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Methods of hadith transmission and narrator criticism: A comparative study of the Kufan and Basran hadith schools in the first and second centuries AH

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Abstract

During the formation of Islamic scholarship, Kufa and Basra emerged as centers of hadith study within distinct social, political, and intellectual contexts. These differences shaped the practices of hadith transmission and narrator criticism in the two regions. This study compares these practices in the Kufan and Basran traditions during the first and second centuries AH through library research and historical-comparative analysis. The findings indicate that both traditions emphasized the *isnād* and narrator credibility, but developed distinct areas of focus. In Kufa, transmission criticism involved caution toward reports associated with political conflict and ideological disagreement. The Basran tradition, meanwhile, emphasized *tadlīs*, continuity of the *isnād*, and narrator evaluation. These differences did not mean that the traditions developed in isolation; scholars' mobility, transmission networks, and scholarly exchange connected them. This study contributes by demonstrating the distinctive approaches to hadith criticism in Kufa and Basra and their interconnected role in the formation of early hadith criticism.

Keywords: Hadith transmission; Narrator criticism; Kufan Hadith School; Basran Hadith School; *Riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*.

Abstrak

Pada masa pembentukan tradisi keilmuan Islam, Kufah dan Basra berkembang sebagai pusat kajian hadis dalam lingkungan sosial, politik, dan intelektual yang berbeda. Perbedaan konteks ini turut membentuk corak transmisi hadis dan kritik perawi di kedua wilayah. Penelitian ini membandingkan metode transmisi hadis dan kritik perawi dalam tradisi Kufah dan Basra pada abad pertama dan kedua Hijriah melalui studi kepustakaan dengan analisis historis-komparatif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa kedua tradisi sama-sama menempatkan sanad dan kredibilitas perawi sebagai perhatian penting, tetapi memiliki penekanan berbeda. Di Kufah, kritik periwayatan berkaitan dengan kehati-hatian terhadap riwayat dalam konteks konflik politik dan perbedaan ideologis. Sementara itu, tradisi Basra memperlihatkan perhatian pada *tadlīs*, kesinambungan sanad, dan penilaian perawi. Perbedaan ini tidak berarti keduanya berkembang secara terpisah. Mobilitas ulama, jaringan periwayatan, dan pertukaran keilmuan menghubungkan kedua tradisi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menunjukkan kekhasan corak kritik hadis di Kufah dan Basra serta keterhubungan keduanya dalam pembentukan tradisi kritik hadis awal.

Kata Kunci: Transmisi hadis; Kritik perawi; Madrasah Hadis Kufah; Madrasah Hadis Basra; *Riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*.

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Introduction

The development of hadith transmission in Kufa and Basra can be examined through regional scholarly networks that emerged within specific historical contexts. Mutaqin and Solihin (2022, p. 176) use the concept of a regional hadith school to understand communities of transmitters and hadith scholars in relation to their geographical and historical settings. This framework makes it possible to examine local characteristics without treating each region as a uniform institution. In the case of Kufa, Al-Qudah (1980) traces the genealogy of transmission through the roles of the Companions, including Ibn Masʿud and ʿAli ibn Abi Talib, as well as transmitters from the generation of the *tābiʿīn*. Accordingly, the study of hadith schools needs to examine teacher-student networks, transmission practices, and the scholarly environments that shaped local traditions. Regional comparisons should likewise be grounded in traceable practices rather than relying solely on inherited geographical labels.

The hadith tradition of Kufa is often discussed in connection with the development of legal reasoning and transmission according to meaning. Muhtador (2016, p. 270) discusses the relationship between the Kufan tradition, *raʾy*, and *riwāyah bi al-maʿnā*, although neither practice should be considered exclusive to the region. Mashan and Jamil (2021) review the emergence and development of the Sunni hadith school of Kufa and revisit views concerning the characteristics of this tradition. Sulaiman et al. (2025) also highlight the transmission of knowledge and tradition within the Kufan school. These studies present Kufa as a scholarly environment shaped by interactions among transmitters and scholars. However, accounts of its history and scholarly networks do not, by themselves, demonstrate how transmission and criticism were practiced. Therefore, characteristics attributed to Kufa need to be tested against specific examples and clearly defined analytical dimensions, rather than assumed to apply to all scholars in the region.

Basra provides an important point of comparison for examining the relationship between regional traditions and hadith transmission practices. Al-Qudah (1998) examines the development of the Basran hadith school through the third century AH, including its concern with textual precision and the conditions governing transmission according to meaning. This discussion provides a basis for comparing transmission practices with studies of Kufa without assuming that particular practices were confined to one city. The comparison should employ the same dimensions, such as modes of transmission, evaluations of transmitters, and continuity of the *isnād*. This approach enables the study to identify similarities and differences that are genuinely supported by evidence. It also avoids the oversimplification that Kufa and Basra each had a single, unchanging method. Instead, the two regions are understood as scholarly networks that developed, diversified, and remained interconnected throughout their histories.

Previous studies offer several approaches to understanding narrator criticism and the transmission of *isnāds*. In a study of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī's evaluations of transmitters, Su (2022) shows that early critics' assessments could vary and were not always expressed explicitly. Syed and Saquib (2019) use computational analysis of a hadith corpus to identify errors in the attribution of transmitters' names within *isnāds*. Bin Jamil (2022) discusses changes in the presentation of *isnāds* in hadith works from a later period. This study provides historiographical context, but it is not direct evidence of early practices in Kufa or Basra. Overall, these studies address particular aspects of criticism and transmission, while direct comparison of the two regional centers using the same analytical dimensions remains to be developed. This study therefore seeks to address that gap through a direct comparison of hadith transmission and criticism in Kufa and Basra.

This study aims to compare hadith transmission practices and narrator criticism in Kufa and Basra from the first to the second century AH. The analysis focuses on the acceptance of reports, transmission verbatim and according to meaning, narrator evaluation, *tadlīs*, and continuity of the *isnād*. Hadith schools are understood as networks of transmitters, scholars, and critics that emerged within specific historical contexts, rather than as entirely uniform institutions. The study's significance lies in moving beyond general descriptions of each city's intellectual character by examining transmission and criticism through comparable dimensions. By identifying similarities and differences systematically, the study seeks to explain the contribution of regional traditions to the development of classical hadith criticism. The comparison may also reveal the limits of generalizations that treat a regional tendency as an absolute characteristic of all its transmitters in every period.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on library research and a historical-comparative perspective to examine the development of hadith traditions in Kufa and Basra during the first and second centuries AH. Library research involves a systematic process of identifying, locating, and examining sources relevant to the research questions (George, 2008). The historical perspective is used to trace the social, political, and intellectual contexts underlying the development of hadith transmission in the two regions. The comparative perspective is used to examine similarities and differences in their methodological tendencies. The literature includes Al-Qudah's works on the hadith schools of Kufa and Basra (Al-Qudah, 1980, 1998), classical sources on hadith transmission and narrator criticism, and academic studies relevant to the focus of this research.

Data were collected by locating, selecting, and recording information from relevant sources. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the development of hadith traditions in Kufa and Basra, the social, political, and intellectual contexts of the two

regions, and practices of hadith transmission and criticism. The collected data were recorded with attention to information about scholars, historical contexts, transmission practices, and evaluations of transmitters. The data were then grouped by regional context and methodological dimension to facilitate systematic examination. Each account was examined within the context of its source, particularly when used to characterize a regional tendency. This procedure helps ensure that the comparison is based on relevant information and does not generalize an individual scholar's practice as characteristic of an entire regional tradition.

The analysis was descriptive-analytical and comparative. First, information on the social, political, and intellectual development of Kufa and Basra was examined to identify the historical context of the hadith tradition in each region. Second, data on transmission practices, narrator evaluations, and *isnād* criticism were analyzed to identify methodological tendencies reflected in the sources. Third, the tendencies of the two regions were compared to identify their similarities and differences. Fourth, the findings were synthesized to explain the development of regional hadith traditions and the connections between them. The study also traced *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* and relationships among scholars whenever relevant information was available in the sources. This analysis treats regional differences as historical tendencies, not as evidence of systems that were entirely uniform or separate.

Results and Discussion

Socio-historical dynamics and intellectual development in Kufa and Basra during the first and second centuries AH

Historical studies of hadith transmission during the formative period of Islam indicate that the emergence of hadith centers in Iraq was associated with the establishment of garrison cities (*amṣār*) following the military expansion under Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Basra was founded by ʿUtbah ibn Ghazwān on the orders of Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb around 14–16 AH/635–637 CE as a military base to support expansion into Persian territories (Erkaya, 2008). Kufa was subsequently founded in 17 AH under the leadership of Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, on the western bank of the Euphrates River, as the second military base in Iraq (Kamal et al., 2026, p. 82). The gradual arrival of the Companions transformed both cities into centers of religious learning and hadith transmission, giving rise to generations of *tābiʿūn* and *tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn* (Rozy, 2025, pp. 22–24).

Although located in the same region and relatively close to one another, Kufa and Basra developed within different socio-political landscapes. Kufa became a political center marked by competition and group polarization. Its position grew stronger when ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib made it the seat of government in 36 AH, following the Battle of the Camel (Maula, 2025, p. 178). The city later became involved in major conflicts, including the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 657 CE, as well as the emergence of Shiʿi and Khārijite

groups (Kamal et al., 2026, pp. 82–83). Its social structure comprised diverse Arab tribes, local inhabitants, and *mawālī*, all of whom helped shape its social dynamics and scholarly tradition (Wendry, 2016, pp. 45–50). Political pressures and divisions among religious groups provide an important context for examining the circulation of reports concerning political legitimacy and the merits of particular figures. They also encouraged caution in tracing the origins of reports and evaluating transmitters' credibility.

Kufa's intellectual tradition was shaped by figures such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, whom ʿUmar appointed as a judge and teacher, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. This tradition was carried forward by Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī, and Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. Its characteristics included an openness to legal reasoning (*raʾy*), contextual understanding of socio-legal issues, transmission according to meaning (*riwāyah bi al-maʿnā*), the integration of hadith and jurisprudence, and attention to textual criticism (*naqd al-matn*) of reports considered inconsistent with the principles of the Qur'an and rational reasoning (Motzki, 2002, p. 204). Basra, meanwhile, developed as a settlement and trading center connected to the Persian Gulf region. The movement of inhabitants, merchants, soldiers, and transmitters made it a center of socio-intellectual interaction. Its economic prosperity was supported by war booty, the expansion of date-palm cultivation, and the construction of thousands of irrigation channels (*anhār wa turʿān*) (al-Qudah, 1998, pp. 55, 60–61).

In Basra's religious life, several prominent Companions settled or taught there, including Anas ibn Mālik, who transmitted more than 2,200 hadiths; Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, whom ʿUmar appointed to teach the Qur'an and Sunnah; and ʿImrān ibn Ḥuṣayn, who taught jurisprudence at Basra's congregational mosque (al-Qudah, 1998, pp. 68–71). Basra also became a center for the study of the Arabic language. Abū al-Aswad al-Duʾalī is associated with the development of Arabic grammar, reportedly at the direction of either ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib or Ziyād ibn Abīh. The city is also associated with the compilation of *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* and the formulation of prosody (*ʿarūḍ*) by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī. This linguistic tradition supported the study of hadith wording and content, but it does not automatically demonstrate that Basran hadith scholars preferred exact-wording transmission (*riwāyah bi al-lafẓ*) over transmission according to meaning (*riwāyah bi al-maʿnā*) (Abbott, 1967, pp. 58–60).

Compared with Kufa, Basra's internal political dynamics are described as relatively less complex, although the city experienced intense intellectual and theological debates. Basra became one of the centers of early theological discussion, including debates over free will and predestination associated with Qadari thought, as well as the development of Muʿtazilite thought (al-Qudah, 1998, pp. 80, 86). These debates also gave rise to concerns about the fabrication of hadith (*al-waḍʿ*) to legitimize particular doctrines, the concealment of weaknesses in the *isnād* (*tadlīs*), and the

circulation of disconnected reports (*mursal*) (al-Qudah, 1998, pp. 12–14). Basra therefore became an important region in the development of transmission verification, particularly with regard to *isnād* continuity and transmitter credibility. The evaluation of reports in this environment became increasingly systematic in order to safeguard the integrity of hadith transmission (Rozy, 2025, pp. 27–28).

Attention to the *isnād* became increasingly important after the *fitnah*, as reflected in a statement by Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn recorded in the *Muqaddimah* of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. The statement indicates that transmitters' identities and credibility began to receive more serious consideration in the acceptance of reports, while also providing a foundation for *isnād* criticism and transmitter evaluation. Figures who contributed to the development of hadith criticism emerged from this milieu, beginning with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, followed by Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj—known as Amīr al-Muʾminīn fī al-Ḥadīth—Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī. Their critical practices emphasized moral integrity (*ʿadālah*), precision and retention (*ḍabṭ*), and continuity of the *isnād* (*ittiṣāl al-sanad*). These principles later became central to the discipline of *al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl* (al-Qudah, 1998, pp. 149–150).

Characteristics of hadith transmission methodology and mechanisms of narrator criticism

Hadith transmission in Kufa and Basra developed from a shared commitment to preserving reports from the Prophet, but the two cities placed different emphases on aspects of transmission. The distinction between *bi al-lafẓ*, transmission according to the exact wording, and *bi al-maʿnā*, transmission according to meaning, illustrates how precision and reasoning were applied in early hadith practice. Al-Qudah (1998, pp. 11, 78) discusses attention to textual accuracy and the conditions for transmitting reports according to meaning. Kamal et al. (2026, pp. 83–84) situate the Kufa tradition within the scholarly legacy of Ibn Masʿūd and ʿAlī, including the use of *raʾy* and *qiyās*. These tendencies shaped scholarly practices in both regions, but they do not mean that either had a single, uniform method of transmission.

The reliability of a report depends not only on its wording but also on the integrity of its *isnād*. The chain of transmitters enables scholars to identify those who conveyed a report, examine the relationships among them, and assess whether a hadith has a defensible transmission route. Rozy (2025, pp. 31–32) emphasizes the role of the *isnād* in hadith validation, while Kadir and Shamsudin (2022) discuss the application of hadith criticism to reports. The history of transmission thus forms part of the evidence for a hadith's acceptance. A text cannot be assessed solely on the basis of its content or the plausibility of its meaning. The *isnād* provides a basis for investigating possible breaks in transmission, including *tadlīs*, and for evaluating each transmitter's credibility. Within this framework, criticism of transmission chains is a principal

mechanism of hadith authentication, not merely an adjunct to the assessment of the *matn*.

Tadlīs became an important concern because the practice can obscure how a report was received. Al-Qudah (1998, pp. 11–14) discusses this issue in relation to Basran transmitters, including al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah. Al Ghouri (2021) explains various forms of *tadlīs* and their implications for assessing continuity in the *isnād*. Wendry (2022) also examines the concealment of a transmitter's identity and its implications for the ethics of transmission. Accordingly, the use of the formula *ʿan* does not, in itself, establish direct audition. The relationship between a transmitter and the source of a report must still be investigated. Studies of Basra indicate an emphasis on *isnād* criticism, particularly through the examination of transmission formulas and verifiable links between transmitters.

Criticism of *tadlīs* requires the examination of both transmitters and individual reports. Al-Qudah (1998, pp. 11–14) discusses al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah in this context. Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj was known for his severe criticism of *tadlīs*, which he described as "the sibling of lying." He also examined Qatādah's transmissions to distinguish reports heard directly from those that may have been conveyed through an intermediary. Turhan (2017, pp. 95–133) identifies Shuʿbah as an important figure in the development of narrator criticism, while the Yaqeen Institute (2018) discusses Shuʿbah's examination of Qatādah's reports. Thus, a transmitter's reputation for practicing *tadlīs* does not automatically determine the status of all their reports. Evaluation must still consider the form of transmission, evidence of direct audition, and corroborating transmission routes.

Narrator criticism is also related to theological and political affiliations. Kamal et al. (2026, pp. 83–84) situate hadith scholarship in Kufa within the political and intellectual divisions of early Islam. Al-Qudah (1980) traces the genealogy of hadith transmission in Kufa, including the contributions of Companions such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as well as the characteristics of transmission among the *tābiʿūn*. This study provides an account of the background to Kufa's hadith tradition and its transmitter networks. In this context, Amrulloh (2019) examines ʿAbbād ibn Yaʿqūb, a transmitter associated with the Shiʿi-Rāfiḍī tradition whose reports nevertheless appear in several major Sunni hadith collections. This case shows that political and theological backgrounds are relevant to understanding transmission traditions, but are insufficient on their own to determine the status of all reports transmitted by an individual.

The acceptance or rejection of a report still requires an assessment of the transmitter and the material transmitted through *jarḥ wa-taʿdīl* and related criteria. Ideological affiliation therefore does not automatically determine whether all of a transmitter's reports are accepted or rejected. Amrulloh's (2019) study of ʿAbbād ibn Yaʿqūb shows

that a transmitter affiliated with Shiʿism and Rāfiḍism is nevertheless included in several major Sunni hadith collections. His reports therefore need to be evaluated in light of the material he transmitted, rather than solely on the basis of his theological identity. Such an assessment must also consider transmission routes, transmitter reliability, and the evidence available in hadith sources. Theological and political affiliations can thus form part of the context for narrator criticism, but they do not replace examination of the *isnād* and the report itself. This approach avoids generalizing about Kufa's hadith tradition on the basis of a single case, while treating narrator criticism as an evaluative process involving multiple criteria.

Table 1. Characteristics of hadith transmission methodology and narrator criticism in Kufa and Basra

Aspect	**Kufa**	**Basra**
Scholarly tradition	The scholarly tradition was shaped by the legacy of Ibn Masʿūd and ʿAlī, as well as the use of *raʾy* and *qiyās*.	The transmission tradition reflects attention to *isnād* examination and the precision of relationships among transmitters.
Hadith transmission	Transmission practices developed within a scholarly environment that allowed for reasoning and legal tradition.	Discussions highlight textual accuracy and the conditions for transmission *bi al-lafẓ* and *bi al-maʿnā*.
Isnād criticism	Examination of the *isnād* also took place amid theological and political differences.	Criticism of *tadlīs* included examining transmission formulas and the possibility of a direct link between a transmitter and the source of a report.
Narrator evaluation	Ideological affiliation could form part of the context for evaluation, but did not automatically determine whether a report was accepted.	Evaluation considered transmission practices, including the concealment of intermediaries and the certainty of direct audition.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Al-Qudah (1980, 1998, pp. 11–14, 78), Kamal et al. (2026, pp. 83–84), Rozy (2025, pp. 23, 31–32), Amrulloh (2019), Al Ghouri (2021), and Wendry (2022).

Table 1 summarizes the tendencies emphasized in the sources used. The discussion of Kufa highlights the scholarly legacy of Ibn Masʿūd and ʿAlī, as well as narrator evaluation in the context of theological and political differences. The discussion of Basra, meanwhile, emphasizes *isnād* examination, particularly issues of *tadlīs* and the certainty of a transmitter's connection to the source of a report. These differences indicate emphases in the literature, not an absolute separation between the two regions. *Isnād* criticism and narrator evaluation were not confined to either city; both formed part of the broader toolkit of hadith criticism. The table should therefore be read as a comparison of emphases found in the cited sources, rather than as a generalization that all scholars in Kufa or Basra consistently applied the same methods.

The comparison of Kufa and Basra reveals different emphases within a shared tradition of criticism. The discussion of Kufa highlights the intellectual legacy of early authorities and the evaluation of transmitters amid theological and political differences. The discussion of Basra, meanwhile, emphasizes close examination of transmission formulas and the possibility of concealment within the *isnād*. These differences do not constitute an absolute separation between the two regions. Rozy (2025, p. 23) stresses that the formula *ʿan* alone does not establish direct audition, while Yuslem et al. (2024) discuss narrator criticism through Ibn Ḥajar's *Lisān al-Mīzān*. Kadir and Shamsudin (2022) likewise support the importance of systematic criticism of reports. Overall, hadith criticism combines examination of transmission, evaluation of transmitters, and attention to the historical context of a report.

Similarities, differences, and interactions between Kufa and Basra and their contributions to classical hadith criticism

A comparison of Kufa and Basra should be understood as a study of two interconnected scholarly environments, rather than of two entirely separate hadith schools. Their development took place within different social, political, and intellectual contexts. Maula (2025, pp. 173–178) links the emergence of scholarly centers in Iraq to Kufa's development as a political center during ʿAlī's rule. Muftih (2024) explains Basra's transformation from a military base into an intellectual center, as well as the role of the Companions and *tābiʿūn* in the development of hadith tradition and *isnād* criticism. Ramadani and Ubaidillah (2024) map the development of hadith in Iraq through Basra, Kufa, and Baghdad, and note the caution shown by some Basran scholars toward recording hadith. These accounts indicate that local contexts helped shape the needs and practices of hadith criticism, without entirely separating the two traditions.

Table 2. Methodological similarities and differences between the hadith schools of Kufa and Basra

Aspect of analysis	Hadith school of Kufa	Hadith school of Basra
Socio-political context	An environment shaped by political conflict among Shiʿi, Khārijite, and Umayyad groups, as well as the significant presence of *mawālī*.	A cosmopolitan port city characterized by trade and theological debate, particularly concerning Qadariyyah and Muʿtazilah.
Characteristics of transmission	Closely associated with contextual understanding and legal reasoning (*raʾy*); transmission according to meaning (*bi al-maʿnā*) was also part of the broader tradition.	Emphasized precision in transmission, preservation of hadith wording, and examination of transmission chains.
Main challenges in *isnād* verification	The circulation of reports with political motives (*waḍʿ*) and possible distortions in transmission arising	The concealment of links in the *isnād* (*tadlīs al-isnād*) and evaluation of transmitters associated with Qadariyyah.

	from sectarian and ideological divisions.	
Focus of hadith criticism	Considered criticism of both the *isnād* and *matn*, including the assessment of reports in light of the Qur'an, legal reasoning, and scholarly practice (*al-ʿamal*).	Emphasized *isnād* criticism, examination of transmission continuity (*ittiṣāl*), and transmitter evaluation.
Key transmission formulas	Allowed variations in wording as long as the hadith's fundamental meaning was preserved and the conditions established by hadith scholars were met.	Gave attention to formulas indicating direct transmission, such as *ḥaddathanā* and *samiʿtu*, particularly when examining the possibility of *tadlīs*.
Major figures in the first and second centuries AH	ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, ʿAlqamah, Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and Abū Ḥanīfah.	Anas ibn Mālik, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn Sīrīn, Qatādah, Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj, and Yaḥyā al-Qaṭṭān.
Contribution to hadith criticism	Developed the evaluation of reports by considering the *isnād*, *matn*, and relevance to legal reasoning.	Developed the examination of *isnād* continuity and transmitter circumstances, as well as the collection and classification of reports.
Shared principles	The *isnād* was considered fundamental; *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* was undertaken to obtain and study hadith; both contributed to the formation of principles for hadith authentication.	The *isnād* was considered fundamental; *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* was undertaken to obtain and study hadith; both contributed to the formation of principles for hadith authentication.

Source: Synthesized by the author based on Al-Qudah (1980, 1998), Maula (2025), and Rozy (2025).

Table 2 summarizes the tendencies discussed in this study, rather than methodological boundaries that applied to every scholar in either region. Hidayatulah, Kosasih, and Mardi (2025) compare the development of the hadith schools in Basra, Kufa, and Syria through a historical-critical approach. They describe Basra as tending toward rationalism, Kufa as a center distinguished by its tradition of transmission criticism, and Syria as a region reflecting a combination of approaches. Their findings indicate that regional characteristics may differ depending on the aspect under examination. The table should therefore be read as a summary of tendencies, not as a rigid classification. Rozy (2025, pp. 31–32) specifically discusses Basran scholars' attention to the *isnād* and the issue of *tadlīs*. These studies underscore the importance of historical context in understanding hadith criticism, while also limiting generalizations about the characteristics of each school.

The similarities between the two schools are evident in their attention to the *isnād*, transmitter credibility, and report verification; their differences lie in the issues that were prominent in each environment. Al-Hayani and Hassan (2024) discuss the efforts

of Basran scholars in the second and third centuries AH to collect, organize, and classify hadith. They also highlight *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* as a means of obtaining reports, studying transmitters' circumstances, and explaining the causes of defects in hadith. This study shows that *isnād* criticism was not merely a formal examination of a chain of names, but part of a scholarly activity involving the search for, collection, and evaluation of reports. This can be considered alongside Kufa scholars' attention to reports circulating amid political and sectarian circumstances. Thus, both regions contributed to hadith authentication, although the issues they faced were not always the same.

Interaction between regions can be traced through networks of teachers, students, and *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, rather than inferred solely from similarities in ideas. Topgül and Maden (2021) propose a method for reconstructing the scholarly circles of hadith experts in Basra during the first half of the second century AH. Using hadith *isnāds* as material for investigation, they construct an initial map of scholarly relationships that can be tested and refined. Their approach shows that transmission networks can be studied through recorded links among transmitters. In his study of Sufyān al-Thawrī and Kufa scholars, Melchert (2022) situates Sufyān within Kufa's scholarly milieu while also discussing his connections with the broader scholarly tradition. These studies support the importance of viewing hadith schools as dynamic and interconnected networks. However, they are insufficient to conclude that every figure in Kufa and Basra interacted directly.

Regional interconnectedness did not eliminate distinctive approaches to legal reasoning. Husen et al. (2024) examine the influence of hadith regionalism on tendencies in legal *ijtihād*, focusing on Basra. Their study directs attention to the relationship between social environment, hadith transmission, and the formation of legal thought. In comparing Kufa and Basra, this research helps explain that hadith interpretation took place within particular scholarly environments, rather than in a social vacuum. Maula's (2025, pp. 182–186) discussion of the relationship between the hadith traditions of the two cities and the development of Islamic legal tradition also demonstrates the importance of examining regional influence comparatively. Nevertheless, regionalism does not mean that all scholars in a given city shared the same pattern of *ijtihād*. Social environments and transmission networks were among the factors that shaped hadith interpretation, but they were not its sole determinants.

The contributions of both schools to hadith criticism are evident in their treatment of different transmission-related problems. In the Kufa tradition, criticism of reports was closely associated with evaluating hadith content and its use in legal reasoning. This emphasis is apparent in discussions of reports circulating amid political conflict and sectarian differences, as well as in the legal tradition that developed in Kufa. In Basra, attention to *isnād* continuity and transmitters' circumstances is evident in efforts to

collect, classify, and evaluate reports. Al-Hayani and Hassan (2024) specifically discuss Basran scholars' examination of transmitters and their explanation of defects in hadith. Topgül and Maden (2021) show that *isnāds* can be used to reconstruct teacher-student networks in Basra. Thus, Kufa's contribution is evident in the examination of reports within the context of legal interpretation, while studies of Basra highlight *isnād* examination and the tracing of transmission networks. This difference reflects distinct emphases, not an absolute division of scholarly roles.

Conclusion

This study shows that the hadith traditions of Kufa and Basra developed within different scholarly contexts and in response to different challenges of transmission, resulting in methodological emphases that were not entirely identical. These differences are evident in their attention to the *isnād*, patterns of criticism, and the ways scholars formulated and applied rules of transmission. However, this variation does not indicate an absolute opposition: both regions shared the principle of caution in accepting hadith and remained connected through *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth* and relationships among successive generations of scholars. Accordingly, the distinctive characteristics of each region can be understood as responses to local scholarly needs and environments, while interactions among hadith scholars helped shape a broader tradition of criticism.

This study contributes to the field by showing that the development of classical hadith criticism emerged through both regional diversity and scholarly exchange, rather than through a single, uniform pattern. The comparison of Kufa and Basra also helps explain the relationships among transmission practices, the formulation of critical principles, hadith codification, and the development of legal thought. Nevertheless, this discussion is limited to two scholarly centers and is based on a literature review; it therefore does not comprehensively examine internal variation within each region or transmission networks through prosopographical analysis. Future research could extend the comparison to other regions, examine teacher-student networks and transmission routes in greater detail, and test these findings through systematic analysis of hadith sources and transmitter biographies.

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