasis on empirical and historical verifiability tends to overlook the epistemological, theological, and spiritual foundations that underpin the classical sciences of hadith. By incorporating Harald Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn* approach, this study demonstrates that the combined analysis of *sanad* and *matn* provides a more comprehensive understanding of transmission history and reveals that certain traditions previously assumed to have originated during the Tabi'īn period may, in fact, exhibit continuity extending back to the generation of the Companions. Accordingly, the common link theory is more appropriately understood as a complementary instrument of historical criticism rather than a substitute for the classical methodology of *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil*. The principal academic contribution of this research lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between Western historical criticism and the epistemological framework of classical Islamic scholarship, thereby promoting a more balanced and integrative paradigm for contemporary hadith studies. However, the scope of the present study remains limited to a selected corpus of traditions and relies primarily on bibliographical analysis; consequently, its findings cannot yet be generalized to the entire hadith tradition. Future research should therefore expand the range of hadith examined and integrate historical, philological, manuscript-based, and digital network approaches in order to develop a more comprehensive methodology for investigating the transmission and authenticity of prophetic traditions.

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