

NASHR AL- 'ILM AND THE WIDENING GROUNDS OF PUBLIC LEGITIMACY IN EARLY ISLAMIC SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al- 'Ilm* as a normative foundation for the ethics of *Nashr al- 'Ilm* and its relation to public legitimacy in early Islamic society, understood here as the socially intelligible grounds through which public responsibility could be justified, recognized, or accepted. Existing studies of educational ḥadīth often approach ḥadīth reports as sources of pedagogical values, while the connection between the ethics of knowledge transmission, social recognition, and public responsibility remains less fully explored. This interpretive literature-based study employs a textual-contextual reading of reports recorded by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim, supported by classical discussions of *adab al- 'ilm*, early Islamic historiography, and relevant modern scholarship. The analysis distinguishes textual findings, historical observations, and conceptual synthesis. The findings show that the prohibition against concealing knowledge does not require unrestricted disclosure. Rather, it rejects the arbitrary withholding of needed knowledge when its transmission is required. Historical traces associated with Dār al-Arqam, the teaching of the Qur'ān in Yathrib, *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*, and the dispatch of Companions function as contextual indications, not as direct proof of social transformation. The reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā are treated as illustrative cases in which recognized personal or scholarly capacity could enter the evaluation of public responsibility without erasing lineage, seniority, or social designation. The term “epistemic meritocracy” is used only as a limited analytical marker for this evaluative process. The article contributes to Qur'an and Ḥadīth Studies by expanding educational ḥadīth analysis beyond direct pedagogical application toward the ethical and social conditions through which knowledge becomes transmissible, recognizable, and publicly meaningful.

Keywords: Ḥadīth Tarbawī; Epistemic Meritocracy; *Kitmān al- 'Ilm*; *Nashr al- 'Ilm*; Public Legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge does not circulate in a vacuum. In this article, opportunities to learn, the authority to transmit religious teachings, and the recognition of figures deemed worthy of being heard are examined in relation to the social setting 30-06-2026 30-06-2026 s in which knowledge circulates. Peter Burke's social approach to the history of knowledge emphasizes that knowledge is situated and that it is gathered, analyzed, communicated, and used within particular social and cultural environments.¹ This framework is not mechanically imposed on early Islamic society. Rather, it provides a limited analytical lens for approaching the dissemination of knowledge as a social question, not merely as an individual relationship between those who possess knowledge and those who seek to learn.

¹Peter Burke, “A Social History of Knowledge: Problems and Perspectives,” *Revista Prâksis*, 2010, 9–14, <https://doi.org/10.25112/rp.v2i0.696>; Burke, “Social History of Knowledge.”

This issue is particularly relevant to the context of Arabia on the eve of Islam. Kinship ties, group status, and social honour formed an integral part of social life.² These structures did not simply disappear with the formation of the Muslim community. Religious texts, however, introduced a normative imperative: knowledge that is known and needed by others should not be withheld arbitrarily. This emphasis is evident in the ḥadīth concerning the prohibition of concealing knowledge, or *Kitmān al-‘Ilm*. Reports transmitted by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah contain a warning against those who, when asked about knowledge they possess, deliberately choose to conceal it.³ The emphasis of the ḥadīth is not a general prohibition against remaining silent, but a prohibition against withholding knowledge when its transmission is required.

At the individual level, this responsibility may be formulated as *badhl al-‘ilm* (sharing knowledge when required), namely the willingness to convey knowledge in a measured and appropriate manner to those who need it. At the social level, this article uses the term *Nashr al-‘Ilm* (dissemination of knowledge) to refer to an ethics of knowledge dissemination grounded in the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm*. The term is an analytical formulation, not a historical category explicitly employed across the reports, nor an equivalent of the modern democratization of education. Its use is more limited: it marks an ethical orientation according to which knowledge that is known and needed by others should not remain confined to those who possess it when its transmission is required.

Contemporary studies highlight the importance of maintaining a careful relationship between text, authenticity, and context. Zahrul Fata, Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, and Amir Sahidin argue that textual and contextual readings should be applied proportionately according to the nature of the ḥadīth.⁴ Bidayatul Mutammimah, Muh. Husni, and Umi Sumbulah underscore the importance of examining the *sanad* and *matn* when assessing ḥadīth transmission.⁵ In contemporary studies of educational ḥadīth, Rapia Arcanita, Busra Febriyarni, and Destriani discuss readiness for twenty-first-century learning; Yuyu Bondan Pujiniarti examines issues related to *sanad* in early childhood education; while Nur Annisa Istifarin and Idri develop ḥadīth literacy through the *One Ḥadīth One Presentation* model.⁶ A related line of inquiry appears in the study by Abur Hamdi Usman and his colleagues on the appointment of Usāmah ibn Zayd and questions concerning his suitability for leadership.⁷

²Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, Reprinted, (twice) (London: Routledge, 2001) 113, 118. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 21.

³Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996) no. 2649; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Damascus: Dār al-Risālah al-‘Ālamiyyah, 2009) no. 3658; Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Qazwīnī Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt et al., 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-‘Ālamiyyah, 2009) no. 266.

⁴Zahrul Fata, Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, and Amir Sahidin, “Dialektika Teks Dan Konteks dalam Framework Pemahaman Hadis,” *Al-Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 7, 2 (2023): 271–285, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v7i1.5002>.

⁵Bidayatul Mutammimah, Muh. Husni, and Umi Sumbulah, “Hadith Authentication Method: Concept, Application and Critique of Orientalist Skepticism,” *Religia* 26, 1 (2023): 58–75, <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v26i1.863>.

⁶Rapia Arcanita, Busra Febriyarni, and Destriani, “Hadith Tarbawi in Islamic Education: Impacts on 21st-Century Learning Readiness through Critical Thinking and Religious Commitment,” *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, 02 (2026): 503–514, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v15i02.10008>; Yuyu Bondan Pujiniarti, “Issues in Sanad and Their Implications for Early Childhood Islamic Education,” *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 14, 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v14i001.9523>; Nur Annisa Istifarin and Idri, “One Hadith One Presentation as a Hadith Literacy Model in a Modern Pesantren,” *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, 01 (2026): 65–80.

⁷Abur Hamdi Usman et al., “Adakah Rasulullah SAW Mengamalkan Nepotisme? Contoh Kes Pelantikan Usāmah Ibn Zayd RA Sebagai Panglima Perang,” *Hadis* 15, 29 (2025): 30–46, <https://doi.org/10.53840/hadis.v15i29.291>.

Recent studies relevant to this article may be mapped into three overlapping discussions. The first concerns ḥadīth interpretation, especially the need to relate textual and contextual readings while maintaining attention to *sanad* and *matn*. The second concerns educational ḥadīth, in which ḥadīth is often approached as a source of pedagogical values, learning readiness, *sanad* awareness in educational materials, or models of ḥadīth literacy. The third concerns public responsibility and leadership, especially in discussions of the appointment of Usāmah ibn Zayd and questions of suitability for command. These studies are important, but they tend to treat ḥadīth interpretation, educational value, and public responsibility as separate problems.

What remains less fully explored is a reading that connects these discussions through the ethics of knowledge transmission. Classical works of *adab al-‘ilm* discuss the moral responsibility of transmitting knowledge, but they do not systematically connect the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* to the formation of public trust and responsibility. Studies of educational ḥadīth often emphasize pedagogical meaning, but rarely examine the social conditions through which knowledge becomes transmissible and publicly recognizable. Studies of leadership and early Islamic social history help explain suitability, authority, and social formation, but they have not usually placed the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* at the center of the analysis of recognized capacity. This article occupies that intersection. Its novelty lies in showing that the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* can be read as a normative entry point for examining how knowledge, once responsibly transmitted and socially recognized, could become relevant to the evaluation of public responsibility.

To develop this argument, the article reads the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* alongside selected historical materials relevant to early Muslim communal formation and religious instruction: the report of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s conversion at Dār al-Arqam, the teaching of the Qur’ān by Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr and Ibn Umm Maktūm before the Prophet’s arrival in Medina, the social condition of *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*, and the dispatch of Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī to Yemen.⁸ These materials are not treated as stages in the development of a formal educational institution. Rather, they provide distinct contextual observations concerning early communal gathering, Qur’ānic instruction, social incorporation, and the regional transmission of religious obligations. The relationship between norm and history is therefore treated carefully: the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides a normative horizon for the responsibility to transmit needed knowledge, while the historical materials provide contextual indications of the settings through which religious teaching and communal responsibility were articulated.

This widening of the social spaces in which knowledge circulated raises a further question: how could recognized capacity become relevant to the assignment of public responsibility? The reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā are used here as illustrative rather than representative cases. In Usāmah’s case, the issue concerns the affirmation of personal suitability when leadership was questioned. In Ibn Abzā’s case, recitation of the Book of God and knowledge of *farā’id* are cited more explicitly as grounds for entrusting responsibility. These reports do not show the replacement of lineage, seniority, or social designation by scholarly capacity. They allow a more limited question to be examined: whether recognized capacity could acquire evaluative weight in specific reported instances.

In this article, “public legitimacy” does not refer to a formal theory of sovereignty or to a fully developed political system. It refers more narrowly to the socially intelligible grounds through which public responsibility could be justified, recognized, or accepted. This clarification is necessary because the article does not claim that early Islamic society became a meritocratic order.

⁸Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar Min Umūr Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi Wa-Sallam Wa-Sunanihi Wa-Ayyāmihi* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1422) no. 3925, 6452, 1458, and 4341–4342; Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘d, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1990), 3:184.

It asks how knowledge-based capacity could become one evaluative consideration within social structures that continued to be shaped by lineage, seniority, and inherited status.

This article therefore asks: how can the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* be read as a normative foundation for the ethics of *Nashr al-‘Ilm*, and to what extent can this ethics be situated alongside historical traces of knowledge dissemination and illustrative reports concerning public responsibility in early Islamic society? The article argues that the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides the negative formulation of an ethical responsibility, while *Nashr al-‘Ilm* expresses its positive social implication. When read alongside historical traces of knowledge circulation and reports concerning public responsibility, this ethics helps explain how recognized knowledge and relevant capacity could become meaningful in the formation of social trust without erasing existing social structures. The term “epistemic meritocracy” is used heuristically and critically to identify this limited evaluative process, whose analytical function is specified in the discussion below.

This article takes three interconnected clusters of materials as its units of analysis: the reports concerning *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* as the normative basis of the argument, selected historical traces of knowledge dissemination as contextual indications of social circulation, and the reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā as illustrative cases in which public responsibility and recognized capacity intersect. The article proceeds in four steps. First, it examines the wording and interpretive limits of the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm*. Second, it situates the ethics of *Nashr al-‘Ilm* alongside early social formations of knowledge dissemination. Third, it analyzes the reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā in relation to public responsibility. Finally, it discusses the limited use of “epistemic meritocracy” as an analytical term for understanding the evaluative role of recognized knowledge and capacity.

METHOD

This article is an interpretive literature-based study that employs a textual-contextual reading of ḥadīth. A textual reading keeps the analysis grounded in the wording of the reports, while a contextual reading situates them alongside relevant historical sources without constructing a simple causal relationship between ḥadīth and social change. M. Syuhudi Ismail proposes that ḥadīth should be understood textually when, after considering the relevant aspects surrounding the report, its meaning remains consistent with the wording of the text. A contextual reading becomes necessary when strong indications require the report to be understood and applied beyond its explicit wording. This approach enables the interpreter to consider whether the guidance contained in a ḥadīth operates in universal, temporal, or local terms.⁹ Zahrul Fata, Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, and Amir Sahidin likewise argue that textual and contextual readings of ḥadīth should be guided by defined interpretive criteria so that interpretation remains proportionate and avoids excess in either direction.¹⁰ Muhamad Rozaimi Ramle and Miftachul Huda show that attention to *asbāb al-wurūd* (circumstances surrounding the transmission of a ḥadīth) helps clarify the relationship between a report’s wording and the circumstances of its transmission.¹¹ This article does not examine *asbāb al-wurūd* as a separate object of study; context is used to test the limits of interpretation, not to introduce meanings unsupported by the *matn*. Combining these two modes of reading does not blur the distinction between text and context: the wording of the reports remains the point of departure, while historical sources are used to situate the interpretive findings in a measured manner.

⁹M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Hadis Nabi Yang Tekstual Dan Kontekstual: Telaah Ma‘ani al-Hadits Tentang Ajaran Islam Yang Universal, Temporal, Dan Lokal* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1994), 4-7.

¹⁰Fata, Hidayat, and Sahidin, “Dialektika Teks Dan Konteks dalam Framework Pemahaman Hadis,” 282.

¹¹Muhamad Rozaimi Ramle and Miftachul Huda, “Between Text and Context: Understanding Ḥadīth through Asbab al Wurud,” *Religions* 13, 2 (2022): 92, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020092>.

The primary corpus consists of two groups of reports. The first group comprises the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-ʿIlm* in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* no. 3658, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr* no. 2649, and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 266.¹² Ibn Mājah no. 261 is used as a supporting parallel report because it contains a broader wording concerning a person who possesses knowledge yet withholds it.¹³ The second group comprises reports concerning public responsibility: the case of Usāmah ibn Zayd in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* no. 4469 and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 2426,¹⁴ as well as the case of Ibn Abzā in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 817.¹⁵ Ibn Mājah no. 218 is treated as a parallel report because it adds the attribute *qāḍīn*, not as evidence of a formal judicial appointment.¹⁶

The corpus was selected purposively on the basis of two considerations. First, these reports relate directly to the withholding or transmission of knowledge and to the assignment of public responsibility. Second, they allow a connected reading of the normative basis of knowledge dissemination and the increasing weight accorded to capacity in the formation of social trust. This article does not seek to compile all ḥadīth reports concerning knowledge, education, or leadership. The historical discussion draws on classical historiography, particularly *ṭabaqāt* works (biographical compendia), in its reading of Dār al-Arḡam, as well as on al-Bukhārī no. 3925 concerning the teaching of the Qurʾān by Musʿab ibn ʿUmayr and Ibn Umm Maktūm; no. 6452 concerning *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*; and no. 1458 and 4341–4342 concerning the dispatch of Muʾadh ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī to Yemen.¹⁷ These sources are used as contextual points of reference for tracing the circulation of knowledge, not as evidence for a linear process of institutional development.

Interpretive sources are used selectively. Ḥadīth commentaries, lexical sources, and academic encyclopedias are consulted when particular terms bear directly on the analysis, especially *ʿilm*, *katama*, *mawlā*, and *farāʿid*. Modern scholarship is used to broaden the context and guard against introducing information not stated in the *matn*. Qurʾānic verses are brought in only at the stage of ethical synthesis as a broader normative horizon, not as direct historical evidence.

The analysis proceeds in five stages: limited *takhrīj* (source tracing); comparison of parallel reports where variations in wording affect meaning; examination of key terms through commentaries, lexical sources, and academic encyclopedias; situating the textual findings alongside early Islamic historiography in order to trace the social spaces through which knowledge circulated; and conceptual synthesis while maintaining the limits of the claims advanced. This article is not a standalone study of *sanad* criticism, although the assessments of ḥadīth scholars are noted where they affect the use of particular reports. At the stage of synthesis, Linton’s distinction between ascribed and achieved status is used heuristically to examine the tension between inherited social position and recognized capacity. In Linton’s formulation, ascribed statuses are assigned without reference to individual abilities, whereas achieved statuses are not assigned at birth but are left open to competition and individual effort.¹⁸ Sorokin’s concept of social mobility is likewise used in a limited sense to describe transitions between social positions.¹⁹ The term “epistemic meritocracy” is used heuristically rather than as a label for an established social system. These

¹²Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* no. 3658; al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr* no. 2649; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 266.

¹³Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 261.

¹⁴al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 4469; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿIsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāʾuh, 1955) no. 2426b.

¹⁵Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 817a.

¹⁶Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 218.

¹⁷al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 3925, 6452, 1458 and 4341–4342; Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 3:184.

¹⁸Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 115

¹⁹Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 133.

modern conceptual tools provide an analytical vocabulary for particular phenomena, but they do not displace the primary sources or portray early Islamic society as an entirely new social order.

For analytical clarity, this article distinguishes three layers of analysis without collapsing them into one another. The first is textual analysis, which concerns the wording, variants, and interpretive limits of the ḥadīth reports themselves. The second is historical observation, which concerns traces of knowledge circulation drawn from early Islamic historiography and used to situate the textual findings within their social setting. The third is conceptual synthesis, which employs analytical formulations and concepts such as *Nashr al-‘Ilm*, epistemic meritocracy, ascribed status, and achieved status to name specific phenomena examined through the sources. These layers interact throughout the article, but they do not have the same evidential function. Textual analysis provides the normative basis of the argument; historical observations offer contextual and illustrative support; and conceptual synthesis provides a controlled language for interpreting the relationship between knowledge transmission, social recognition, and public responsibility.

RESULT

The findings are presented in three related but distinct layers. The first subsection establishes the textual basis of the argument by analyzing the wording, variants, and interpretive limits of the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm*. The second subsection offers historical observations concerning the circulation of knowledge through selected spaces, figures, and regions; these observations function as contextual indications rather than direct proof of social transformation. The third subsection examines the reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā as illustrative cases in which recognized capacity becomes relevant to public responsibility. Conceptual interpretation is developed more fully in the Discussion, so that the Result section remains focused on textual and historical findings.

The Ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* and the Responsibility to Transmit Knowledge

Reports prohibiting the concealment of knowledge indicate that knowledge is not merely a private possession. In *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, the Prophet stated:

مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكَتَمَهُ أَلْجَمَهُ اللَّهُ بِلْجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

“Whoever is asked about knowledge and then conceals it, God will bridle him with a bridle of fire on the Day of Resurrection”.²⁰

Closely related wording appears in *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* by al-Tirmidhī and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*. Al-Tirmidhī uses the wording *man su‘ila ‘an ‘ilmin ‘alimahu thumma katamahu* and grades the report *ḥasan*. Ibn Mājah no. 266 conveys a similar emphasis through the wording *man su‘ila ‘an ‘ilmin ya‘lamuhu fa-katamahu*.²¹ Ibn Mājah no. 261 presents a broader wording:

مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ يَحْفَظُ عِلْمًا فَيَكْتُمُهُ إِلَّا أَتَى بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مُلْجَمًا بِلْجَامٍ مِنَ النَّارِ

“No one possesses knowledge and then conceals it without being brought forth on the Day of Resurrection bridled with a bridle of fire”.²²

Variations in wording clarify the limits of the interpretation. The primary report places the question in an immediate context: a person possesses knowledge that is needed but withholds the answer. Ibn Mājah no. 261 broadens the emphasis because it does not explicitly repeat the context of being asked, yet its wording is insufficient to require unrestricted disclosure of information. Classical discussions of *adab al-‘ilm* support the ethical significance of knowledge transmission.

²⁰Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* no. 3658.

²¹al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* no. 2649; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 266.

²²Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 261.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr includes a section entitled *Jāmi‘ li-Nashr al-‘Ilm*, which preserves reports commending guidance through others and compares learning knowledge without communicating it to hoarding gold without spending it.²³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī likewise records that some early scholars became reluctant to narrate when students showed poor adab, persistently pressed questions, and disregarded proper conduct. He also opens a separate section on gentleness in ḥadīth transmission and forbearance in moments of anger.²⁴ These materials do not themselves establish a complete rule of disclosure. They do, however, show that the transmission of knowledge was treated as an ethically governed practice rather than as the neutral circulation of information.

These reports are transmitted through Abū Hurayrah. Al-Tirmidhī grades the report ḥasan. The commentary in ‘Awn al-Ma‘būd notes that the report is transmitted through several routes containing critical discussion, while the route recorded by Abū Dāwūd is regarded as ḥasan.²⁵ This article does not extend the discussion into an examination of all transmission routes because its focus is not an independent *takhrīj* study. Reference to the parallel reports and these assessments is necessary to ensure that the social analysis remains grounded in a defensible basis of transmission.

The word ‘ilm appears in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), so the *matn* does not restrict its meaning to a particular branch of knowledge. This breadth, however, must still be read in relation to the needs of the questioner. In ‘Awn al-Ma‘būd, the phrase is explained as knowledge needed by the questioner in matters of religion. Citing al-Khaṭṭābī, the commentary limits the warning to knowledge whose communication becomes obligatory in a particular circumstance, such as guidance sought by a person entering Islam or a request for clarification regarding lawful and unlawful matters. It distinguishes this from supplementary knowledge for which people have no pressing need.²⁶

The choice of the word *katama* reinforces this reading. Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī defines *al-kitmān* as *satr al-ḥadīth*, namely the concealment of a report or statement. Ibn Manẓūr likewise defines *al-kitmān* as the opposite of public declaration and uses the verb *katama* for concealing a thing rather than making it known openly.²⁷ In the context of the ḥadīth, the issue is the deliberate withholding of knowledge from those who need it. The warning of “a bridle of fire” depicts a fitting recompense: a tongue deliberately restrained is met with a bridle that restrains it.²⁸

At the individual level, the positive implication of this prohibition may be formulated as *badhl al-‘ilm*: conveying knowledge one possesses when its transmission is required. At the social level, the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides a normative basis for *Nashr al-‘Ilm*, an ethics that rejects the arbitrary withholding of knowledge. The term does not imply an obligation to disclose all information without limit, nor is it equated with the modern democratization of education. The ḥadīth is not treated as the sole cause of the emergence of learning spaces or changes in social structures; rather, it provides a normative layer that must be read alongside historical traces of knowledge circulation.

²³Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm wa-Faḍlih*, 1st ed., ed. Abū al-Ashbāl al-Zuhayrī, 2 vols. (al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1994), 1: 488-489.

²⁴Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Akhlāq al-Rāwī wa-Ādāb al-Sāmi‘*, 1st ed., ed. Maḥmūd al-Taḥḥān, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1983), 1:221-222.

²⁵al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* no. 2649; Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq al-‘Aẓīmābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1995), 10:66-67.

²⁶al-‘Aẓīmābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 10:66.

²⁷al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’ān*, 1st ed., ed. Ṣafwān ‘Adnān Dāwūdī (Damascus; Beirut: Dār al-Qalam and al-Dār al-Shāmiyyah, 1992) s.v. “كتم”; Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1990), 12:206.

²⁸al-‘Aẓīmābādī, *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 10:66

Social Formations of Knowledge Dissemination in Early Islam

The ethics of *Nashr al-‘Ilm* cannot be treated as the sole cause of the widening dissemination of knowledge. This normative orientation is better read alongside historical traces of knowledge circulation through meeting spaces, teaching figures, communal life, and the dispatch of Companions to other regions. These traces do not amount to a linear system of formal education; rather, they reveal a widening social space in which teachings were conveyed.

In early Islamic historiography, *Dār al-Arqam* is associated with an important episode in the formation of the early Muslim community in Mecca. Ibn Sa‘d reports that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb embraced Islam at *Dār al-Arqam*. The Muslims then left the house, proclaimed takbīr, and performed *ṭawāf* openly; the house came to be known as *Dār al-Islām*.²⁹ This report does not warrant treating *Dār al-Arqam* as a formal educational institution. It does, however, indicate its significance as a gathering place within the early Muslim community.

Prior to the Hijrah, the transmission of teachings extended to Yathrib. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, al-Barā’ ibn ‘Āzib mentions Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr and Ibn Umm Maktūm among those who arrived early in Medina and taught the Qur’ān to the community.³⁰ After the Hijrah, communal life around the Prophet’s Mosque included *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*. A report from Abū Hurayrah refers to them as *adyāf al-Islām* (guests of Islam): they had neither families nor property, nor anyone on whom they could depend; alms were given to them, while gifts were shared with them.³¹ This report is insufficient to construct a picture of a formal school, curriculum, or particular institutional structure. Their presence, however, indicates that connection to the Muslim community around the mosque was not entirely contingent upon home ownership or economic stability. Within these limits, communal life may be read in relation to worship and social solidarity.

Such caution is necessary because Islamic educational institutions developed through a complex historical process. Essam Ayyad highlights the diversity of programs, orientations, and social contexts associated with the *kuttāb* (elementary Qur’ānic school) in the medieval Islamic period and cautions against reducing Qur’ānic memorization to mechanical repetition.³² These studies do not directly address the Prophet’s lifetime, but they help guard against projecting institutional categories from later periods onto *Dār al-Arqam*, the Prophet’s Mosque, or *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*.

The transmission of teachings extended beyond Medina through the dispatch of Companions. When sending Mu‘adh ibn Jabal to Yemen, the Prophet instructed him in stages: first to call the people to worship God, then to explain the obligation of prayer, and finally to convey the obligation of *zakāh*.³³ In another report, Mu‘adh and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī were instructed to make matters easy rather than difficult, to give glad tidings, and not to drive people away.³⁴ These reports need not be turned into a formal pedagogical theory, but they indicate that the transmission of teachings involved attention to the conditions of the people and to the way the dispatched figures engaged with those they addressed. Such dispatches carried not only public responsibilities but also the gradual transmission of teachings.

Read together, these traces indicate that knowledge circulated through increasingly diverse spaces, communities, figures, and regions. *Dār al-Arqam* may be read as an early communal space

²⁹Ibn Sa‘d, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*. 3:184

³⁰al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 3925.

³¹al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 6452.

³²Essam Ayyad, “How Were Young Muslim Minds Shaped? A Critical Study of the Kuttāb in Medieval Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, 1 (2022): 141–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135618632100002X>; Essam Ayyad, “Re-Evaluating Early Memorization of the Qur’ān in Medieval Muslim Cultures,” *Religions* 13, 2 (2022): 179, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020179>.

³³al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 1458.

³⁴al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 4341–4342.

in which access to religious instruction was shaped by belonging, commitment, and protection amid Meccan pressure, not by formal enrolment in an institution. The teaching of the Qur'ān in Yathrib shows that knowledge moved beyond its initial setting through trusted figures and emerging communal ties. *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*, meanwhile, indicates that proximity to the Prophet's Mosque and participation in communal life could provide access to learning despite economic vulnerability. The dispatch of Companions to Yemen further shows that knowledge transmission could move across regions through figures entrusted with both religious instruction and public responsibility. These examples do not amount to a uniform institutional system, but they reveal a widening set of social conditions through which knowledge became publicly recognizable. This finding raises a further question: if knowledge could move through diverse social spaces, figures, and regions rather than through a single institutional or status-based channel, what grounds were available for evaluating those entrusted with public responsibility? The reports examined in the following section approach this question through illustrative rather than representative cases, selected because the criteria of suitability and recognized capacity are stated or contested within the reports themselves.

Knowledge and the Widening Grounds of Public Legitimacy

The reports examined in this section are not presented as a representative sample of early Islamic social practices. They are selected as illustrative cases because they have particular analytical value: both reports preserve different moments in which public responsibility was questioned, justified, or explained through reference to personal or scholarly capacity. The widening social spaces of knowledge dissemination did not erase long-standing social structures. Lineage, seniority, and group status continued to carry weight. These reports therefore do not demonstrate a general replacement of ascribed status by knowledge-based capacity; rather, they allow a more limited question to be examined: whether recognized capacity could enter the evaluation of public responsibility in specific reported instances.

One precedent appears in the appointment of Usāmah ibn Zayd as commander of an army. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, some people questioned his leadership. The Prophet reminded them that similar objections had previously been directed at his father, Zayd ibn Ḥārithah:

وَأَيْمُ اللَّهِ إِنْ كَانَ لَخَلِيفًا لِلْإِمَارَةِ

“By God, he was indeed worthy of leadership.”

In al-Bukhārī's wording, the phrase *la-khalīqan li-l-imārah* refers directly to Zayd, not to Usāmah. A parallel report in Muslim is more explicit: after affirming Zayd's suitability, the Prophet also stated that Usāmah was worthy of leadership and counted among the righteous in his community.³⁵ The ḥadīth does not specify all the reasons for the criticism or the considerations underlying the appointment. Usman and his colleagues discuss the appointment within a contemporary debate over nepotism and merit, referring to Usāmah's youth, perceived familial connection, military experience, and competence. Their study is used here only as secondary interpretive context, not as primary evidence for the historical reasons behind the criticism.³⁶

The relationship between capacity and public responsibility is more explicit in the report concerning Ibn Abzā during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. When Nāfi' ibn 'Abd al-Ḥārith was asked whom he had left in charge of *ahl al-wādī* (the inhabitants of the valley), he replied: Ibn Abzā, a *mawlā*. Nāfi' explained:

إِنَّهُ قَارِئٌ لِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَإِنَّهُ عَالِمٌ بِالْفَرَائِضِ

“Indeed, he is a reciter of the Book of God and is knowledgeable about farā'id.”

³⁵al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* no. 4469; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 2426b.

³⁶Usman et al., “Adakah Rasulullah SAW Mengamalkan Nepotisme? Contoh Kes Pelantikan Usāmah Ibn Zayd RA Sebagai Panglima Perang,” 35, 40-43.

‘Umar then recalled the Prophet’s statement:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْفَعُ بِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ أَقْوَامًا وَيَضَعُ بِهِ الْآخَرِينَ

“Indeed, God raises some people through this Book and lowers others through it”.³⁷

A parallel report in Ibn Mājah adds the attribute *qāḍin*.³⁸ This addition enriches the reading of Ibn Abzā’s capacity, but it does not establish that he was appointed as a formal judge, since the *matn* concerns responsibility for *ahl al-wādī*. His status as a *mawlā* remains explicit, but the justification offered by Nāfi‘ does not appeal to lineage, seniority, or tribal position. It appeals instead to his recitation of the Book of God and his knowledge of *farā’id*. ‘Umar’s response then reframes the decision through a prophetic statement about God raising and lowering people through the Book. The report therefore does not erase Ibn Abzā’s social designation, nor does it present scholarly capacity as an automatic entitlement to authority. Its significance lies in the tension it preserves: social markers remained visible, while relevant knowledge could still acquire evaluative weight in the assignment of public responsibility.

The term *mawlā* must be handled with care. Wensinck and Crone describe it as a term of theological, historical, and legal usage whose meanings varied across periods and social contexts.³⁹ This semantic range means that the designation *mawlā*, taken by itself, cannot establish a single and fixed social identity. In particular, the report in Muslim is insufficient to identify Ibn Abzā automatically as a non-Arab or a former slave. Motzki’s study of non-Arab converts and Urban’s study of populations with slave backgrounds are used to broaden the social context, not to introduce information not stated in the *matn*.⁴⁰ Urban’s more recent study further highlights the complexity of categories of race, gender, and slavery in early Islamic society.⁴¹

The cases of Usāmah and Ibn Abzā are not identical. In Usāmah’s case, the emphasis lies in affirming personal suitability when his leadership was questioned. In Ibn Abzā’s case, capacities related to the Book of God, *farā’id*, and the attribute *qāḍin* are stated more explicitly. Both cases indicate that social standing was not the sole determinant of public eligibility. They are therefore better read as specific reported instances in which recognized capacity entered the reasoning of public responsibility, rather than as evidence of a comprehensive meritocratic order.

The findings in this section therefore yield three points. First, the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides a normative basis for the responsibility to transmit needed knowledge, but it does not require indiscriminate disclosure. Second, the historical traces discussed above show that knowledge dissemination in early Islamic society occurred through multiple social spaces rather than through a single institutional form. Third, the reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā indicate that personal and scholarly capacities could become meaningful in the assignment of public responsibility, even though lineage, seniority, and social designation continued to matter.

The dispatch of Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, discussed in the preceding section, offers contextual support for this reading, although it is not a case of the same kind. It does not state evaluative criteria as explicitly as the reports concerning Usāmah and Ibn Abzā, but it does show that public dispatch involved the transmission of religious instruction, attention to audience, and guidance on the manner and sequence of teaching.

³⁷Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 817a.

³⁸Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* no. 218.

³⁹A. J. Wensinck and Patricia. Crone, *Mawlā*, VI, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1991). 184.

⁴⁰Harald Motzki, “The Role of Non-Arab Converts in the Development of Early Islamic Law,” *Islamic Law and Society* 6, 3 (1999): 293–317, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568519991223793>; Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers*, Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-conquered-populations-in-early-islam.html>.

⁴¹Elizabeth Urban, “Race, Gender and Slavery in Early Islamic History,” *History Compass* 20, 5 (2022): e12727, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12727>.

Read with these different evidential functions, these materials do not demonstrate that scholarly capacity consistently outweighed ascribed status, nor that public legitimacy underwent a systematic structural transformation. They show, more modestly, that recognized knowledge and relevant capacity could function as evaluative considerations in specific reported instances. These findings prepare the ground for the following discussion, which examines how the ethics of *Nashr al-‘Ilm* may be read in relation to public legitimacy without turning early Islamic society into a modern meritocratic order.

Discussion

The discussion below interprets the findings in relation to Qur’an and Ḥadīth Studies rather than merely restating them. Its main contribution is to show that a ḥadīth report concerning the concealment of knowledge can be read not only as an individual moral warning, but also as a normative entry point for examining the conditions under which knowledge becomes socially transmissible, recognizable, and connected to public responsibility. This reading differs from studies that treat educational ḥadīth primarily as direct pedagogical guidance, and from studies of leadership that examine individual cases of suitability without connecting them to the broader ethics of knowledge transmission.

The conceptual link between *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* and public legitimacy lies in the social function of recognized knowledge. The prohibition against concealing needed knowledge means that knowledge is not treated only as a private possession of those who hold it. Its value becomes ethically connected to benefit, need, and responsible transmission. The positive implication of this prohibition, formulated here as *Nashr al-‘Ilm*, therefore concerns the movement of knowledge from private possession into shared communal recognition. Once knowledge circulates, the capacity to recite, teach, advise, or lead can become publicly knowable and may contribute to the formation of trust. The reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā are treated here as illustrative cases, not as representative evidence for a comprehensive transformation of early Islamic society. Their significance lies in showing that recognized capacity could enter the evaluation of public responsibility while lineage, seniority, and social designation continued to matter.

The Social Weight of Knowledge and the Limits of Epistemic Meritocracy

In this article, “epistemic meritocracy” is used to identify a limited evaluative process through which recognized knowledge and relevant capacity may become meaningful for public responsibility within social structures still shaped by lineage, seniority, and status. The term does not simply mean that knowledge has social weight. Rather, it names a process in which knowledge-based capacity becomes one criterion by which a person’s suitability for responsibility may be justified or recognized.

This distinction is important. The phrase “social weight of knowledge” describes the fact that knowledge matters socially; “epistemic meritocracy,” as used here, points to the evaluative movement from knowledge to recognized capacity, and from recognized capacity to public responsibility. The term is not a label for an established social order, a modern selection mechanism, or a society without hierarchy. It is a limited analytical marker for a pattern visible in the reports discussed here: scholarly or personal capacity could be invoked as a ground for responsibility without erasing existing social markers.

Gregor Schoeler’s study of the transmission of knowledge in early Islam shows that learned material was not conveyed through an exclusively oral or exclusively written medium. Teachers could lecture from written notes or memory, while students could take notes during instruction or produce written records after the lecture. Schoeler therefore argues that oral and written transmission should not be treated as rigidly opposed categories, since the two practices often

supplemented one another.⁴² Michael Chamberlain’s study of high medieval Damascus offers a comparative methodological caution. He examines how learned elites used knowledge within strategies of social survival and political competition, including competition for mansabs within a military patronage state. He further argues that cultural institutions and practices should be studied within their specific social and political contexts rather than through a universal institutional template.⁴³ These studies are not used here as direct evidence for the Prophetic period. Rather, they help clarify the analytical language used in this article: knowledge dissemination is treated as a social process, while public legitimacy is examined through the ways recognized capacity could become meaningful within existing structures.

Ralph Linton’s distinction between *ascribed status* and *achieved status* provides an analytical language for this tension. *Ascribed status* refers to a position assigned without regard to individual ability, whereas *achieved status* may be attained through individual effort.⁴⁴ This distinction cannot be applied rigidly to early Islamic society. The reports discussed here point only to a widening of the grounds of legitimacy: personal and scholarly capacities could be recognized within social structures that remained in place. Sorokin’s concept of social mobility is used within the same limits, namely to read the possibility of shifts in position, not to demonstrate an entirely open system of social mobility.⁴⁵ The case of Ibn Abzā reveals a more limited phenomenon: his status as a *mawlā* remained visible, but it did not by itself preclude the assignment of responsibility when relevant capacity was recognized.

A critical distance from the term “meritocracy” must be maintained. Michael Young introduced the term through a satirical work that warned of a new form of stratification when social standing is treated as entirely the result of merit.⁴⁶ Sardoč situates merit within debates over distributive justice and objections to mechanisms for allocating social positions.⁴⁷ Mijs connects critiques of meritocracy to structural inequality, the social evaluation of success and failure, and the emergence of *ressentiment*.⁴⁸ This article therefore does not present those who possess knowledge as a new class automatically entitled to exercise authority. Recognition of scholarly capacity must remain connected to the context of responsibility, the limits of authority, and the ethical orientation governing the use of knowledge.

The social weight of knowledge should therefore be understood through both intellectual and social dimensions. Franz Rosenthal’s study of the concept of ‘ilm in Islam shows that knowledge occupied a central place in Muslim intellectual, religious, political, and social life. This centrality, however, should not be confused with an unrestricted claim to authority by anyone who possesses knowledge.⁴⁹ Dale F. Eickelman’s study of Islamic education and social reproduction further suggests that education transmits not only information, but also socially recognized dispositions,

⁴²Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, ed. James E. Montgomery, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl (Routledge, 2006). 40-41

⁴³Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511563492>, 21-22, 62, 71-72.

⁴⁴Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction*, 110-116.

⁴⁵Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility*, 130-135.

⁴⁶Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 94, 123–124.

⁴⁷Mitja Sardoč, “The Trouble with Merit,” *Theory and Research in Education* 20, 2 (2022): 135–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14778785221108844>.

⁴⁸Jonathan J. B. Mijs, “Merit and Ressentiment: How to Tackle the Tyranny of Merit,” *Theory and Research in Education* 20, 2 (2022): 173–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14778785221106837>.

⁴⁹Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, Slightly revised second edition, Brill Classic in Islam 2 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 2, 240, 334.

cognitive styles, and forms of communal recognition.⁵⁰ These perspectives help clarify the argument of this article: *Nashr al-‘Ilm* concerns not only the movement of information, but also the ethical and social conditions through which knowledge becomes recognizable, trusted, and connected to responsibility. At the same time, such recognition remains bounded by context; it does not transform knowledge into an autonomous or absolute source of public authority. This distinction between knowledge and authority is crucial. Wael B. Hallaq’s study of authority in Islamic law shows that authority is not reducible to the possession of knowledge alone. It is shaped through recognized interpretive practices, inherited scholarly structures, and mechanisms by which juristic communities authorize particular forms of reasoning.⁵¹ Although his study concerns later juristic traditions rather than the Prophetic period, it is useful for clarifying the conceptual boundary of the present argument. The reports discussed in this article do not show that knowledge automatically generated authority; rather, they show that recognized knowledge could become one factor in the evaluation of public responsibility. In this sense, the phrase “epistemic meritocracy” should be read as a limited analytical marker for the social recognition of capacity, not as a claim that knowledge by itself constituted an independent basis of public authority.

Within a broader normative horizon, the social weight of knowledge cannot be separated from ethical orientation. The Qur’ān associates those who possess knowledge with *khashyah* (reverential fear of God) in Qur’ān 35:28. In matters of public responsibility, *amānah* (entrusted responsibility) provides an ethical direction: responsibility should be entrusted to those entitled to bear it and exercised with justice, as stated in Qur’ān 4:58. These two verses are not direct historical evidence for the cases of Usāmah or Ibn Abzā; rather, they provide a moral horizon for knowledge and authority.

The Contribution of This Reading to Qur’an and Ḥadīth Studies

The contribution of this article to Qur’an and Ḥadīth Studies lies in reading an educational ḥadīth as both a textual and social-ethical source. The ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* is not detached from its textual limits: its wording, parallel reports, lexical terms, and classical commentarial reception remain the basis of interpretation. The social question is introduced only after this textual basis has been established: what kind of responsibility does the prohibition of concealing needed knowledge imply for the circulation and recognition of knowledge within the community?

This reading differs from studies that approach educational ḥadīth mainly by extracting pedagogical values, assessing the quality of reports used in educational contexts, or developing models of ḥadīth literacy. It asks not only what educational value a ḥadīth contains, but also how its ethical demand may be read alongside the social conditions through which knowledge is transmitted, recognized, and connected to responsibility.⁵² In this sense, the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* becomes relevant to educational ḥadīth studies because it addresses the ethical responsibility that makes the circulation of knowledge possible.

The implication is limited but important. Ḥadīth reports concerning knowledge may be read not only for direct pedagogical instruction, but also for the ethical and social conditions they establish around access, transmission, and responsibility. In the case examined here, the prohibition of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides a normative basis for responsible transmission, while the illustrative reports concerning public responsibility show that recognized knowledge and relevant capacity could contribute to public trust without replacing lineage, seniority, or existing social structures.

⁵⁰Dale F. Eickelman, “The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, 4 (1978): 485–516, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500012536>.

⁵¹Wael B. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), ix–x, 1–2, 19–20, 239–241.

⁵²Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton Studies on the Near East (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3–4, 13–14, 162.

This is the specific contribution of the article: it expands the study of educational ḥadīth from the extraction of pedagogical values toward an analysis of how ḥadīth ethics can shape the social intelligibility of knowledge and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This article has answered its central question by showing that the ḥadīth of *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* can be read as a normative foundation for the ethics of *Nashr al-‘Ilm* because it rejects the arbitrary withholding of needed knowledge. The prohibition does not require unrestricted disclosure. Rather, it establishes an ethical responsibility: knowledge that is known, needed, and appropriate to transmit should not remain confined to those who possess it. In this sense, *Kitmān al-‘Ilm* provides the negative formulation of the argument, while *Nashr al-‘Ilm* expresses its positive social implication.

The article has also shown the extent to which this ethics can be situated alongside historical traces of knowledge dissemination and reports concerning public responsibility. Dār al-Arqam, the teaching of the Qur’ān in Yathrib, *Ahl al-Ṣuffah*, and the dispatch of Companions indicate that knowledge circulated through multiple social spaces, figures, and regions. These materials function as contextual indications, not as direct proof of a linear institutional transformation. The reports concerning Usāmah ibn Zayd and Ibn Abzā then provide illustrative cases in which personal or scholarly capacity became relevant to the evaluation of public responsibility. They do not demonstrate that lineage, seniority, or social designation disappeared. They show, more modestly, that recognized knowledge and relevant capacity could enter the grounds through which responsibility was justified or accepted in specific reported instances.

The article’s contribution lies in connecting ḥadīth interpretation, the ethics of knowledge transmission, historical traces of knowledge circulation, and public legitimacy within a single but limited analytical frame. “Epistemic meritocracy” has been used only to identify this evaluative process: the movement from knowledge to recognized capacity, and from recognized capacity to public responsibility. This reading expands educational ḥadīth studies beyond the extraction of pedagogical values by showing how a ḥadīth concerning knowledge can also illuminate the ethical and social conditions through which knowledge becomes transmissible, recognizable, and publicly meaningful. Further research may examine how this relationship between knowledge transmission, recognition, and authority developed in later Islamic educational institutions and scholarly networks.

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