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Detecting ‘Ilal al-Matn in the Tradition of Hadith Criticism: Methods and Practices of Classical Muhaddithun

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This study examines the concept of *‘Ilal al-Matn* (hidden defects in hadith texts) and the methods employed by classical *muhaddithun* to identify them. The research addresses the tendency in some modern approaches to associate hadith criticism primarily with sanad evaluation, overlooking the internal textual criticism embedded in classical hadith scholarship. Employing a qualitative library-based method, this study conducts a descriptive-critical analysis of ‘Aisyah Gharabli’s article, *‘Ilal al-Matn ‘inda al-Muhaddithin wa Turuq al-Kashf ‘Anha*, alongside relevant classical works on hadith sciences cited therein. The findings reveal that textual defects may manifest in various forms, including problematic solitary transmissions, additions by reliable narrators (*ziyadat al-thiqah*), interpolation (*idraj*), textual disturbance (*idtirab*), anomalous and objectionable reports (*syudzudz* and *nakarah*), textual inversion (*qalb*), and scribal or transmission errors (*tashif*). Such defects may also be identified through inconsistencies with definitive Qur'anic principles, stronger hadith reports, established consensus, reliable historical facts, linguistic conventions, and sound rational principles. Classical *muhaddithun* employed several interconnected procedures to uncover these defects, including comparing variant narrations, collecting transmission routes, examining textual variations, identifying points of divergence, evaluating narrator reliability, and verifying reports against stronger textual, historical, and linguistic evidence. This study argues that matn criticism constitutes an integral component of classical hadith methodology rather than a secondary complement to sanad criticism. It further highlights the methodological relevance of classical approaches for contemporary hadith criticism, particularly in maintaining a systematic and evidence-based hierarchy of evaluation.

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1. Introduction

Hadith criticism constitutes a fundamental dimension of Islamic scholarship that extends beyond the examination of sanad continuity and narrator reliability. Classical hadith scholars (*muhaddithun*) developed sophisticated approaches to evaluating transmitted reports by examining not only the reliability of their chains of transmission but also the textual integrity of their contents. Such examination involved comparing variant narrations, identifying textual inconsistencies, assessing the accuracy of wording, and investigating discrepancies that could indicate hidden defects within a report. Within this tradition, the concept of *'illah* refers to a subtle and concealed defect that may undermine the authenticity or reliability of a hadith, even when its apparent characteristics suggest that it is sound. Identifying such defects requires extensive knowledge of transmission patterns, narrator performance, and the relationships among different versions of a narration. Consequently, hadith criticism cannot be reduced to a formal assessment of transmission chains, as it also involves a complex process of textual evaluation and evidentiary comparison.

The examination of *'Ilal al-Matn* represents an important yet methodologically demanding dimension of classical hadith criticism. The term *matn* refers to the textual content of a hadith that constitutes the endpoint of its chain of transmission. In this context, *'Ilal al-Matn* refers to concealed defects associated with the wording, structure, meaning, or transmission of the textual content of a narration. Such defects may become apparent when different versions of a hadith are compared or when a particular wording is examined against stronger transmitted evidence. Nevertheless, the distinction between *sanad* and *matn* should be understood analytically rather than as an absolute separation. A defect originating in the chain of transmission may produce textual discrepancies, while an anomaly in the wording may also reveal weaknesses in the transmission process. Therefore, examining textual defects requires an integrated understanding of transmission reliability and textual integrity.

In classical hadith scholarship, textual defects may manifest in several forms, including problematic solitary transmissions (*tafarrud*), disputed additions by reliable narrators (*ziyadat al-thiqah*), interpolation (*idraj*), textual inconsistency (*idtirab*), anomalous transmission (*syudzudz*), objectionable narration (*nakarah*), textual inversion (*qalb*), and transmission or transcription errors (*tashif*). These categories are discussed in classical hadith literature, particularly in the works of Ibn Abi Hatim, al-Daraqutni, and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj. However, these phenomena cannot automatically be classified as defects without considering the circumstances of transmission.

Tafarrud, for example, does not necessarily indicate weakness, since a reliable narrator may transmit a report independently. Similarly, *ziyadat al-thiqah* cannot be accepted or rejected categorically. Its evaluation depends on the narrator's precision, the nature of the additional wording, and its relationship with other available transmission variants. This demonstrates that identifying *'illah* requires contextual examination and comparative evaluation rather than applying predetermined classifications mechanically.

Other indicators of textual defects may involve apparent contradictions with definitive Qur'anic principles, stronger hadith reports, established scholarly consensus, reliable historical facts, linguistic conventions, or principles of sound reasoning. Nevertheless, such apparent contradictions must be evaluated carefully. They do not automatically establish the existence of a textual defect. Their significance depends on the certainty of the competing evidence, the possibility of contextual interpretation or reconciliation, and the methodological principles governing hadith evaluation. The identification of textual defects therefore involves several interconnected dimensions, including transmission analysis, textual comparison, linguistic examination, and contextual verification.

The conceptual foundations of *'illah* have been discussed extensively in classical hadith scholarship. Ibn al-Salah, in his *Muqaddimah*, emphasizes the complexity of identifying concealed defects, which requires extensive memorization, comprehensive knowledge of narrations, and the ability to recognize subtle differences among transmission variants. Al-Nawawi and subsequent scholars similarly recognize the specialized nature of *'ilal* analysis. More specific methodological insights can be found in Ibn Abi Hatim's *'Ilal al-Hadith*, al-Daraqutni's *al-'Ilal al-Waridah fi al-Ahadith al-Nabawiyyah*, and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj's *al-Tamyiz*. These works demonstrate that identifying defects is closely connected to comparing transmission routes, examining variations in wording, assessing narrator precision, and determining the relative strength of competing reports. In contemporary scholarship, 'Aisyah Gharabli's study, *'Ilal al-Matn 'inda al-Muhaddithin wa Turuq al-Kashf 'Anha*, provides a relevant discussion of the forms of textual defects and the methods through which classical hadith scholars identified them.

Despite these contributions, the methodological relationship between identifying textual anomalies, comparing transmission variants, and establishing the evidentiary grounds for evaluating defective narrations requires further systematic examination. Previous discussions have addressed the conceptual foundations and classifications of *'Ilal al-Matn*, but the analytical procedures through which classical hadith scholars moved from identifying an anomaly to establishing its methodological significance have not always been presented as an integrated framework. Furthermore, the relationship between transmission reliability, textual variations, and external evidence requires closer examination to understand how classical scholars distinguished genuine defects from acceptable differences in narration. This study addresses these issues by reconstructing the interconnected procedures through which classical *muhaddithun* identified, verified, and evaluated hidden defects in hadith texts.

The analytical framework of this study is based on comparative narration analysis and evidentiary evaluation. First, textual anomalies are identified through the examination of different versions of a narration, including variations in wording, additions, omissions, and attribution. Second, the transmission routes and the reliability of the narrators are examined to determine the origins and significance of these discrepancies. Third, textual variations are evaluated against stronger transmitted reports and other relevant evidence, including linguistic, historical, and contextual considerations. These procedures are interconnected and should not be treated as isolated criteria. The identification of a potential defect constitutes an initial stage rather than a final judgment. A methodological evaluation requires tracing the source of the discrepancy, examining its relationship with other transmission variants, assessing the reliability of the transmitters, and determining whether the available evidence supports the existence of a genuine defect. This approach positions classical matn criticism as a systematic process of identification, comparative verification, evidentiary assessment, and methodological judgment.

A methodological challenge in contemporary hadith studies concerns the tendency to approach *matn* criticism primarily through rational evaluations of textual content. Although contextual, historical, linguistic, and rational considerations are relevant to hadith evaluation, applying them without adequate attention to the principles of classical transmission criticism may lead to subjective judgments. Classical *muhaddithun* did not reject a narration merely because its content appeared unfamiliar or inconsistent with an individual reader's understanding. Instead, they examined the report within its broader transmission context, compared its different versions, identified the source of discrepancies, and evaluated the strength of the evidence supporting each variant.

Reconsidering these methodological principles is therefore important not to reproduce classical procedures mechanically, but to understand their epistemological foundations and assess their relevance to contemporary hadith scholarship. Based on this background, the study addresses three research questions. First, how did classical *muhaddithun* conceptualize *'Ilal al-Matn* and distinguish textual defects from acceptable variations in narration? Second, what indicators and comparative procedures did they employ to identify and verify defects in hadith texts? Third, how can the methodological principles underlying classical matn criticism contribute to the development of contemporary hadith studies? By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide a systematic understanding of textual defect detection as an integral component of classical hadith methodology and to clarify its continuing relevance to contemporary hadith criticism.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research to examine the conceptual and methodological dimensions of *'Ilal al-Matn* in classical hadith scholarship. The primary source is the Arabic article *'Ilal al-Matn 'inda al-Muhaddithin wa Turuq al-Kashf 'Anha* by 'Aisyah Gharabli. The article is examined analytically to identify its conceptual definitions, classifications of textual defects, procedures for detecting such defects, illustrative applications, and references to classical hadith literature. Supporting sources are limited to the works explicitly cited in the primary article, including those of Ibn al-Salah, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, al-Suyuti, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, and al-Sakhawi, as well as relevant hadith collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim. These sources provide the classical scholarly context for understanding the concepts and methodological principles discussed in the primary text.

Data analysis is conducted through four interconnected stages. First, conceptual reduction is undertaken by distinguishing the definitions of *'illah* and *matn* from the various forms of textual defects identified in the literature. Second, methodological categorization is performed by grouping the procedures for detecting defects according to their evidentiary references, including the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, transmission routes, scholarly consensus (*ijma'*), historical evidence, linguistic principles, and rational considerations. Third, procedural reconstruction is carried out by organizing the identified methods into a sequence of analytical operations, beginning with the collection of relevant narrations and proceeding through textual comparison, identification of discrepancies, and determination of potential defects. Fourth, critical interpretation is employed to assess the methodological implications of these procedures and their relevance to contemporary hadith studies.

The scope of this research is primarily methodological and conceptual. It does not seek to independently conduct a comprehensive *takhrij* or re-evaluate the authenticity of every hadith example discussed in the primary article. Rather, it reconstructs and critically examines the methodological logic presented in the selected literature, particularly the relationship between textual defect identification, comparative narration analysis, and evidentiary evaluation. Accordingly, the findings are intended to provide an analytical account of the methods used to identify *'Ilal al-Matn*, rather than an independent authentication of the individual narrations examined in the referenced works.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Identifying 'Ilal al-Matn through Comparison with the Qur'an

The findings indicate that comparison with the Qur'an constitutes one of the methods employed in classical hadith criticism to identify potential defects in hadith texts. This method involves examining a hadith's content against Qur'anic verses whose meanings and legal implications are definitive. The underlying principle is not that every apparent difference between a hadith and the Qur'an indicates a defect. Rather, a narration requires further examination when an irreconcilable contradiction appears to exist between the two sources. This approach reflects an understanding of hadith interpretation within a broader hierarchy of Islamic textual evidence.

The discussion presented by Gharabli illustrates this practice through the evaluation attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab concerning a narration understood to conflict with Qur'anic provisions regarding maintenance and accommodation for divorced women. The example demonstrates that the evaluation of a hadith text may involve examining its consistency with established Qur'anic legal principles. Accordingly, the textual content of a narration is not interpreted independently of other authoritative sources but is assessed within the broader normative structure of Islamic teachings.

Nevertheless, this method requires careful consideration of interpretative possibilities. An apparent contradiction may arise from differences in context, specification (*takhsis*), qualification (*taqyid*), or the circumstances surrounding the narration. Therefore, a genuine textual problem can only be established when the two texts address substantially the same issue, the contradiction cannot reasonably be reconciled, and the comparative evidence possesses a sufficiently authoritative status. This finding suggests that Qur'anic comparison functions as a controlled method of verification rather than an unrestricted basis for rejecting hadith reports.

3.2. Comparative Narration Analysis and the Collection of Transmission Routes

A second major finding concerns the importance of comparing different narrations dealing with the same subject. The collection of multiple transmission routes enables researchers to identify dominant textual formulations, isolated additions, changes in sentence structure, errors in names, and possible insertions originating from narrators' explanations. Such comparison is essential because a concealed defect may remain undetected when a narration is examined through only one transmission route.

Comparative analysis also provides a methodological basis for distinguishing acceptable textual variations from potentially defective transmissions. Differences in wording do not necessarily indicate an error, particularly when they can be explained through transmission according to meaning (*riwayah bi al-ma'na*) without altering the essential content. Conversely, an additional expression may raise concerns when it is transmitted through a narrator whose precision is comparatively weaker and when the addition changes the principal meaning or legal implications of the narration.

The evaluation of *ziyadat al-thiqah* illustrates this methodological complexity. The reliability of a narrator is an important consideration, but it does not independently determine whether an additional expression should be accepted. The researcher must examine the narrator's comparative standing, the characteristics of the additional wording, and its relationship with other transmission variants. Thus, comparative narration analysis demonstrates that the assessment of *matn* is closely interconnected with the examination of *sanad*. The textual variation becomes meaningful when its transmission context is established.

3.3. Determining the Point of Divergence and Identifying the Source of Error

After collecting the available transmission routes, the next methodological step involves identifying the central point of transmission (*madar al-hadith*) and determining where discrepancies first emerge. This procedure requires examining the relationships among transmitters, similarities in names and wording, possible transmission errors (*wahm*), and the connections between teachers and students. The identification of a textual discrepancy alone is insufficient to establish a defect. Researchers must determine which transmitter introduced the variation and assess the reliability of that transmitter in comparison with others who transmitted the same report.

This procedure illustrates the analytical precision characteristic of classical *'ilal* scholarship. Hadith evaluation does not always end with a general classification of a narrator as reliable or weak. A narrator may be considered trustworthy overall while still making an identifiable error in a particular narration. Consequently, the assessment of individual transmission performance must be distinguished from the general evaluation of a narrator's reliability.

The distinction has important implications for the methodology of hadith criticism. Reliability is not an absolute guarantee against occasional mistakes, and identifying an error in one narration does not automatically invalidate all transmissions from the same narrator. Instead, the evaluation focuses on the specific report, the nature of the discrepancy, and the comparative strength of the available evidence. This approach allows classical hadith scholars to identify the precise location of a defect without making excessive generalizations about individual transmitters.

3.4. Verification through Consensus, Historical Evidence, Language, and Reason

The findings further indicate that the identification of textual defects may involve examining a narration against established scholarly consensus (*ijma'*), reliable historical facts, Arabic linguistic conventions, and principles of sound reasoning. These forms of verification provide additional evidentiary dimensions for assessing the consistency and plausibility of transmitted texts. However, their application depends on the certainty and reliability of the evidence used.

First, contradiction with definitive consensus may constitute an important indicator when a narration appears incompatible with an established and indisputable scholarly agreement. This criterion must be distinguished from majority opinion or claims of consensus that remain subject to scholarly disagreement. Only consensus established with sufficient certainty can serve as a strong basis for evaluating an apparent textual contradiction.

Second, historical verification becomes relevant when a narration contains information concerning chronology, individuals, places, or events that can be examined against established historical circumstances. Gharabli discusses a narration concerning the event of Isra whose historical placement raises questions when compared with an established chronological framework. The methodological significance of this example lies in the use of historical consistency as a means of identifying potential textual or transmission anomalies. Nevertheless, historical evidence should not automatically override hadith transmission. Both the historical claim and the narration require critical assessment before a conclusion can be established.

Third, linguistic examination functions as a means of identifying possible textual distortions and inconsistencies. Considering the recognized eloquence of the Prophet, expressions that appear fundamentally incompatible with established Arabic linguistic conventions may require further investigation. However, this assessment must account for transmission according to meaning, linguistic variation, and the possibility of differences in expression. A linguistic anomaly should therefore be established through careful analysis rather than an isolated grammatical judgment.

Fourth, rational evaluation provides another instrument for identifying reports that appear to contain impossible or internally contradictory content. The use of reason, however, is limited to principles regarded as certain rather than assumptions based on contemporary preferences or incomplete knowledge. A narration describing an extraordinary event or miracle cannot be rejected merely because it exceeds ordinary human experience. This distinction demonstrates that classical hadith criticism recognizes the role of reason while maintaining methodological boundaries concerning its application.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that textual verification involves several complementary forms of evidence. Qur'anic principles, stronger hadith reports, consensus, historical circumstances, linguistic conventions, and rational considerations contribute to the evaluation of a narration according to their respective epistemological status. No single criterion should be applied independently of its context and evidentiary strength.

3.5. Matn Criticism as an Internal Method of Classical Hadith Scholarship

The findings demonstrate that *matn* criticism is not an external methodological addition to classical hadith scholarship. Rather, it is embedded in the practices of the *muhaddithun* through the collection of transmission routes, comparison of textual formulations, examination of contradictory reports, evaluation against stronger evidence, and identification of narrator errors. Although many of these procedures require detailed examination of the *sanad*, this does not mean that the textual dimension is neglected. On the contrary, the transmission chain provides essential information for explaining the emergence and distribution of textual variations.

From an epistemological perspective, classical matn criticism relies on the accumulation of interconnected indicators. A single characteristic rarely constitutes sufficient evidence for establishing a concealed defect. *Tafarrud*, for example, becomes problematic when accompanied by weaknesses in comparative transmission reliability or contradiction with stronger reports. Similarly, linguistic variation constitutes a potential defect only when it cannot reasonably be explained through transmission according to meaning or other acceptable linguistic considerations. Historical inconsistency becomes relevant when the historical evidence is sufficiently established and directly concerns the narration under examination.

This pattern reveals that classical hadith criticism operates through a structured evaluation of evidence rather than through isolated judgments. The identification of a defect involves examining the relationship between different sources of information, determining their relative reliability, and assessing whether the available evidence supports the conclusion that a particular transmission contains an error. Consequently, the methodological strength of *'ilal* analysis lies in its capacity to integrate multiple indicators into a coherent process of verification.

3.6. The Interrelationship between Sanad and Matn Criticism

One important implication of the findings is that the relationship between *sanad* and *matn* should not be understood through a rigid separation. In many cases, defects in textual content become identifiable through the examination of transmission routes. *Idraj*, for instance, may be detected when certain transmission variants separate explanatory statements that appear integrated into other versions. *Qalb* may become apparent through differences in the arrangement of names or expressions across transmission branches. Likewise, the evaluation of *ziyadat al-thiqah* requires comparing the reliability of transmitters and the relative strength of their respective transmission routes.

The relationship also operates in the opposite direction. An anomaly in textual meaning may encourage researchers to re-examine the transmission chain to identify the possible source of the variation. Thus, *sanad* analysis provides information about the origin of textual discrepancies, while *matn* analysis helps identify the possible consequences of transmission errors.

This interrelationship suggests that the two dimensions function as mutually reinforcing components of hadith criticism. Evaluating the chain without examining relevant textual discrepancies may leave certain defects undetected. Conversely, examining textual content without considering its transmission context may lead to conclusions that are insufficiently supported by the available evidence. An integrated approach is therefore necessary to understand how classical *muhaddithun* evaluated the authenticity and reliability of transmitted reports.

3.7. The Epistemological Boundaries of Reason in Matn Criticism

The role of reason in classical matn criticism deserves particular attention because it is closely related to contemporary debates concerning the rational acceptability of hadith reports. The findings indicate that reason was not positioned as an unrestricted authority over transmitted narrations. Instead, it functioned as an instrument for identifying demonstrable impossibilities, contradictions, and inconsistencies that could be established through sufficiently certain premises.

This distinction is important because rejecting a narration simply because its content appears unreasonable to an individual reader does not constitute a methodologically sufficient argument. Such a judgment must clarify the premises upon which it is based, the epistemological certainty of the knowledge involved, and the possibility of alternative interpretations. Without these considerations, rational evaluation risks becoming an expression of subjective preference rather than a disciplined process of scholarly verification.

At the same time, excluding rational considerations entirely would also be inconsistent with the analytical practices described in classical hadith scholarship. Reason plays a role in evaluating chronology, assessing the possibility of transmission relationships, examining textual coherence, and considering the implications of competing reports. The methodological issue, therefore, is not whether reason should be employed, but how its application can be justified and controlled through established principles of evidence. Rational evaluation becomes methodologically meaningful when its premises are sufficiently certain and its conclusions remain consistent with the broader framework of hadith criticism.

3.8. Relevance of Classical Matn Criticism to Contemporary Hadith Studies

The methodological principles identified in classical hadith scholarship remain relevant to contemporary research, particularly in the context of digital access to hadith collections and the development of interdisciplinary approaches. Digital databases and search technologies can facilitate the collection of multiple narrations, comparison of textual variants, and mapping of transmission networks. These tools may improve the efficiency of preliminary research, but they cannot independently determine whether a textual difference represents *idraj*, transmission according to meaning, or an actual transmission error.

The identification of concealed defects still requires scholarly competence in hadith terminology, narrator evaluation, Arabic philology, and the interpretation of transmission contexts. Technology should therefore be understood as an instrument that supports the collection and organization of evidence rather than a substitute for methodological judgment. The distinction is particularly important because the availability of large quantities of digital data does not automatically guarantee the accuracy of their classification or interpretation.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches involving history, linguistics, anthropology, and manuscript studies can enrich contemporary matn criticism. Historical analysis may help examine chronology and contextual claims, while linguistic research can clarify textual structures and possible transmission distortions. Manuscript studies may also contribute to the examination of textual transmission and variations. Nevertheless, each discipline has its own evidentiary limitations and levels of certainty. Their integration should strengthen the analysis through converging evidence rather than establish any single discipline as the exclusive authority for evaluating hadith.

Accordingly, the relevance of classical matn criticism lies in its methodological discipline, particularly its emphasis on comprehensive data collection, comparative evaluation, and the careful assessment of evidentiary strength. Contemporary research can develop these principles through modern analytical tools while maintaining the critical standards established in the classical tradition.

3.9. A Procedural Model for Detecting 'Ilal al-Matn

Based on the preceding findings, this study reconstructs a procedural model for detecting *'Ilal al-Matn* through seven interconnected analytical stages. The model synthesizes the methods identified in the primary source and organizes them into a systematic sequence of examination.

The first stage involves collecting the available transmission routes and textual variants of the narration. This stage establishes the comparative basis for identifying possible discrepancies. The second stage examines the reliability of transmitters and the continuity of transmission routes to determine the relative strength of the available versions. The third stage identifies the central point of transmission (*madar al-hadith*) and traces the earliest occurrence of textual differences across the transmission branches.

The fourth stage classifies the identified variations according to their characteristics, including additions, omissions, changes in textual arrangement, interpolations, contradictions, and contextual inconsistencies. The fifth stage compares the textual content with stronger hadith reports, definitive Qur'anic principles, and established consensus where relevant. The sixth stage examines historical, linguistic, and rational considerations when these dimensions are directly relevant to the narration. Finally, the seventh stage formulates a methodological judgment by determining whether the available evidence supports acceptance of a particular variant, preference for a stronger transmission (*tarjih*), suspension of judgment (*tawaqquf*), or identification of a genuine defect.

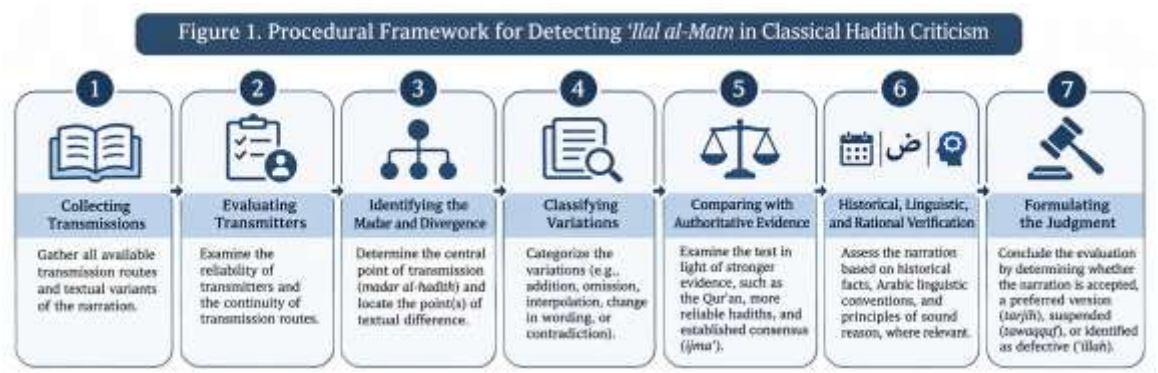
The following table summarizes the reconstructed model.

Table 1. Procedural Model for Detecting 'Ilal al-Matn

Stage	Analytical procedure	Primary objective
1	Collection of transmission routes and textual variants	Establish comprehensive comparative data
2	Evaluation of transmitters and transmission continuity	Determine the relative reliability of narrations
3	Identification of *madar al-hadith* and points of divergence	Locate the origin of textual discrepancies
4	Classification of textual variations	Identify the characteristics of potential defects
5	Comparison with authoritative textual evidence	Examine consistency with stronger sources
6	Historical, linguistic, and rational verification	Assess contextual and substantive plausibility
7	Formulation of methodological judgment	Determine the status of the identified variation

The model illustrates that detecting *'illah* is not a single-stage activity but a cumulative process of examination. The initial identification of a textual anomaly does not immediately establish the existence of a defect. Instead, the researcher must trace the source of the discrepancy, evaluate the reliability of the relevant transmitters, and examine the available evidence before formulating a conclusion. The final judgment should therefore be accompanied by an explanation of the evidence and reasoning that support it.

1. The reconstructed methodological



The reconstructed model also helps avoid two methodological extremes. The first is the uncritical acceptance of every narration whose *sanad* appears sound without examining relevant textual anomalies. The second is the rejection of hadith reports based merely on contemporary preferences or subjective rational judgments. The classical approach, as reconstructed in this study, requires detailed examination and a willingness to revise an initial assessment when stronger evidence becomes available.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *'Ilal al-Matn* represents an integral dimension of classical hadith criticism, characterized by comparative narration analysis, identification of transmission discrepancies, and the evaluation of textual evidence within a structured hierarchy. The proposed procedural model provides an analytical synthesis of these principles and offers a basis for understanding their continuing relevance to contemporary hadith research.

4. Conclusion

'Illah al-matn refers to a subtle defect related to the wording or meaning of a hadith that can only be identified through comprehensive examination. Its indicators may include problematic tafarrud, unjustifiable ziyadat al-thiqah, idraj, idtirab, syudzudz, nakarah, qalb, tashif, and contradictions with stronger textual evidence or established facts. However, these indicators do not automatically establish the presence of a defect in a hadith. Rather, they must be examined through the collection of multiple transmission routes, comparison of textual variants, identification of points of divergence, evaluation of narrator reliability, and assessment of the matn against the Qur'an, stronger Prophetic traditions, definitive scholarly consensus (ijma'), historical facts, linguistic principles, and conclusive rational principles.

This study confirms that matn criticism constitutes an integral component of the classical tradition of hadith criticism and cannot be separated from sanad criticism. The practices of the muhaddithun demonstrate that assessing the authenticity of a hadith requires an integrated examination of transmission chains and textual content. The methodological contribution of this study lies in reconstructing the stages involved in detecting 'illah al-matn as a layered evaluative process that prioritizes comprehensive comparison, the hierarchy of evidentiary strength, and verifiable argumentation. In contemporary contexts, digital technologies and multidisciplinary approaches offer opportunities to expand the scope of hadith analysis. Nevertheless, their application must remain grounded in the principles of hadith criticism developed by classical muhaddithun, ensuring that the evaluation of matn does not become subject to excessive subjectivity or detached from the established scholarly tradition of hadith studies.

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