



# The Epistemological Shift in Hadith Science: From al-Hakim's Systematic Classification to Nur al-Din 'Itr's Methodological Framework

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**Abstract:** The science of ḥadīth holds a fundamental role in preserving the authenticity of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and its historical development reflects an ongoing epistemological evolution within Islamic scholarship. Nevertheless, studies addressing the epistemological shifts within the discipline of ḥadīth science remain limited and insufficiently explored. This research aims to examine the contribution of al-Ḥākim al-Naisābūrī (d. 405 AH/1014 CE) to the formation of the epistemology of ḥadīth science. Employing a qualitative methodology with a content analysis approach, the study analyzes Ma'rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth as the primary source. Secondary data are drawn from academic literature discussing the development of ḥadīth methodology, including Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr's (d. 1442 AH/2020 CE) Manhaj al-Naqd fi Ulūm al-Ḥadīth, which proposes a classificatory framework of six branches of ḥadīth science. This study finds that al-Hakim succeeded in systematizing fifty-two branches of hadith science in a more coherent and methodologically structured manner. This formulation not only extended the methodological foundations earlier initiated by al-Ramahurmuzi in al-Muhaddith al-Fashil, but also provided an initial framework for the modern reinterpretation later reclassified by Nur al-Din 'Itr. The central finding of this study lies in identifying an epistemological shift within hadith science: from a descriptive and taqlidi mode, to a systematic-analytical orientation, and subsequently to a manhaji approach that is both reflective and systemic. In this respect, al-Hakim may be situated as a pivotal figure in the evolution of hadith science epistemology, while also serving as one of the conceptual foundations for the development of contemporary hadith science methodology..

**Keywords:** Epistemology of Hadith Science; al-Hakim al-Naisaburi; Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith; Nuruddin 'Itr

**Abstrak:** Ilmu hadis memegang peran fundamental dalam menjaga autentisitas ajaran Nabi Muhammad ﷺ, dan perkembangannya menunjukkan dinamika epistemologis yang mencerminkan evolusi pemikiran ulama. Namun, kajian mengenai pergeseran epistemologi ilmu hadis masih terbatas dan jarang dilakukan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menelaah kontribusi al-Hakim al-Naisaburi (w. 405 H/1014 M) terhadap pembentukan epistemologi ilmu hadis melalui metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis isi atas karya Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith sebagai sumber data primer. Data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur akademik yang membahas perkembangan metodologi ilmu hadis, termasuk karya Nur al-Din 'Itr (w. 1442 H/2020 M), *Manhaj al-Naqd fi Ulum al-Hadith*, yang menampakkan kerangka klasifikasi enam cabang ilmu hadis. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa al-Hakim berhasil menyusun lima puluh dua cabang ilmu hadis secara lebih sistematis. Penyusunan tersebut tidak hanya memperluas fondasi metodologis yang telah dirintis al-Ramahurmuzi dalam *al-Muhaddith al-Fashil*, tetapi juga menyediakan kerangka awal bagi reinterpretasi modern yang kemudian diklasifikasikan kembali oleh Nur al-Din 'Itr. Temuan utama penelitian ini terletak pada adanya pergeseran epistemologis dalam ilmu hadis, yakni dari corak taqlidi yang deskriptif menuju corak sistematis-analitis, dan selanjutnya ke corak manhaji yang reflektif serta sistemik. Oleh karena itu, al-Hakim dapat ditempatkan sebagai figur penting dalam evolusi epistemologi ilmu hadis, sekaligus sebagai salah satu landasan konseptual bagi pengembangan metodologi ilmu hadis kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Epistemologi Ilmu Hadis; al-Hakim al-Naisaburi; Ma'rifat Ulum al-Hadith; Nuruddin 'Itr

## 1. Introduction

Throughout its historical development, hadith studies have not merely focused on the collection and transmission of reports but have also sought to construct a systematic epistemological framework aimed at facilitating their interpretation and application particularly in ensuring the validity of *isnād* (chains of transmission), *matn* (textual content), and their legitimacy in the construction of Islamic law (Majid, Saghira, Wendry, Safri, & Syafruddin, 2023). The evolution of hadith scholarship reflects an epistemological dynamism that mirrors the intellectual transformations of Muslim scholars across different historical periods.

Accordingly, the development of hadith studies should not be understood merely as an accumulation of technical categories, but also as an evolution in

the scholarly modes of thought through which Muslim scholars organized, classified, and interpreted the subject matter of the discipline. Despite the abundance of scholarship on hadith studies, research specifically addressing the epistemology of hadith studies remains limited and relatively rare. (Idri, 2015). More specifically, studies that trace the epistemological transformation from classical works to contemporary classificatory frameworks remain relatively limited. This limitation is particularly evident in the scarcity of research examining how the structure of hadith studies developed historically from its foundational phase into more systematic and reflective forms. Yet such an analysis of epistemological shifts is crucial for understanding changes in the intellectual orientation of the hadith tradition, its trajectory in the modern period, and its relevance to contemporary methodological needs (Jose Vicente Villalobos Antunez, Jose Francisco Guerrero Lobo & Reynier I. R. Molina., 2022), tracing future trajectories of the discipline, and integrating values and cultural contexts into knowledge production (Kovac, 2006). Classical scholars endeavored to formulate principles and scholarly categories capable of safeguarding the authenticity of hadith, whereas contemporary scholars have attempted to reinterpret this intellectual structure in order to align it with modern academic paradigms (Miftahudin, 2023).

In this context, al-Ramahurmuzi (d. 360 AH/971 CE), through his seminal work *Al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil baina al-Rāwī wa al-Wāṭī* laid an early foundational framework that primarily emphasized descriptive aspects of *‘Ilm al-Riwayah* and *‘Ilm al-Ruwat* (Abdurrohman & Mutaqin, 2021). Despite its significance, his work did not fully articulate a comprehensive epistemological structure. It is therefore necessary to investigate the development of hadith scholarship in the post-foundational period, particularly the contribution of al-Hakim al-Naisaburi (d. 405 AH/1014 CE) in his *Ma‘rifat ‘Ulum al-Hadith*. Such an inquiry enables us to assess his contribution to the epistemology of hadith studies and to trace the epistemological shifts from the classical era of al-Ramahurmuzi to al-Hakim, and further to contemporary figures of the twenty-first century such as Nur al-Din ‘Itr (d. 1442 AH/2020 CE). This line of inquiry is significant not only for understanding the systematic presentation of hadith sciences in their works but also for identifying both continuity and

transformation in the scholarly frameworks governing the discipline over time (Ansori, Rahman, & Darussamin, 2020).

Several previous studies are relevant to this topic. Idri, in *Epistemologi Ilmu Pengetahuan, Ilmu Hadis, dan Ilmu Hukum Islam*, outlines the conceptual structure of hadith epistemology in terms of its definition, historical development, ontological status, and orientalist perspectives (Idri, 2015). However, his discussion remains largely macro-theoretical and does not examine the historical-empirical formation of epistemology in specific classical works. The present study contributes by focusing specifically on al-Hakim al-Naisaburi through a content analysis of *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith* and by exploring its relevance to the six-branch classificatory system of hadith sciences formulated by Nur al-Din 'Itr. Thus, this research not only confirms the epistemological framework discussed by Idri but also extends it through a historical analysis of the evolution of hadith epistemology from the classical to the contemporary period.

Sulthan al-'Akayilah and Haifa' examined al-Hakim's discussion of *ajnas al-'illah* (types of hidden defects in hadith) in *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, particularly in Chapter 27, assessing al-Suyuti's explanations and reclassifying *'illah* according to the classical tradition of hadith criticism (Al-Ziyadah, 2013). Their study successfully categorized hadith defects according to recognized analytical pathways in classical criticism, such as distinctions between *wasl* and *irsal*, *raf'* and *waqf*, the use of common transmission routes (*suluk al-jadah*), and errors involving addition or omission of transmitters (Al-Ziyadah, 2013). While this study highlights al-Hakim's significant role in structuring the discourse on *'illah*, its focus remains primarily diagnostic and does not situate his contribution within a broader epistemological framework, nor does it explore its relevance to contemporary classifications of hadith sciences.

Similarly, Amal bint Ismail al-Shini analyzed Ibn al-Salah's critical engagement in *'Ulum al-Hadith* with several issues raised by al-Hakim in *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*. The findings indicate that Ibn al-Salah did not merely reproduce al-Hakim's concepts but also offered substantive corrections (Al-Shini, 2020). Nevertheless, this study concentrates on Ibn al-Salah's critique without connecting it to the broader development of contemporary

methodology and epistemology in hadith studies. This gap opens space for further investigation into the continuity of al-Hakim's contribution, particularly in relation to contemporary classificatory frameworks such as that proposed by Nur al-Din 'Itr.

Bayu Pramesta and colleagues examined al-Hakim's methodology of isnād and matn criticism in *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, concluding that despite certain weaknesses and inconsistencies, the work represents a major milestone in the tradition of hadith scholarship (Bayu Pramesta, Yassinta Ananda, 2024). Their findings show that al-Hakim employed distinct evaluative criteria, including distinctions between *'ali* and *nazil* chains, assessments of transmitters' integrity and precision, identification of *musnad* and *mursal* traditions, and hierarchical mapping of Companions in transmission. Matn criticism included discussions of *mudraj*, *gharib* formulations, and widely transmitted reports. Although their study provides a valuable descriptive account of al-Hakim's methodology, it does not situate his contribution within a broader historical or contemporary epistemological framework.

Based on the foregoing literature review, a substantial research gap remains regarding al-Hakim's epistemological contribution through *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, particularly in linking early systematic developments in hadith sciences with modern conceptual frameworks and strengthening the methodological foundations of hadith studies in the twenty-first century. This study addresses two primary research questions: (1). What was al-Hakim al-Naisaburi's principal contribution to the development of the epistemology of hadith studies through *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*? (2). How did the epistemological orientation of hadith studies shift from al-Ramahurmuzi's *al-Muhaddith al-Fasil*, to al-Hakim's *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, and subsequently to the contemporary classificatory framework proposed by Nur al-Din 'Itr in *Manhaj al-Naqd fi 'Ulum al-Hadith*?

To address this issue, the present study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis to examine textual data. As Krippendorff argues, all texts are inherently qualitative in nature (Krippendorff, 2019). The primary data consist of a critical reading of *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, while secondary data are drawn from academic literature on the development of hadith

methodology, including Nur al-Din ‘Itr’s six-branch classification and contemporary studies on hadith epistemology. The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, data identification, involving the selection of relevant sections of *Ma‘rifat ‘Ulum al-Hadith* corresponding to Nur al-Din ‘Itr’s classificatory dimensions. Second, data categorization, mapping al-Hakim’s fifty-two branches of hadith sciences and correlating them with ‘Itr’s six-branch framework. Third, epistemological interpretation, examining the conceptual implications of this classification to understand the shifts in hadith epistemology. Data validity is ensured through triangulation and comparative analysis.

## 2. Results and Discussion

### *The Genealogy of al-Hakim al-Naisaburi’s Intellectual Thought*

#### Brief Biography of al-Hakim al-Naisaburi

al-Hakim al-Naisaburi, whose full name was Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn Hamduyah ibn Nu‘aim ibn al-Hakam al-Hafiz Ibn al-Bayyi’, was born in Nishapur in 321 AH/933 CE and died in 405 AH/1014 CE (Khallikan, 1971). From an early age, he devoted himself to the study of hadith; he began his studies at the age of nine and became a student of Ibn Hibban at thirteen (Al-Subki, 1993). He undertook extensive scholarly journeys (*rihlah ilmiyyah*) to major centers of learning such as Rayy, Baghdad, Kufah, and Mecca in order to collect hadith, eventually becoming one of the most renowned and influential hadith scholars of his time (Al-Subki, 1993). His scholarly productivity was extraordinary. al-Khalili recorded approximately 500 works attributed to him, including *Ma‘rifat ‘Ulum al-Hadith*, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn*, and *Tarikh Nishapur* (Al-Dimashqi, 1996) (Al-Dhahabi, 1998). Al-Hakim studied under nearly two thousand teachers, among them Abu Hatim Ibn Hibban and Abu ‘Ali al-Hafiz al-Naisaburi (Al-Dimashqi, 1996). It is therefore unsurprising that he stipulated, as a condition for authentic hadith, that transmitters must have been recognized as having formally studied under qualified teachers (Al-Suyuthi, 2010).

Among his students were leading scholars such as al-Daraqutni (d. 385 AH/995 CE), Abu Ya'la al-Khalili (d. 446 AH/1054 CE), and al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH/1066 CE) (Salah, 1992). His areas of expertise encompassed hadith, hadith sciences, *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* (transmitter criticism), and jurisprudence (Al-Tayyib bin Abdillah Al-Hadrami, 2008). Beyond his scholarly achievements, he also held important administrative and judicial positions, serving as head of the Dar al-Sunnah madrasa and as a judge in the city of Nasa during the Samanid dynasty an indication of the recognition of his scholarly integrity and authority (Al-Bairuti, 2006) (Al-Azhar, 1989). His scholarly rigor is reflected in reports that he prepared hundreds of hadith prior to assuming judicial office (Al-Dimasyqi, 2018), demonstrating his dedication to collection and validation. His reputation was widely acknowledged: his teacher Abu 'Ali al-Hafiz (d. 403 AH/1012 CE) remarked that seeing al-Hakim was akin to seeing a thousand hadith scholars, while al-Daraqutni regarded his memorization as stronger than that of Ibn Mandah (d. 395 AH/1005 CE). Abu Hazim al-'Abdawi (d. 417 AH/1026 CE) considered him the foremost authority in *'ilal al-hadith* (hidden defects in hadith) in Nishapur after Imam Muslim (d. 261 AH/875 CE) and Ibrahim ibn Abi Talib al-Naisaburi (d. 295 AH/908 CE) (Abu Tayyib Nayif bin Salah Al-Mansuri, 2007). These accolades firmly establish al-Hakim al-Naisaburi as one of the central figures in the historical development of hadith scholarship and classical Islamic epistemology.

Taken together, these testimonies confirm al-Hakim al-Naisaburi's standing as a pivotal figure in the historical development of hadith studies and the epistemology of classical Islamic scholarship. The breadth of his intellectual formation, his experience of scholarly travel, and his recognized authority as a hadith scholar provide an important context for understanding *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith* not simply as a classificatory text, but as a methodological response to the increasingly complex need for a more systematic organization of hadith studies in his time. In this sense, his systematization of fifty-two branches of hadith studies reflects a conscious effort to articulate the epistemological structure of the discipline in a more ordered and analytical form.

## The Historical Context of Hadith Studies in al-Hakim's Era

al-Hakim lived during the Samanid dynasty (Al-Bairuti, 2006), which governed regions including Nishapur, Tabaristan, and Samarqand from 261 AH to 389 AH (819–999 CE), operating as a regional power under the broader Abbasid Caliphate.

The fourth Islamic century witnessed a more accelerated development of hadith scholarship compared to the preceding century. Nevertheless, this progress represented a continuation of earlier intellectual advancements (Al-Zahrani, 1996). During this period, new sub-disciplines emerged that had not yet been systematized in the third century AH, including *'Ulum al-Hadith* (Mustalah al-Hadith) (Bankiran, n.d.). Al-Ramahurmuzi's *al-Muhaddith al-Fasil Bayna al-Rawi wa al-Wa'i* (d. 360 AH) is widely recognized as the first independent work in this field, marking the consolidation of hadith methodology as a distinct scholarly discipline (Al-'Asqalani, 2000). It was subsequently followed by al-Hakim's *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, which constitutes the focus of this study.

The period also witnessed the emergence of new genres such as *al-Mustakhrajat*, beginning with Abu Bakr al-Isma'ili's *Mustakhraj 'ala Sahih al-Bukhari* (d. 371 AH), and later developments in *al-Mu'jam* literature, most notably by al-Tabarani. Furthermore, works on *al-'Ilal* (hidden defects) developed systematically, often arranged according to the names of Companions in a manner similar to *al-Musnad* compilations, such as al-Daraqutni's *al-'Ilal al-Waridah fi al-Ahadith al-Nabawiyah* (Muhammad Matar al-Zahrani, 1996).

During al-Hakim's lifetime, Nishapur was a vibrant intellectual center populated by scholars of hadith, tafsir, jurisprudence, and other Islamic sciences. In his *Tarikh Nishapur*, al-Hakim recorded approximately 950 scholars from whom he had learned (Al-Bairuti, 2006). Among his teachers were prominent figures such as Ibn Hibban (d. 354 AH), author of *Sahih Ibn Hibban*; 'Ali ibn Khashshad al-Naisaburi (Al-Naisaburi, 1984); Abu al-'Abbas al-Ashamm (d. 346 AH), known as *Muhaddith al-Mashriq*; Ibn al-Akhram al-Naisaburi (d. 344 AH); and al-Daraqutni (d. 385 AH), one of the foremost hadith critics of his time (Al-Bairuti, 2006).

al-Hakim's own works reflects the maturity of hadith scholarship in his era. In addition to *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, he authored *Su'alat al-Hakim li al-Daraqutni fi al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, documenting his inquiries to al-Daraqutni regarding transmitter evaluation; *Su'alat Mas'ud al-Sijzi li al-Hakim*; and works addressing 'ilal traditions, including discussions in *al-Madkhal ila al-Sahih* (Al-Bairuti, 2006).

### *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*

#### Background of Composition

The fourth Islamic century marked a continuation of earlier scholarly dedication to the writing and codification of the Prophet's hadith. This intensification was driven by the need to respond to the proliferation of fabricated traditions. In response, scholars composed comprehensive works on hadith methodology (*'Ulum al-Hadith*) to guide critical evaluation and selection (Al-Siba'i, 1982).

Within this intellectual climate, al-Hakim composed *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*. In its introduction, he explicitly states that the work was motivated by the widespread circulation of fabricated hadith used to legitimize deviant religious views and practices, alongside the insufficient methodological awareness among students of hadith despite their strong enthusiasm. This reflects a crucial socio-intellectual context characterized by epistemological degradation where zeal for learning was not matched by methodological rigor. The work can thus be understood as a scholarly response to a crisis of authenticity and method in hadith studies.

#### Characteristics of Work

The edition used in this study was critically edited (*tahqiq*) by Ahmad ibn Faris al-Salum. In preparing the edition, he relied primarily on a manuscript transmitted by Ibn Khalaf and cross-checked it against several other manuscripts preserved in libraries in Madinah, Cairo, Alexandria, Dublin (Chester Beatty Library), El Escorial (Spain), and Yemen (Al-Naisaburi, 2003).

The editor's introduction argues that al-Hakim was the first to compose a comprehensive work on hadith sciences and compares his contribution with that of al-Ramahurmuzi and Ibn al-Salah. It also discusses later engagements with the text, such as Abu Nu'aym al-Asbahani's *Mustakhraj* and Tahir al-Jaza'iri's summary *Tawjih al-Nazar ila 'Ulum al-Athar*. The introduction further examines previous editorial efforts and manuscript limitations.

### Contents of the Work

In *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith*, al-Hakim presents a comprehensive classification of fifty-two branches of hadith sciences. The work follows a structured systematic arrangement, beginning with a preface explaining the background and urgency of its composition. He then cites reports highlighting the virtues of hadith scholars and condemning those who reject hadith (*inkar al-sunnah*).

The core of the work elaborates on fifty-two branches (*al-naw'*), beginning with the discussion of *sanad 'ali* (shorter chains closer to the source) and *sanad nazil* (longer chains more distant from the source), which he regards as foundational for assessing the quality of transmission. he said:

النُّوعُ الْأَوَّلُ: مِنْ هَذِهِ الْعُلُومِ مَعْرِفَةُ عَالِي الْإِسْنَادِ وَفِي طَلَبِ الْإِسْنَادِ الْعَالِي سُنَّةٌ  
صَحِيحَةٌ

The first category among the branches of hadith sciences is the knowledge of an elevated chain of transmission (*sanad 'ali*), that is, a chain closer to the original source. In seeking an elevated chain, there exists an established Prophetic practice (*sunnah sahihah*) (Al-Naisaburi, 2003).

He then concludes with the fifty-second branch, stating:

النُّوعُ الثَّانِي وَالْخَمْسِينَ: مِنْ مَعْرِفَةِ عُلُومِ الْحَدِيثِ هَذَا النَّوعُ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْعُلُومِ مَعْرِفَةُ  
مَنْ رَحَّصَ فِي الْعَرَضِ عَلَى الْعَالِمِ، وَرَأَهُ سَمَاعًا، وَمَنْ رَأَى الْكِتَابَةَ بِالْإِجَارَةِ مِنْ بَلَدٍ إِلَى بَلَدٍ  
أَخْبَارًا، وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَ ذَلِكَ.

The fifty-second category: Among the branches of hadith sciences is the knowledge of the differences of opinion among hadith scholars regarding the recitation of hadith before a teacher, which is regarded as a form of *talaqqi* (of *akhbar* ), (Al-Naisaburi, 2003).

The structure of *Ma'rifat Ulum al-Hadith* demonstrates a high level of systematic organization and scholarly classification. al-Hakim al-Naisaburi arranges

the contents of his work using the term *al-naw'* (type/category), numbered sequentially from beginning to end an approach not previously found in earlier works on ḥadīth studies. This pattern reflects a deliberate effort to present an encyclopedic format within the discipline of ḥadīth, in which each *al-naw'* represents a distinct yet conceptually interconnected branch of inquiry within a broader epistemological structure. Moreover, the recurrent use of expressions such as *min hādhihi al-'ulūm* ("among these sciences") or *min 'ulūm al-ḥadīth* ("among the sciences of ḥadīth") in each discussion indicates al-Ḥākim's analytical endeavor to delineate the epistemological boundaries of ḥadīth scholarship. These expressions function not merely as thematic markers but also signify his methodological awareness in identifying and categorizing the disciplines that fall within the domain of ḥadīth studies and distinguishing them from those that lie beyond its framework.

#### *Nur al-Dīn 'Itr's Classification of the Branches of Ḥadīth Studies*

In *Manhaj al-Naqd fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, Nur al-Dīn 'Itr proposes a systematic classification of ḥadīth sciences, which he synthesizes into six principal fields: (1) *'Ilm al-Ruwāh* (the study of transmitters); (2) *'Ilm al-Riwāyah* (the study of transmission); (3) *'Ilm al-Sanad* (the study of the chain of transmission); (4) *'Ilm al-Matn* (the study of the textual content of ḥadīth); (5) *'Ilm al-Ḥadīth min ḥaythu al-qabūl wa al-radd* (the study of ḥadīth in terms of its acceptance or rejection); and (6) *'Ilm al-Mushtarak baina al-Sanad wa al-Matn* (the integrated study of sanad and matn) ('Itr, 2003).

He subsequently defines each of these fields. *'Ilm al-Ruwāh* constitutes a subdiscipline within ḥadīth studies concerned with the biographical and critical evaluation of transmitters. It examines data pertaining to their personal circumstances, reputations, and credibility in order to establish an accurate understanding of their authority and reliability in the transmission process (Abdurrohman & Mutaqin, 2021). *'Ilm al-Riwāyah* focuses on the modes and methods of transmission, investigating how a transmitter received a ḥadīth from a teacher, conveyed it to students, and employed specific formulae of transmission (*ṣiḡhat al-adā'*), whether orally, in writing, or through other recognized forms within the scholarly tradition. *'Ilm al-Ḥadīth min ḥaythu al-qabūl wa al-radd* examines the criteria for the acceptance or rejection of a ḥadīth, considering both the sanad and the matn. *'Ilm al-Matn*, meanwhile, analyzes the textual substance of ḥadīth, including its sources of transmission,

semantic interpretation, and comparison with parallel narrations. *‘Ilm al-Sanad* investigates aspects related to the chain of transmission, such as continuity, multiplicity of transmission routes, and the strength of connections among transmitters. Finally, *‘Ilm al-Mushtarak bayna al-Sanad wa al-Matn* studies the results of the process of *I’tibār*, namely the examination and comparison of multiple transmission routes of a ḥadīth in order to determine whether it is corroborated by other reports, contradicted by them, or lacks either support or opposition (‘Itar, 2003).

The sixfold classification formulated by Nur al-Dīn ‘Itr provides a systematic and methodological conceptual framework for comprehending the overall structure of ḥadīth scholarship. Through this schema, each subdiscipline can be situated proportionally according to its scope and object of inquiry. This framework may serve as an analytical lens for reassessing the classical systematic presentation of ḥadīth sciences, particularly as articulated by al-Ḥākim al-Naisābūrī in *Ma’rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, which enumerates fifty-two distinct types of ḥadīth sciences. Accordingly, al-Ḥākim’s fifty-two categories can be remapped and reclassified considering ‘Itr’s six major fields, thereby illuminating the epistemological and historical continuity between classical systematic formulations and contemporary twenty-first-century conceptualizations of the structure of ḥadīth studies.

The detailed mapping of the fifty-two types of ḥadīth sciences presented in *Ma’rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* into the six major categories proposed by Nur al-Dīn ‘Itr may be outlined as follows:

Table 1. Mapping of the Fifty-Two Types of Ḥadīth Sciences in *Ma’rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* to the Sixfold Classification of Nur al-Dīn ‘Itr

Manhaj al-Naqd Fi ‘Ulum al-Hadith	Ma’rifat ‘Ulum al-Hadith
1. ‘Ilm al-Ruwāh (The science of ḥadīth transmitters, concerned with the biographical study and critical evaluation of narrators, including their integrity, reliability, and scholarly standing)	<i>al-Naw’ 3</i> : This section addresses the evaluation of the integrity and reliability of ḥadīth transmitters, including their moral probity ( <i>‘adālah</i> ), precision in memorization ( <i>dabt</i> ), and other factors determining their credibility and trustworthiness. It encompasses a comprehensive assessment of the transmitters’ personal characteristics, such as their ethical conduct, adherence to Islamic principles, and capacity to preserve and accurately transmit ḥadīth.

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*al-Naw'* 7: This section discusses the hierarchical classification of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), as well as the hierarchical categorization of their successors (the *tābi'ūn*).

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*al-Naw'* 14: This section examines the levels and classifications of transmitters among the *tābi'cūn* (the generation following the Companions).

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*al-Naw'* 15: This section addresses the transmitters from among the *atbā' al-tābi'in* (the generation following the *tābi'ūn*).

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*al-Naw'* 16: This section discusses senior transmitters who narrated ḥadīth from junior transmitters. It includes an analysis of hierarchical relationships and relative standing among the Companions, the *tābi'ūn*, and subsequent generations of transmitters, as well as the complexities involved in transmission from senior to junior authorities.

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*al-Naw'* 17: This section concerns the identification of the sons of the Companions.

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*al-Naw'* 18: This section addresses the science of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* (impugnation and accreditation) and its classifications.

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*al-Naw'* 26: This section discusses the *mudallisūn* (transmitters who practiced *tadlis*) among the *tābi'ūn* and subsequent generations up to the time of al-Ḥākim.

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*al-Naw'* 36: This section concerns the identification of the brothers of the Companions, the *tābi'ūn*, the *atbā' al-tābi'in*, and later generations of transmitters up to the era of al-Ḥākim.

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*al-Naw'* 37: This section examines individuals among the Companions, the *tābi'ūn*, and the *atbā' al-tābi'in* who had only a single transmitter narrating from them.

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*al-Naw'* 38: This section discusses the tribal affiliations and social backgrounds of the Companions, the *tābi'cūn*, the followers of the *tābi'cūn*, and subsequent generations up to the time of al-Ḥākim. Such information is essential for establishing the identity, social standing, and potential networks that may have influenced the transmission of reports.

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*al-Naw'* 39: This section addresses the genealogies (*ansāb*) of transmitters from the Companions to the generations contemporary with al-Ḥākim.

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	<i>al-Naw' 40</i> : This section concerns the proper names of ḥadīth transmitters.
	<i>al-Naw' 41</i> : This section discusses the <i>kunā</i> (teknonyms, typically beginning with Abū or Umm) of transmitters from the Companions to the generations of al-Ḥākim's time.
	<i>al-Naw' 42</i> : This section addresses the geographical origins and regional affiliations of ḥadīth transmitters.
	<i>al-Naw' 43</i> : This section concerns the <i>mawālī</i> (freedmen or clients) and their descendants.
	<i>al-Naw' 44</i> : This section discusses the dates of birth and death of ḥadīth transmitters.
	<i>al-Naw' 45</i> : This section addresses the <i>alqāb</i> (epithets or honorific titles) of transmitters, including those widely recognized by such appellations.
	<i>al-Naw' 46</i> : This section examines the transmission of <i>al-aqrān</i> (peer-to-peer transmission), from the Companions through later generations up to the time of al-Ḥākim.
	<i>al-Naw' 47</i> : This section discusses cases of <i>al-mutashābih</i> (similarities or ambiguities) in tribal names, geographical attributions, personal names, <i>kunā</i> , and professions.
	<i>al-Naw' 49</i> : This section concerns the identification of trustworthy ( <i>thiqa</i> ) and well-known leading authorities ( <i>a'immah</i> ) among the <i>tābi'ūn</i> and subsequent generations.
	<i>al-Naw' 51</i> : This section discusses transmitters among the <i>tābi'ūn</i> whose reports were not relied upon as authoritative proof ( <i>ḥujjah</i> ) in the canonical <i>ṣaḥīḥ</i> collections.
2:Ilm al-Riwāyah	<i>al-Naw' 33</i> : This section addresses <i>mudhākarat al-ḥadīth</i> , namely the practice of reviewing and rehearsing previously studied ḥadīths collectively to reinforce retention, ensure accuracy, and preserve precision in transmission.
(The science of ḥadīth transmission, concerned with the methods and modalities by which ḥadīths are received, preserved, and transmitted)	<i>al-Naw' 35</i> : This section discusses the compilation of ḥadīths belonging to specific <i>anwā'</i> (categories) that had been previously recorded by ḥadīth scholars, as well as efforts to supplement incomplete materials and to subject these narrations to collective review ( <i>mudhākarah</i> ) for purposes of verification and refinement.
	<i>al-Naw' 52</i> : This section examines the scholarly debate among ḥadīth authorities regarding whether the act of reciting ḥadīths before a shaykh should be classified as

	<p><i>samā<sup>c</sup></i> (direct audition from the shaykh). It explores the divergent methodological positions concerning the terminology and validity of this mode of transmission.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 32</i>: This section discusses the doctrinal positions (<i>madhāhib</i>) of ḥadīth scholars concerning the permissibility and conditions of transmitting reports from individuals identified as <i>ahl al-bid<sup>c</sup>ah</i> (adherents of theological or doctrinal innovation).</p>
<p>3. Ilm al-Sanad</p> <p>(The science of the chain of transmission, concerned with the structure, continuity, and evaluation of the isnād in ḥadīth reports)</p>	<p><i>al-Naw' 1</i>: This section discusses the concept of <i>al-sanad al-<sup>c</sup>ālī</i> (an elevated chain of transmission), referring to a chain with fewer intermediaries between the compiler and the Prophet (peace be upon him), or another authoritative source.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 2</i>: This section addresses <i>al-sanad al-nāzil</i> (a lower chain of transmission), namely a chain containing a greater number of intermediaries relative to other available chains for the same report.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 4</i>: This section examines the <i>ḥadīth musnad</i>, that is, a report transmitted with a continuous chain of authorities reaching back to the Prophet (peace be upon him).</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 5</i>: This section discusses the <i>ḥadīth mawqūf</i>, a report whose chain terminates at a Companion and does not extend to the Prophet.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 6</i>: This section addresses reports whose chains are not explicitly stated to reach the Prophet (peace be upon him), thereby distinguishing them from fully connected Prophetic traditions.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 8</i>: This section examines the <i>ḥadīth mursal</i>, in which a Successor (<i>tābi<sup>c</sup>ī</i>) directly attributes a report to the Prophet without mentioning the Companion intermediary.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 9</i>: This section discusses the <i>ḥadīth munqa<sup>c</sup>ī'</i>, a report characterized by a break in its chain of transmission at any point.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 10</i>: This section addresses the <i>ḥadīth musalsal</i>, a report in which the chain of transmission exhibits a recurring characteristic whether in wording, action, or circumstance at each level of narration.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 11</i>: This section examines the <i>ḥadīth mu'an'an</i>, a report transmitted using the ambiguous connective formula "an" ("from"), raising questions regarding the continuity of transmission.</p> <p><i>al-Naw' 12</i>: This section discusses the <i>ḥadīth mu'dal</i>, a report in which two or more consecutive transmitters are omitted from the chain.</p>

	<i>al-Naw'</i> 23: This section addresses the <i>ḥadīth mashhūr</i> , a report transmitted through multiple chains and widely known, though not reaching the level of mass transmission ( <i>mutawātir</i> ).
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 24: This section examines the <i>ḥadīth gharīb</i> , a report transmitted through a single chain or containing a unique element at a particular level of transmission.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 25: This section discusses <i>al-afrād</i> (singular narrations), referring to reports transmitted uniquely by a particular narrator at some point in the chain.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 35: This section addresses <i>taṣḥīf</i> , namely errors committed by transmitters in the pronunciation or writing of specific words or names within the chain of transmission.
4. 'Ilm Matn  (The science concerned with the study of the textual content of ḥadīth, including its wording, meaning, linguistic features, and substantive analysis)	<i>al-Naw'</i> 20: This section addresses the jurisprudence of ḥadīth ( <i>fiqh al-ḥadīth</i> ), focusing on the extraction of legal rulings, ethical principles, and normative guidance derived from Prophetic traditions.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 21: This section discusses the doctrine of abrogation ( <i>al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh</i> ) in ḥadīth, examining cases in which one report supersedes or modifies the legal implication of another.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 22: This section examines <i>gharīb al-ḥadīth</i> , namely uncommon or obscure terms occurring in the text ( <i>matn</i> ) of a ḥadīth whose meanings may not be readily understood due to their rare usage in the Arabic language.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 29: This section addresses ḥadīths that appear, on their outward meaning, to be in contradiction with other reports, noting that scholars of different legal schools may adopt one of the two as authoritative proof ( <i>hujjah</i> ).
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 30: This section discusses ḥadīths that are not contradictory, emphasizing methods of reconciliation and harmonization among narrations.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 31: This section examines instances of additional wording ( <i>ziyādāt</i> ) in the text ( <i>matn</i> ) of a ḥadīth, analyzing their authenticity and implications.
	<i>al-Naw'</i> 34: This section addresses <i>taṣḥīfāt</i> (scribal or orthographic errors) occurring in the text ( <i>matn</i> ) of ḥadīths.
5. 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth min Ḥaythu al-Qabūl wa al-Radd (The science of ḥadīth concerned	<i>al-Naw'</i> 19: This section addresses the distinction between <i>ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ</i> (sound/authentic reports) and <i>ḥadīth saqīm</i> (defective or weak reports), outlining the criteria used to determine their validity and reliability.

with the criteria for the acceptance or rejection of a report)	<i>al-Naw'</i> 48: This section examines what is deemed authentic among the reports concerning the <i>maghāzī</i> (the military expeditions of the Prophet), including accounts of his captives, envoys, and letters sent to contemporary rulers; the Companions who participated in these campaigns; those who were killed or survived; those who fled the battlefield or exhibited fear; those who steadfastly supported the Prophet in jihad; the hypocrites; and the Prophet's method of distributing the spoils of war. The discussion focuses on assessing the authenticity of these historical narrations.
6. <i>Ilm al-Mushtarak Baina al-Sanad wa al-Matn</i>  (The integrated science that examines both the chain of transmission ( <i>sanad</i> ) and the textual content ( <i>matn</i> ), focusing on their interrelationship in assessing the authenticity, coherence, and evidentiary value of a ḥadīth)	<i>al-Naw'</i> 13: This section discusses the <i>ḥadīth mudraj</i> , namely a report in which additional words are inserted into the chain ( <i>sanad</i> ) or text ( <i>matn</i> ) by a transmitter without clear separation from the original wording. <i>al-Naw'</i> 27: This section addresses ' <i>ilal al-ḥadīth</i> (hidden defects in ḥadīth), examining subtle and often complex irregularities that may undermine the authenticity of a report despite its outwardly sound appearance. <i>al-Naw'</i> 28: This section discusses the <i>ḥadīth al-shādh</i> (anomalous report), referring to a narration transmitted by a reliable narrator that contradicts a more reliable authority or a stronger chain of transmission.

Against this intellectual backdrop, al-Hakim's contribution in *Ma'rifat 'Ulum al-Hadith* can be examined through a systematic mapping of the fifty-two branches of hadith studies that he formulated. As indicated in the table above, his contribution to '*Ilm al-Ruwah*' is represented by 22 *al-naw'* that address in detail various aspects relating to hadith transmitters. In '*Ilm al-Riwayah*', he identifies 4 *al-naw'* dealing with methods of transmission and modes of hadith delivery. Within '*Ilm al-Sanad*', he outlines 14 *al-naw'* that focus on issues of sanad continuity and numerical structure. His contribution to '*Ilm al-Matn*' is reflected in 7 *al-naw'* concerned with meaning and textual analysis. In '*Ilm al-Hadith min haythu al-qabul wa al-radd*', he discusses 2 *al-naw'* related to the criteria governing the acceptance and rejection of hadith. Finally, in '*Ilm al-Mushtarak baina al-Sanad wa al-Matn*', he presents 3 *al-naw'*

that explore the reciprocal relationship between sanad and matn in the processes of *i'tibar* and comparative analysis among different transmissions.

From this mapping, it can be inferred that al-Ḥākim al-Naisābūrī's classification of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* in *Ma'rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* is not merely descriptive and analytical but also reflects a systematic effort to construct the epistemological structure of the discipline. The division into fifty-two *al-naw'*, encompassing various aspects of sanad, matn, transmitters, and the validity of ḥadīth, demonstrates al-Ḥākim's methodological awareness in conceptually organizing the branches of ḥadīth studies. This intellectual foundation subsequently became instrumental for the formation of the modern classification proposed by Nur al-Dīn 'Itr, who through an inductive (*istiqrā'*) approach successfully synthesized these diverse branches into six principal fields.

The shift from al-Ḥākim's classification of fifty-two branches of ḥadīth scholarship to Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr's six major fields should not be understood merely as a quantitative simplification; rather, it reflects an epistemological transformation in the way ḥadīth studies are constructed and systematized. Al-Ḥākim's formulation represents a classical enumerative mode of scholarship, aimed at collecting, distinguishing, and preserving in detail the various technical issues within ḥadīth studies. This mode was closely tied to the formative context of the discipline, particularly the need to respond to the crisis of authenticity brought about by the proliferation of fabricated ḥadīths, as well as to the growing demand for increasingly rigorous verification.

By contrast, the sixfold classification proposed by Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr reflects a more advanced stage of epistemological development, in which scholarly concern is directed not only toward preserving dispersed technical details, but also toward constructing a more integrated, systematic, and functional conceptual framework. In the academic context of the twenty-first century, this model is more relevant because it enables the various subdisciplines of ḥadīth studies to be mapped onto a more coherent structure, thereby making it more effective for teaching, research, and the development of interdisciplinary analysis.

This relevance, however, cannot be explained solely as the result of modern Western academic taxonomy, nor should it be understood as a purely internal evolution entirely detached from contemporary academic dynamics. Rather, ‘Itr’s classification is better understood as the product of an internal evolution within *uṣūl al-ḥadīth* that also intersects with modern academic tendencies to organize disciplines in ways that are more thematic, coherent, and conceptually economical. Accordingly, the transition from al-Ḥākim’s model to that of ‘Itr does not signal a rupture with tradition but rather marks an epistemological consolidation of ḥadīth studies in a form more responsive to the demands of modern scholarship.

*The Epistemological Shift in Ulūm al-Ḥadīth from al-Rāmahurmuzī to al-Ḥākim and Nur al-Dīn ‘Itr*

The epistemological trajectory of ḥadīth studies demonstrates a progressive dynamic from the classical to the contemporary period. In its early phase, al-Rāmahurmuzī, through his work *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil*, presented a construction of ḥadīth scholarship that remained largely confined to two principal domains: *‘Ilm al-Ruwāh* and *‘Ilm al-Riwāyah* (Abdurrohman & Mutaqin, 2021). His focus was primarily directed toward the ethics of transmission and the descriptive characteristics of ḥadīth transmitters, without advancing a systematic classification of the broader branches of ḥadīth sciences. The subsequent phase was marked by the emergence of al-Ḥākim al-Naisābūrī’s monumental work, *Ma’rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, which expanded the epistemological horizon of ḥadīth studies into fifty-two distinct branches (*al-Anwā’*), encompassing various dimensions of sanad, matn, sanad criticism, and the validity of transmission, among other aspects (Al-Naisaburi, 2003). When these fifty-two categories are mapped onto the classificatory framework formulated by Nur al-Dīn ‘Itr, it becomes evident that all six principal fields identified by ‘Itr namely, *‘Ilm al-Ruwāh*, *‘Ilm al-Riwāyah*, *‘Ilm al-Sanad*, *‘Ilm al-Matn*, *‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth min Ḥaithu al-Qabūl wa al-Radd*, and *‘Ilm al-Mushtarak baina al-Sanad wa al-Matn* are conceptually embedded within al-Ḥākim’s scholarly structure in *Ma’rifat Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*. This demonstrates that al-Ḥākim played a central role in constructing an epistemological

framework that bridges al-Rāmahurmuzī's early formulation and the modern systematization undertaken by Nur al-Dīn 'Itr.

This shift is also clearly reflected in the epistemological character of ḥadīth literature. In al-Rāmahurmuzī's period, the composition of ḥadīth sciences remained largely descriptive, oriented toward the collection of empirical data and narratives concerning ethical norms and transmission practices, without a systematically organized classificatory structure. In contrast, al-Ḥākim introduced a descriptive-analytical and systematic approach, in which discussions not only described phenomena but also analyzed and classified the various components of ḥadīth scholarship within a more coherent epistemological framework.

In the contemporary period, Nur al-Dīn 'Itr represents what may be termed a *manhajī* phase a more concise, synthetic, systematic, and methodologically oriented approach. Through his work *Manhaj al-Naqd fī Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, he reconstructed the system of ḥadīth sciences by synthesizing the complexity of the classical legacy into six principal fields without diminishing its scholarly substance. Thus, the evolution of the epistemology of ḥadīth studies moves from a relatively simple descriptive form to a more rational systematic-analytical structure, and ultimately to a methodological formulation that is structured, integrative, and responsive to the academic demands of the twenty-first century.

### 3. Conclusion

The trajectory of ḥadīth epistemology demonstrates an evolutionary and cumulative paradigm rather than a static theological construct. As the historical progression reveals, the discipline has consistently adapted its methodological rigor to meet shifting scholarly demands. The foundational stage, pioneered by al-Rāmahurmuzī, established an essential descriptive framework rooted in the ethical and practical dimensions of transmission. Building upon this empirical base, al-Ḥākim al-Naisābūrī, in his seminal work *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, initiated a critical epistemological shift; by systematizing the field into fifty-two distinct branches, he transitioned the discipline from a descriptive inventory into a structured analytical taxonomy. This evolutionary arc achieves its modern operational form in the work of Nur

al-Dīn ‘Itr, who’s methodological (*manhajī*) synthesis successfully distills classical complexities into a rigorous, measurable framework that satisfies twenty-first-century academic standards.

Consequently, it is evident that the epistemology of ḥadīth is fundamentally dynamic and historically resilient. It is precisely this inherent adaptability that validates the integration of classical tradition with contemporary, multidisciplinary methodologies. The trajectory established from al-Ḥākim’s taxonomy to ‘Itr’s synthesis provides the vital theoretical bedrock for the discipline’s next academic frontier: the digital humanities. Future research must rigorously interrogate the epistemological shifts precipitated by Artificial Intelligence (AI), moving beyond mere application to analyze narrator networks, algorithmic ḥadīth verification, and the subsequent transformation of religious authority. Ultimately, the study of classical ḥadīth epistemology is not an exercise in historical nostalgia; it is an authoritative prerequisite for engineering robust research paradigms capable of navigating and leading global academic discourse in the digital age.

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