

FROM LIVING TRADITION TO TRANSMITTED AUTHORITY: AL-SUNNAH BEFORE AND AFTER AL-SHAFI'Ī

Kholik Ramdan Mahesa, Rifqi Muhammad Fatkhri, Atiyatul Ulya, & Hilmy Firdausy

Abstract: *The authority of hadith occupies a central position in Islamic intellectual history, yet its historical formation remains a subject of scholarly debate. Much of the existing literature tends to portray al-Shāfi'ī as the pivotal figure who established the epistemological foundation of hadith as an authoritative source of Islamic law. Such a perspective, however, risks obscuring the long historical process through which mechanisms of transmission, verification, documentation, and legal application of hadith had already developed prior to al-Shāfi'ī. This article addresses that gap by examining the transformation of hadith authority from the generation of the Companions to the emergence of al-Shāfi'ī's legal theory. Employing an intellectual-historical approach, the study reconstructs the continuity and transformation of hadith authority through an analysis of early transmission practices, the development of scholarly networks among the tābi'ūn, the codification movement of the second century Hijrī, and the epistemological reformulation advanced by al-Shāfi'ī. The study argues that the authority of hadith was neither suddenly created nor exclusively dependent upon al-Shāfi'ī's intervention. Rather, it emerged through a cumulative process involving verification practices (al-tathabbut), transmission networks, scholarly learning circles, and systematic documentation that had evolved since the earliest Muslim generations. Nevertheless, before al-Shāfi'ī, hadith functioned alongside other normative authorities, including communal practice, companion precedents, and juristic reasoning. The article demonstrates that al-Shāfi'ī's principal contribution was not the creation of hadith authority, but the systematization and canonization of a new epistemological framework that identified authentic prophetic reports as the primary representation of the Sunnah and the principal criterion of legal legitimacy. Consequently, the transformation associated with al-Shāfi'ī is best understood as a shift from a model of living sunnah grounded in communal practice toward a model of transmitted sunnah grounded in authenticated transmission.*

Keywords: *Hadith Authority; Sunnah; al-Shāfi'ī; Legal Epistemology; Hadith Codification.*

Abstrak: Otoritas hadis menempati posisi sentral dalam sejarah intelektual Islam, namun proses pembentukannya secara historis masih menjadi perdebatan akademik. Sebagian besar literatur cenderung menempatkan al-Syafi'i sebagai figur kunci yang meletakkan fondasi epistemologis hadis sebagai sumber otoritatif hukum Islam. Perspektif tersebut, bagaimanapun, berpotensi mengaburkan proses historis yang panjang, di mana mekanisme transmisi, verifikasi, dokumentasi, dan penggunaan hadis dalam pembentukan hukum telah berkembang jauh sebelum masa al-Syafi'i. Artikel ini berupaya mengisi celah tersebut dengan mengkaji transformasi otoritas hadis sejak generasi sahabat hingga munculnya teori hukum al-Syafi'i. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sejarah intelektual (*intellectual history*), penelitian ini merekonstruksi kesinambungan dan perubahan otoritas hadis melalui analisis terhadap praktik transmisi awal, perkembangan jaringan keilmuan pada masa *tabi'in*, gerakan kodifikasi hadis pada abad kedua Hijriah, serta reformulasi epistemologis yang dilakukan oleh al-Syafi'i. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa otoritas hadis tidak lahir secara tiba-tiba dan tidak sepenuhnya bergantung pada intervensi al-Syafi'i. Sebaliknya, otoritas tersebut terbentuk melalui proses kumulatif yang melibatkan praktik verifikasi (*al-taṣābbut*), jaringan transmisi, halaqah keilmuan, dan dokumentasi sistematis yang telah berkembang sejak generasi Muslim awal. Namun demikian, sebelum al-Syafi'i, hadis masih berfungsi berdampingan dengan sumber-sumber otoritas normatif lainnya, seperti praktik masyarakat, preseden sahabat, dan *ijtihad* para *fugaha*. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa kontribusi utama al-Syafi'i bukanlah menciptakan otoritas hadis, melainkan mensistematisasi dan mengkanonisasi kerangka epistemologis baru yang menempatkan riwayat Nabi yang autentik sebagai representasi utama *sunnah* dan sebagai kriteria pokok legitimasi hukum. Dengan demikian, transformasi yang terkait dengan al-Syafi'i lebih tepat dipahami sebagai pergeseran dari model *living sunnah* yang berlandaskan praktik kolektif menuju model *transmitted sunnah* yang berlandaskan transmisi yang autentik.

Kata kunci: Otoritas Hadis; *Sunnah*; al-Syafi'i; Epistemologi Hukum Islam; Kodifikasi Hadis.

Introduction

The authority of a source of knowledge is never born suddenly, but rather is the result of a long historical process, intellectual negotiation, and the gradual formation of a scientific tradition. In Islamic history, this phenomenon is evident in the development of hadith. The position of hadith as a religious authority cannot be understood only as a normative consequence of its proximity to the Prophet Muhammad, but also as a result of the dynamics of knowledge transmission, narration verification mechanisms, documentation practices, and the development of scientific methodology that took place from the generation of the Companions to the beginning of the second century Hijri. Thus, the authority of hadith is an epistemological construction formed through a complex historical process, not just a doctrine that is present in the final.

In the literature of hadith studies, the attention of scholars is more

directed to al-Shafi'i as a figure who succeeded in providing a systematic formulation of the blasphemy of hadith through the work of *al-Risālah*. This position makes al-Shafi'i often seen as laying the foundation for the legitimacy of hadith as a source of Islamic law. Modern scholarship, however, has increasingly questioned the tendency to portray al-Shafi'i as the sole founder of Islamic legal theory and the primary originator of hadith authority. While acknowledging the centrality of al-Shafi'i's contribution, a number of scholars argue that many of the legal and epistemological structures later systematized in *al-Risālah* had already emerged in earlier regional traditions of jurisprudence and hadith transmission. Consequently, al-Shafi'i's contribution is more accurately understood as a process of synthesis, standardization, and canonization of existing scholarly trends rather than the creation of an entirely new epistemological framework.¹

A number of historical facts show that the generation of Companions has developed a strict mechanism for receiving and narrating hadith through the practice of *taṣābbut*, restrictions on narration (*taqlīl al-riwāyah*), the use of witnesses, and various forms of verification of information attributed to the Prophet. This tradition then developed during the *tabi'in* period through the activities of *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīṡ*, the formation of *scientific halaqah*, the strengthening of transmission networks, and the development of hadith documentation in the form of *ṣaḥīfah* and *the tadwīn movement*. All these developments show that before al-Shafi'i formulated a normative argument regarding the blasphemy of hadith, an intellectual foundation had been formed that supported the birth of the authority of hadith in the scientific life of Muslims.

Nevertheless, research on pre-al-Shafi'i hadith generally still moves in two directions. First, research that focuses on the history of narration and codification of hadith as a series of chronological events. Second, the research focuses on al-Shafi'i's thoughts on the position of the *sunnah* in the Islamic legal system. These two tendencies have made important contributions, but still leave room for study that has not been touched much, namely how changes in the pattern of narration, transmission, verification, documentation, and codification of hadith together formed the transformation of the authority of hadith before the birth of the theory of al-Shafi'i. As a result, the intellectual relationship between the phases of the companions, *tabi'in*, and scholars of the second century of the Hijri is often understood as separate historical stages, rather than as a process of continuous epistemological formation.

Based on these gaps, this article aims to reconstruct the transformation of the authority of hadith before al-Shafi'i through an intellectual historical

approach. The focus of the research is not only to explain the development of narration in each period, but also to analyze the change in the function of hadith from the tradition of transmission to normative authority which then obtains a methodological formulation in al-Shafi'i's thought. With this approach, the article argues that al-Shafi'i was not the starting point of the birth of the hadith authority, but rather a figure who systematized the epistemological tradition that had developed over the previous nearly two centuries.

The Authority and Transformation of the Hadith Narration

After Prophet Muhammad, the main problem faced by the Muslim community was not only to maintain the continuity of the transmission of hadith, but also to maintain its validity as a source of religious knowledge. In this context, the Companions appear as the first authorities to establish the mechanism of narration through the collection of hadith from oral traditions and written records (*jam' al-ahādīṣ*). This activity shows that since the early generations, the transmission of hadith did not take place spontaneously, but was accompanied by collective awareness to ensure the authenticity of the information coming from the Prophet.²

The position of the companions as a generation that interacts directly with the Prophet makes them have legitimacy in narrating hadiths. However, this legitimacy is not synonymous with the freedom to spread history. On the contrary, the practice of narration is built on the principles of *al-taṣabbut* (verification) and *al-iqlāl min al-riwāyah* (limitation of narration). The policy implemented by Abū Bakr and continued by 'Umar is more appropriately understood as an epistemological strategy to maintain the integrity of the hadith than as an attempt to limit the authority of the sunnah. The request to present witnesses, the need to confirm the history, and the prudence in conveying hadith show that the validity of information is positioned as the top priority in the early Islamic scientific tradition.³

However, the policies of the caliphs were not uniform. During the 'Uṣmān period, narration activities began to gain a wider space as the Islamic territory expanded and the people's need for hadith increased.⁴ As for 'Alī, it retains the principle of verification, although it no longer makes the oath an absolute requirement for a narrator who has proven credible.⁵ These policy variations show that narration methods develop adaptively following social dynamics without abandoning the basic principles of hadith authentication.⁶

The difference in the approach of the caliphs al-Rāsyidūn shows that

the formation of the authority of hadith took place through the process of institutionalization of the transmission mechanism, not simply because of the closeness of the companions to the Prophet. Thus, the companion phase became the initial foundation for the birth of the tradition of narration criticism which then developed more systematically in the tabi'in generation and reached its methodological form during the hadith codification period. Recent studies on the transmission of early Islamic traditions further support the view that mechanisms of verification and scholarly scrutiny emerged much earlier than previously assumed. Through isnād-cum-matn analysis, Harald Motzki demonstrates that a number of traditions preserved in early compilations can be traced to first-century transmitters, indicating that organized transmission and verification procedures were already functioning before the large-scale codification of hadith literature.⁷

The end of the generation of the companions marked a shift in the authority of hadith narration to the generation of tabi'in. This shift not only shows the change of generations of narrators, but also reflects a change in the structure of scholarly authority in the transmission of hadith. In contrast to the companions who gain legitimacy through direct interaction with the Prophet, the authority of tabi'in is built on the basis of scientific credibility, intellectual capacity, and narration integrity. Therefore, not every tabi'in is recognized as an authoritative source of hadith; Only those who meet *the criteria of šiqah*, have memorization accuracy, and master the substance of history are accepted as references in the transmission of hadith. This transformation was followed by a change in the pattern of knowledge transmission.⁸ If in the time of the companions the narration relied more on personal closeness to the Prophet, then during the time of tabi'in various more systematic learning mechanisms developed, such as *mulāzamah*, *munāzarah*, *muzākarah*, request for fatwa, and *al-riḥlah fi ṭalab al-ḥadiṡ*.⁹ These various methods show that the transmission of hadith has shifted from individual relationships to academic traditions that emphasize the process of learning, verification, and scientific dialogue. The mobility of tabi'in to various scientific centers also expands the transmission network while accelerating the spread of hadith in various Islamic regions.

Another development that stood out in this period was the strengthening of the tradition of hadith documentation. If the generation of companions has known recording in the form of *ṣaḥīfah*, then the tabi'in generation has expanded the practice as part of the strategy to maintain the authenticity of the hadith in the midst of the increasing number of narrators, the

expansion of Islamic territory, the decrease in memorization of hadith, and the emergence of concerns about falsification of history.¹⁰ Therefore, documentation no longer functions as a personal archive, but develops into a scientific instrument to sustain the validity of hadith transmission.

Codification of Hadith and the Dynamics of Legal Authority in the Second Century of Hijri

The most important development in the history of hadith in the second century Hijri was the change in the tradition of oral transmission towards systematic codification (*taṣnīf*). If in the previous period hadith was more maintained through memorization, personal notes, or individual transmission, then from the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century Hijri began to emerge efforts to compile hadith into books compiled based on fiqh themes. This transformation marked the birth of hadith literature as a more organized scientific discipline, although at this stage the function of hadith as a legal authority had not yet been fully consolidated.

The codification initiative is generally attributed to the policy of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101 AH). His concern about the death of the early generation of narrators and the increasing falsification of hadith triggered by political conflicts prompted the birth of an official policy to collect the hadith of the Prophet. This policy is an important turning point because for the first time the state pays direct attention to the preservation of hadith as an Islamic scientific heritage.

In realizing this policy, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz assigned Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Amr ibn Ḥazm to compile the hadiths that developed in Medina, especially the narrations on 'Amrah bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān and al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, two *tabi'in* figures who are known as the heirs of the scientific tradition of Medina.¹¹ On another occasion he also instructed Kaṣīr ibn Murrah al-Ḥaḍramī to collect the history of the Companions of the Battle of Badr who were still living in the region of Ḥims. In addition, official letters were also sent to scholars in various Umayyad territories to collect their hadiths.¹²

Among the figures who obtained the greatest mandate was Muḥammad ibn Syihāb al-Zuhri. The significance of al-Zuhri's role has also been highlighted in contemporary hadith studies. Rather than viewing early codification merely as a state-sponsored archival effort, recent scholarship considers it part of a broader scholarly movement to preserve legal and prophetic traditions already circulating among regional networks of scholars. This suggests continuity between the oral and written phases of

transmission rather than a radical break between them.¹³

The success of the al-Zuhri project then led to the emergence of a wave of hadith codification in the middle of the second century Hijri. A number of scholars began to compile hadith works based on the chapters of fiqh (*muṣannaf*), including Ibn Jurayj (d. 150 AH), Ma'mar ibn Rāshid (d. 153 AH), al-Awzā'i (d. 157 AH), Sa'id ibn Abī 'Arūbah (d. 156 AH), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161 AH), al-Layth ibn Sa'd (d. 175 AH), Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH), 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181 AH), Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāh (d. 197 AH), Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah (d. 198 AH), to 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211 AH).¹⁴ The presence of these works shows that hadith began to be classified according to the needs of *the legal istinbāt*, no longer merely collected as a scattered history.

Although Ibn Jurayj and Ma'mar are often seen as the pioneers of the preparation of *muṣannaf*, the most widely influential work is *the al-Muwatta'* of Mālik ibn Anas. This book not only collects *the hadith of marfū'*, but also contains the fatwas of the companions, the opinions of the tabi'in, the practices of the people of Medina, and the ijtihad of Mālik himself. Of the approximately 1,720 narrations contained in it, the hadith of the Prophet is only part of the entire content, while the rest consists of the atsar of the companions, the fatwa of tabi'in, and the personal views of its compiler. The composition shows that the hadith book in the second century Hijri still represents a fiqh tradition that makes various forms of religious authority go hand in hand, not just the hadith of the Prophet.¹⁵

In addition to *the forms of muṣannaf* and *muwatta'*, in this period there were also works that used the term *sunan*. However, the term *sunan* in the second century did not have the same meaning as the sunan books in the third century Hijri. This category still includes the history of *marfū'*, *mawqūf*, and *maqtū'*, so the boundaries between the hadith of the Prophet, the opinions of the companions, and the fatwa of tabi'in have not been expressly separated in the construction of hadith literature.¹⁶

The emergence of hadith books in the second century Hijri did not necessarily change the position of hadith as the main source in the formation of Islamic law. Although the codification process had taken place systematically, the construction of legal epistemology at that time still placed hadith as one of the elements among the various sources of authority that had developed before. In other words, the transformation that occurred in this period was more administrative in the form of historical collection than a paradigm shift in the use of hadith as the main basis of *istinbāt* law.

This character can be observed from the structure of hadith books that

were born in the second century Hijri. Like *al-Muwatta'* by Mālik ibn Anas and various *muṣannaf* books, they not only contain the hadiths of the Prophet, but are also filled with fatwas of companions, opinions of tabi'in, community practices, and ijtihad of its own compilers. Such an arrangement shows that the hadith of the Prophet has not been positioned as the only normative authority. Instead, he is still part of a network of legal authorities that includes the traditions of the Companions, community practices, and the opinions of the fuqaha.

This reality shows that the codification of hadith in the second century of the Hijri is not identical to the dominance of hadith in the practice of Islamic law. The presence of hadith in fiqh books serves more as an instrument of legitimacy for legal decisions that have developed in the tradition of the jury. Therefore, the birth of hadith literature cannot be understood as the triumph of *the ahl al-ḥadīṣ* paradigm, but is still in the plural form of fiqh thought, where various forms of legal authority run side by side.¹⁷

This phenomenon is clearly seen in *al-Muwatta'* by Mālik ibn Anas. Although this book is known as one of the earliest collections of hadith, the legal arguments built by Mālik did not always rely on the hadith of the Prophet. In many matters, he prefers the practice of life in Medina (*'amal ahl al-Madīnah*) as an authentic representation of the legacy of the Prophet and the generations of companions. The epistemological importance of *'amal ahl al-Madīnah* has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Rather than representing a rejection of hadith, Mālik's reliance on Medinan practice reflects an alternative conception of sunnah in which communal continuity functions as a vehicle for preserving prophetic guidance. In this framework, living practice itself may constitute evidence of the Prophet's normative legacy.¹⁸

One example that is often given is Mālik's view on fasting for six days of the month of Shawwal. In *al-Muwatta'* he stated that he did not know of any of the scholars or scholars of Medina who practiced the fast. In fact, this practice is considered makruh because it is feared to develop into bid'ah. In fact, a sahih hadith that advocates fasting for six days of Shawwal has been narrated from Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. Mālik's attitude in this case shows that the existence of sahih hadith has not always been a decisive factor in the determination of the law if it is contrary to the established practice in Medina.¹⁹

The case indicates that for Mālik, the authority of the sunnah was not solely built through the transmission of sanad, but also through the continuity of practices inherited collectively by the people of Medina.

Consequently, the validity of the law is determined not only by the authenticity of history, but also by the continuity of the tradition that is considered to represent the practices of the Prophet and his companions. This perspective came to be known as the doctrine of *‘amal ahl al-Madīnah*.²⁰

A similar pattern can also be found in *Muṣannaf* ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan’ānī. Although the book is one of the largest collections of hadith at the end of the second century Hijri, its content structure shows that the Prophet's hadith did not yet dominate the overall legal argument. In a number of fiqh discussions, especially in the early chapters on *ṭahārah*, the discussion begins with the fatwa of his teachers such as Ibn Jurayj, Ma'mar ibn Rāshid, or the opinions of the tabi'in without being preceded by the hadith of the Prophet. In another part, the *hadith of marfū' is indeed found*, but after that the discussion is strengthened again with the *atsar* of the companions and the fatwa of tabi'in which there are more than the hadith of the Prophet.

The composition shows that the function of the *muṣannaf* book in the second century Hijri was not just to collect hadiths, but to document the entire treasure of legal authorities living in the midst of Islamic society. Therefore, these books are more accurately understood as encyclopedias of the fiqh tradition than as a collection of hadith in the sense that developed in the third century Hijri. Hadith is one of the important components of it, but it has not yet become the center of legitimacy of the entire legal building.

This condition is closely related to the concept of *sunnah* that developed among the fuqaha of the second century of the Hijri. At that time, the *sunnah* was not understood exclusively as a narration sourced from the Prophet through an authentic sanad. *Sunnah* is better understood as a normative tradition that is passed down from generation to generation through the collective practice of Islamic society. Therefore, the continuity of practice is often seen as having the same authoritative value, even under certain conditions stronger than information derived from individual history.²¹

This view is evident in the thought of al-Awzā'ī who views the practice of Muslim society as a direct continuation of the tradition of the Prophet although it is not always conveyed through formal transmission of sanad. In contrast to al-Awzā'ī, Abū Yūsuf requires that a tradition must have a reliable basis for narration, but he still gives priority to the widely accepted narration and rejects the *āḥād* hadith as a legal basis in a number of issues. Meanwhile, al-Syaybānī combines hadith with the practice of the Companions so that the legal authority is built through the continuity of

the behavior of the early generations of Islam.²²

The diversity of the concepts of the sunnah shows that before the emergence of al-Shafi'i there was no uniform definition of the relationship between the sunnah and the hadith. Some scholars identify the sunnah with the practices of the community, some make it a tradition of the companions, while others combine hadith with the habits that have developed among the fuqaha. As a result, the authenticity of the sanad has not yet become the only parameter in determining the legal authority of a narration.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the codification of hadith in the second century of the Hijri has not resulted in an epistemological transformation of the position of the hadith. Hadith has indeed been successfully compiled in the form of systematic works, but its authority still shares space with community practices, fatwas of friends, tabi'in opinions, and traditions of regional schools of fiqh. This condition then became the intellectual background for the reformulation carried out by al-Shafi'i, which was to shift the center of legal authority from *the living tradition* to the hadith of the Prophet which was validated through the transmission of sanad. The fundamental change brought about by al-Shafi'i was not just a defense of hadith, but a restructuring of the epistemology of Islamic law that made the hadith the sole representation of the Prophet's sunnah.

Al-Shafi'i, Reformulation of Sunnah Epistemology, and Strengthening the Authority

The codification of hadith that developed during the second century of the Hijri did not necessarily end the debate on the position of hadith in the Islamic legal system. Although various hadith works have been systematically compiled in the form of *muṣannaf*, *muwaṭṭa'*, and the initial form of *sunan*, there is no methodological agreement on the basis of the legitimacy of a hadith as *an argument*. In the practice of *istinbāt* law, hadith is still positioned side by side with various other sources of authority, such as community practices (*'amal*), fatwa of the companions, local traditions, and *ijtihād* of the fuqaha. This condition shows that the fundamental problem in this period is no longer related to the availability of hadith as a source of religious information, but rather the absence of an epistemological framework that is able to explain the relationship between hadith, sunnah, and other sources of Islamic law consistently.

These differences in orientation can be seen in the legal construction developed by various early schools of fiqh. The tradition of Medina, for

example, gives great authority to *'amal ahl al-Madīnah* as a representation of religious practices inherited from generations of companions. In Iraq, some scholars are more selective in accepting hadith by considering the level of fame of history and its conformity with developed legal principles. On the other hand, the rationalist group (*ahl al-kalām*) even shows a tendency to limit the use of hadith and prioritize the arguments of the Qur'an and rational reasoning. The diversity of approaches shows that at the end of the second century Hijri there was no single paradigm regarding the source of Islamic legal authority.²³

This reality gives birth to a fairly basic epistemological problem. If sunnah is understood as a tradition that lives in a community, then its authority is highly dependent on the continuity of social practices that develop in a certain area. On the other hand, if the sunnah is identified through the transmission of the hadith, then its validity must be determined based on the authenticity of the narration, not on the popularity of a tradition. This difference in starting point is what causes the emergence of various standards in accepting or rejecting a hadith as a legal basis. As a result, hadith has not fully acquired a position as an independent normative authority, but is still one of the elements in a wider network of legal authorities.²⁴

It is in this context that Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shafi'i's contribution acquires historical significance. Its presence is not merely to offer new opinions on the sunnah, but to reconstruct the epistemological foundations that underpin the authority of hadith in Islamic law.²⁵ Contemporary historians of Islamic law argue that al-Shafi'i's enduring influence lies not primarily in introducing new legal sources, but in redefining the hierarchy and relationship between existing sources. By establishing a coherent theory that linked the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and legal reasoning within a unified framework, he contributed decisively to the canonization of Islamic legal methodology.²⁶

Therefore, al-Shafi'i's contribution cannot be understood only as an effort to maintain the position of hadith in Islamic law. More than that, he reformulated the concept of sunnah and at the same time changed the basis of legal legitimacy from a praxis authority to a transmission authority. This shift became a turning point in the history of Islamic legal thought because it made the authenticity of sanad the main parameter in determining the validity of a sunnah. With this framework, the hadith is no longer positioned simply as a religious reference, but acquires methodological legitimacy as a source of law that has normative authority after the Qur'an. This transformation then became the foundation for the development of

the methodology of hadith criticism and the theory of sunnah blasphemy in the following periods.

The epistemological reconstruction carried out by al-Shafi'i departs from the criticism of the way some of the fuqaha understand the sunnah. Before his time, the term sunnah was not always understood as a history that authentically originated from the Prophet Muhammad (saw). In legal practice, sunnah is often interpreted as a normative tradition that lives in Muslim society, passed down through generations of companions and tabi'in, and maintained through collective practices that take place from generation to generation. As a result, the authority of a sunnah is determined more by the continuity of a tradition than by the certainty of transmission that connects it to the Prophet. It is this condition that, according to al-Shafi'i, has the potential to give birth to a diversity of standards in establishing Islamic law because each community can claim its traditions as a representation of the sunnah.²⁷

On that basis, al-Shafi'i proposed a redefinition of the concept of sunnah. For him, sunnah is not synonymous with social practices that develop in a community or with habits inherited from previous generations. The Sunnah can only be identified through the proven narration of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). Therefore, the validity of the sunnah is no longer determined by the popularity of a practice, but by the authenticity of the transmission that connects the narration to the Prophet. With this formulation, al-Shafi'i shifts the basis of the legitimacy of the sunnah from the authority of tradition to the authority of sanad.²⁸ Joseph Lowry notes that al-Shafi'i's legal theory fundamentally transformed the epistemological status of the Sunnah by grounding its authority in reliable transmission from the Prophet rather than in regional practice or juristic consensus. Through this reformulation, Sunnah became increasingly identified with authenticated prophetic reports and acquired a more clearly defined legal function within Islamic jurisprudence.²⁹

This change was a very important turning point in the history of Islamic legal thought. Before al-Shafi'i, a practice could gain legitimacy because it had become a widely accepted custom by the community or because it was inherited by the companions and tabi'in. However, within the methodological framework of al-Shafi'i, the continuity of social practice is no longer sufficient to establish the status of the sunnah if it is not supported by authentic hadith transmission. On the other hand, a hadith still has normative force even if it does not become a dominant practice in a region, as long as its sanad meets the standards of validity. Thus, the authority of the sunnah is no longer built on the basis of social acceptance,

but on the basis of the validity of the narration.

The implication of the reformulation is a fundamental change to the concept of religious authority. If previously the legal authority relied on a combination of hadith, community traditions, fatwas of the companions, and the practices of the *jury*, then al-Shafi'i places the hadith of the Prophet as the center of legitimacy of all sunnah buildings. The opinions of friends, community habits, and practices that have developed only have argumentative value as long as they do not contradict authentic hadiths. In this perspective, the sunnah is no longer understood as the result of the historical construction of Muslim society, but rather as a normative representation of the teachings of the Prophet that can only be known through an accountable transmission mechanism.

The reformulation also changed the perspective of the hadiths narrated individually (*khabar al-āḥād*). Some of the previous fuqaha tended to require reinforcement through community practice or the level of historical fame so that a hadith can be used as a legal basis. On the other hand, al-Shafi'i emphasized that a hadith narrated by a narrator still has the power of argument as long as it meets the criteria of the validity of the sanad and the narrator is known to have integrity and accuracy in narrating the hadith. Thus, the quantity of narrators is no longer the main measure in determining the validity of a sunnah, but the quality of transmission that connects the narration to the Prophet Muhammad (saw).

This view shows that al-Shafi'i's attention is not directed to the limitation of the sources of law, but to the unification of epistemological standards in determining the authority of hadith. It seeks to eliminate the dualism between *the sunnah* as a living tradition and *the sunnah* as the narration of the Prophet by making the authentic hadith as the only authentic representation of the sunnah of the Prophet. Through this formulation, the concept of sunnah obtained clearer methodological boundaries as well as became the foundation for the birth of the discipline of sanad criticism and the theory of hadith criticism in the classical period.

The reformulation of the concept of sunnah developed by al-Shafi'i ultimately had far-reaching consequences than simply a change in the definition of terminology. The change shifts the structure of authority in the Islamic legal system. If in the previous period the hadith was only one element in the process of forming the law together with the practices of the community, the fatwa of the companions, and the *ijtihad* of the jurists, then in the construction of al-Shafi'i the hadith was placed as the main foundation that determines the legitimacy of all forms of legal reasoning. Thus, the question at issue is no longer related to which religious practice is

more authoritative, but what source of knowledge has the most authentic relationship with the Prophet.

This shift is a direct criticism of the methodology of the early schools of *fiqh*. The legal tradition of Medina, for example, gives a very high position to *'amal ahl al-Madinah* as a representation of the collective practice that is believed to have inherited the traditions of the Prophet. Within this framework, community practices gain legitimacy because they are seen as a historical continuity of the generation of friends. In contrast, some Iraqi jurists developed a more selective approach to hadith by considering the level of historical fame, its conformity with established legal principles, and its relevance to the growing practice in society. Although they differ in method, the two approaches have fundamental similarities, namely that they have not placed *sahih* hadith as a single parameter in determining the validity of the law.

Al-Shafi'i offers a fundamentally different construction. According to him, legal authority cannot be based on the continuity of a tradition or the social acceptance of a practice, but must be returned to a history that can be confirmed from the Prophet. Therefore, the practices of the community, fatwa of the companions, and the opinions of the *tabi'in* do not have an independent position if they are contrary to the authentic hadith. The entire form of *ijtihad* only has argumentative power as long as it is in harmony with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as evidenced through the transmission of authentic *sanad*.³⁰

This change in orientation is evident in al-Shafi'i's criticism of the tendency of some *fuqaha* to prioritize community practices over hadith. This phenomenon can be found, for example, in Mālik ibn Anas's view of the law of fasting for six days in the month of Shawwal. Mālik considered the practice to be unknown among Medina jurists and therefore tended not to advocate it, although there is a history that explicitly explains its virtues. For al-Shafi'i, this approach indicates a reversal of the hierarchy of authority, i.e. when tradition acquires a higher position than the hadith. This condition, according to him, has the potential to obscure the position of the Prophet's *sunnah* as an authentic source of law.

The same criticism is also directed at the tendency of some Iraqi *fuqaha* to require a certain level of fame before a hadith can be used as an argument. In the perspective of al-Shafi'i, the validity of the hadith is not determined by the number of people who narrate it or by the breadth of public acceptance of its contents, but by the integrity of the *sanad* and the credibility of the narrators. As long as the chain of narration is proven to be continuous and each narrator meets the criteria of justice and

precision, the hadith still has normative force even though it is narrated through a limited path. With this argument, al-Shafi'i indirectly changed the standard of acceptance of hadith from a quantitative approach to a qualitative approach.³¹

The implications of this construction are very large for the development of Islamic law. Hadith is no longer treated as a complement to the practice of fiqh that has developed before, but becomes the main instrument in verifying all forms of ijtihad. The traditions of the community, the decisions of the companions, and the opinions of the imams of the madhhab are no longer independent sources of law, but must be tested based on their conformity with the hadith of the Prophet. This change shows that al-Shafi'i is actually building a new hierarchy in Islamic legal epistemology, namely by placing the Qur'an as the primary source, the sahih hadith as the explanatory as well as the second normative authority, while the other forms of reasoning are at the subordinate level.

Thus, the transformation carried out by al-Shafi'i not only strengthened the position of hadith in the discourse of Islamic law, but also changed the mechanism of formation of religious authority as a whole. From this period, the legitimacy of an opinion is no longer measured, mainly based on who practices it or how widely the practice is accepted by the community, but based on the ability of the opinion to be traced to the Prophet through the transmission of authentic hadith. This shift became the foundation for the birth of *the ahl al-ḥadīṣ* paradigm in the third century A.D. and at the same time paved the way for the development of the discipline of sanad criticism, matan criticism, and codification of hadith in a more systematic form in the following period.

Conclusion

The transformation of hadith authority in early Islamic history is an epistemological process that takes place gradually and cannot be separated from the dynamics of transmission, verification, documentation, and codification of hadith. Since the time of the Companions, a number of mechanisms have developed to maintain the validity of narration, such as *al-taṣābbut*, restrictions on narration, confirmation, and the use of witnesses. The tradition then underwent development during the tabi'in period through the formation of scientific halaqah, *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīṣ*, the strengthening of transmission networks, and the increasing breadth of the practice of hadith documentation. Thus, the authority of hadith had an epistemological foundation long before the emergence of the methodological formulation of al-Shafi'i.

The codification of hadith in the second century Hijri became an important stage in the process. The emergence of various works in the form of *muṣannaf*, *muwaṭṭa'*, and the early form of *sunan* shows that hadith began to be collected and compiled in a more systematic manner. However, the codification has not automatically made the hadith the sole source of legal authority. The hadith books of this period still show the existence of the Prophet's hadith alongside the fatwas of the companions, the opinions of *tabi'in*, community practices, and *ijtihād fuqaha*. *Mālik ibn Anas's* *Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, for example, shows that *'amal ahl al-Madīnah* had an important position in the construction of law, so that the authority of the *sunnah* at that time was not entirely identical to the authenticity of the transmission of individual hadith. It is in this context that al-Shafi'i's contribution acquires historical significance. Al-Shafi'i cannot be positioned as the original creator of hadith authority, because the practice of using hadith as a source of knowledge and normative reference has been going on since previous generations. His main contribution lies in the effort to reformulate and systematize the epistemological basis of *sunnah* authority by placing hadith that has authentic transmission as the main representation of the Prophet's *sunnah*. Through this construction, the legitimacy of the *sunnah* undergoes a shift from the authority of living traditions and practices to an authority that rests on the validity of transmission.

This epistemological shift also changes the hierarchy of authority in the formation of Islamic law. Hadith is no longer just one of the elements that complements the practice of *fiqh*, but is placed as the main instrument to verify various forms of *ijtihād*, community practices, and the opinions of scholars. The emphasis on the quality of the *sanad* and the credibility of the narrator also strengthens the qualitative standards in determining the blasphemy of the hadith, including in the acceptance of *khābar al-āḥād*.

Thus, the history of the authority of the hadith is more accurately understood as a continuous process of transformation, not as a sudden change in the time of al-Shafi'i. The Companion period provided the foundation for verification, the *tabi'in* period expanded the network and practice of transmission and documentation, the second century Hijri developed codification, while al-Shafi'i provided a more systematic epistemological formulation of the relationship between the *sunnah*, hadith, and Islamic law. This transformation then became one of the foundations for the development of *the ahl al-ḥadīṣ paradigm*, the criticism of *sanad* and *matan*, as well as the increasingly systematic codification of hadith in the third century Hijri.

Endnotes

1. Wael B. Hallaq, "Was al-Shafi'i the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993): 587-605; Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-18.
2. Rifqi Muhammad Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar dalam Periwiyatan dan Kodifikasi Hadis* (Tangerang Selatan: HIPIUS Press, 2020), 205.
3. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 29.
4. Arofatul Mu'awanah, "Perkembangan Hadis pada Masa Sahabat (Taqlī' wa Tathabbut min al-Riwāyah)". *Jurnal Kaca Jurusan Ushuluddin STAI Al-Fithrah*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Agustus 2019): 138.
5. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib narrated hadith orally and in writing, among others about fines, the release of Muslim captives, and the prohibition of qīṣāṣ against the infidels. In *the Musnad Ahmad*, there are about 780 hadiths narrated through it. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (Bayrūt: 'Ālim al-Kutb, 1998), 50.
6. Arofatul Mu'awanah, "Perkembangan Hadis pada Masa Sahabat", 139.
7. Harald Motzki, "The Musannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī as a Source of Authentic Ahadith of the First Century A.H.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 08, no. 1 (1991): 1-21.
8. Muḥammad 'Ajāj al-Khaṭīb, *al-Sunnah Qabla al-Tadwīn* (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah 1987 M), 237.
9. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, Juz 20 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1403 H), 304.
10. 'Ajāj al-Khaṭīb, *al-Sunnah Qabla al-Tadwīn*, 174. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 39.
11. Hasbi Ash Shiddieqy., *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu Hadis*, Cet. 3 (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1965), 53.
12. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 69..
13. Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47. M. M. Azami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978), 34-58.
14. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 70.
15. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 71.
16. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 72.
17. R.M. Fatkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 199.
18. Umar F. Abd-Allah, *Malik's Concept of 'Amal in the Light of Maliki Legal Theory* (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978), 145-180.
19. Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997), 310.
20. Alamsyah, *Otoritas Sunnah Nabi di Era 4.0: Refleksi Pemikiran Syahrur dan al-Qardawi* (Bandar Lampung: Pusaka Media, 2020), 26.
21. Ahmad Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Penerjemah Agah Garnadi, Cet. Ke 1, (Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka, 1984), 89.
22. Ahmad Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic*, 93.
23. Daniel W. Brown, *Menyoal Relevansi Sunnah dalam Islam Modern*, terj. Jaziar Radianti dan Entin Sariani Muslim (Bandung: Mizan, 2000), 19-20.
24. Umar, "Konsep Sunnah Perspektif al-Syafi'i". *Al-Riwayah: Jurnal Studi Hadis*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2018): 114..
25. Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Syāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (t.tp: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938 M), 79.
26. Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52-79.
27. Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950) 2. Noel J. Coulson, *Hukum Islam dalam Perspektif Sejarah*, terj. Hamid Ahmad

- (Jakarta: P3M, 1987), 64-65.
28. Joseph E. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'i* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 11-36.
 29. R.M. Farkhi, *Kontestasi Nalar*, 199.
 30. Ahmad Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic*, 95.

Bibliography

- Abd-Allah, Umar F. *Malik's Concept of 'Amal in the Light of Maliki Legal Theory*. PhD Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978.
- Alamsyah. *Otoritas Sunnah Nabi di Era 4.0: Refleksi Pemikiran Syahrur dan al-Qardawi*. Bandar Lampung: Pusaka Media, 2020.
- Anas, Mālik ibn. *al-Muwatta'*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997.
- Azami, Muhammad Mustafa. *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978.
- Brown, Daniel W. *Menyoal Relevansi Sunnah dalam Islam Modern*. Diterjemahkan oleh Jaziar Radianti dan Entin Sariani Muslim. Bandung: Mizan, 2000.
- Brown, Jonathan A. C. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009.
- Coulson, Noel J. *Hukum Islam dalam Perspektif Sejarah*. Diterjemahkan oleh Hamid Ahmad. Jakarta: P3M, 1987.
- El Shamsy, Ahmed. *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Farkhi, Rifqi Muhammad. *Kontestasi Nalar dalam Periwiyatan dan Kodifikasi Hadis*. Tangerang Selatan: HIPIUS Press, 2020.
- Ḥanbal, Aḥmad ibn. *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*. Beirut: 'Ālim al-Kutub, 1998.
- Hasan, Ahmad. *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Diterjemahkan oleh Agah Garnadi. Cet. 1. Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka, 1984.
- Hallaq, Wael B. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Hallaq, Wael B. "Was al-Shafi'i the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993): 587-605.
- al-Khaṭīb, Muḥammad 'Ajāj. *al-Sunnah Qabla al-Tadwīn*. Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1987.
- Lowry, Joseph E. *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'i*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Melchert, Christopher. *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- al-Mizzī. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*. Juz 20. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1403 H.
- Motzki, Harald. *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Motzki, Harald. "The Musannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī as a Source of Authentic Ahādīth of the First Century A.H." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991): 1-21.
- Mu'awanah, Arofatul. "Perkembangan Hadis pada Masa Sahabat (Taqlīl wa Tathabbut min al-Riwāyah)." *Jurnal Kaca Jurusan Ushuluddin STAI Al-Fitrah* 9,

- no. 2 (2019).
- Schacht, Joseph. *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.
- al-Syāfi‘i, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs. *al-Risālah*. t.tp.: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938.
- Shiddieqy, Hasbi Ash. *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu Hadis*. Cet. 3. Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1965.
- Umar. “Konsep Sunnah Perspektif al-Syafi’i.” *Al-Riwayah: Jurnal Studi Hadis* 2, no. 2 (2018).

Kholik Ramdan Mahesa, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta | kholik.ramdan@staff.uinjkt.ac.id

Rifqi Muhammad Fatkhi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta | rifqimuhammad@uinjkt.ac.id

Atiyatul Ulya, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta | atiyatul.ulya@uinjkt.ac.id

Hilmy Firdausy, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta | hilmy.firdausy@uinjkt.ac.id