

ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IMAM AL-BUKHARI’S SCHOOL OF HADITH STUDIES

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
The ontological status of hadith is broader than the definition of it as merely “a report about the past” and encompasses its two-layered nature. At the first level, a hadith is a historical report concerning a statement, action, or tacit approval of the Prophet; at the second level, it is a bearer of normative meaning that guides the life of the Muslim community. Thus, the object of study simultaneously consists of the event that occurred, the narration concerning that event, and the rule derived from the narration. Abubakr Mustafoev characterizes hadith collectively as a religious, spiritual-moral, and historical source; such a classification demonstrates the necessity of not reducing the existence of hadith merely to the text itself.	Hadith, Revelation, Qur’an, Imam al-Bukhari, al-Tarikh al-Kabir.

Introduction

The science of hadith occupies an important place among the scholarly and educational traditions that contributed to the formation of Islamic thought and the spiritual life of Muslim society. As the principal source after the Holy Qur’an, hadith encompasses reports concerning the sayings, actions, tacit approvals, and life activities of the Prophet Muhammad. In this respect, hadith is not merely historical information or a form of narration, but also functions as a source carrying religious-legal, ethical, and spiritual meaning. This multilayered nature of hadith necessitates its study from an ontological perspective, particularly with regard to its mode of existence, source status, and transformation into an object of scholarly inquiry.

In the process of collecting, verifying, classifying, and introducing hadith into scholarly circulation, various schools of hadith studies emerged throughout the Muslim world. Among them, the hadith tradition that developed in the region of Transoxiana holds particular scholarly and historical significance. The scholarly legacy of the great hadith scholar Imam Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari occupies an incomparable place in the rise of this school. Imam al-Bukhari studied hadith not simply as a collection of narrations, but in relation to their reliability, isnad and textual characteristics, the status of transmitters, and their historical context. Therefore, his methodology of hadith scholarship provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the ontological status of hadith as a form of “being.”

In selecting and classifying hadith, Imam al-Bukhari paid particular attention to such criteria as the continuity of the isnad, the reliability of transmitters, their level of memory and precision (*dabt*), and the consistency of narrations with one another. Such an approach makes it possible to view the existence of hadith not merely as a written text, but as a complex process involving its formation, transmission, and reception. Accordingly, in studying the ontological foundations of hadith, it is important to analyze the interconnected categories of “event – narration – text – meaning – normative rule.” Alongside Imam al-Bukhari’s *al-Jami‘ al-Sahih*, his biographical-historical work *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* is also an important source for understanding the methodological foundations of his school of hadith studies. In particular, the systematic collection of information about transmitters makes it possible to identify the factors that ensured the historical existence and scholarly reliability of hadith. This demonstrates that historicity and normativity function as two complementary dimensions within hadith scholarship.

The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that contemporary scholarly studies often examine hadith separately as a historical source, a religious text, or an ethical-didactic heritage. However, the essence of hadith becomes apparent in the unity of these aspects. On the one hand, hadith is a report concerning an event that occurred in the past and the activities of the Prophet; on the other hand, it expresses normative content that provides spiritual, ethical, and legal guidance for Muslims. Therefore, determining the ontological status of hadith requires a comprehensive analysis of its historical, textual, and normative characteristics.

The dialectic between revelation and experience is also manifested precisely here: although the normative orientation of the source ultimately derives from revelation, its transmission to subsequent generations took place through historical human activities such as memory, hearing, writing, travel, and verification. Therefore, the notion of “divine content” does not imply exemption from verification; rather, it creates an even greater need to control the human medium through which transmission takes place, given its susceptibility to error. Musaeva interprets *mustalah al-hadith* as a set of rules for accepting or rejecting reports through the examination of the condition of the text and isnad. Consequently, the ontological object of hadith studies can be characterized as the interconnected existence of meaning, testimony, and historical traces.

The practice of selection attributed to Imam al-Bukhari expanded the possibility of systematically analyzing the textual, testimonial, and transmission-historical layers of hadith. Within this approach, the religious value of a narration does not eliminate the necessity of historical analysis. On the contrary, the more important the attribution, the greater the responsibility for substantiating it. Therefore, the judgment that “a hadith exists” signifies not merely the existence of a text, but also its genuine connection to its source. In this context, ontological judgment and epistemic justification necessarily complement one another.

The relationship between the Qur’an and Sunnah constitutes the primary ontological condition for the formation of hadith studies. In Muslim belief, the Qur’an is the direct revealed text, whereas hadith represents the prophetic experience guided by revelation and recorded by human beings in the form of testimony. This distinction does not place the two sources in opposition; rather, it differentiates their modes of existence. The Qur’an entered circulation as a centralized text through recitation and the written *mushaf*, whereas hadith circulated as numerous reports with multiple isnads and textual variants. Therefore, preserving hadith involved not only remembering its content, but also determining who transmitted each report and under what circumstances it was transmitted.

According to Mustafoev, during the period from the time of the Prophet until the end of the first Islamic century, the Companions memorized reports and transmitted them to various regions; this period created the practical foundation that preceded the later terminological system. This phenomenon should be evaluated within the interaction between oral transmission and written recording. Oral transmission relied on communal listening, repetition, and mutual correction, while writing gradually strengthened this environment as an additional means of preserving memory. Murataliev, by comparing reports concerning the prohibition and permission of writing, demonstrates that written recording already existed in the Prophet's lifetime in the form of individual initiatives. Thus, the initial form of the revelation–experience dialectic was not a competition between memory and writing, but rather a functional distribution between them.

The later Bukhari school transformed this functional distribution into a systematic process of verification and established the principle that the text should not be separated from the history of its human transmission. This principle required the reliability and potential for error of both memory and writing to be assessed separately. A written copy could be incorrectly transcribed, while a memorized text could be corrected through communal recitation. Reliability derives not from the type of medium itself, but from the manner in which that medium is controlled and verified. This balance strengthened scholarly oversight.

In the genesis of hadith scholarship, the concept of “experience” does not correspond exactly to the modern notion of a laboratory experiment. Rather, it refers to a historical form of experience consisting of a witness's hearing, the testing of a transmitter's memory, the comparison of different copies, and the repeated verification of a report in several scholarly centers. Although each act of transmission was individual, the accumulation of repeated narrations made it possible to identify regularities. For example, when a report transmitted from one shaykh was compared with the narrations of numerous students, errors of memory or additions to the text could be identified. In this respect, while the *isnad* provides information about social connections, textual variants demonstrate the product of those connections.

Eido and Safi regard the hadith corpus as an exceptionally extensive body of material for the epistemology of testimony: at its center is not information in general, but specific testimony concerning the Prophet and individuals associated with him. This perspective allows Imam al-Bukhari's method to be interpreted not simply as an act of “belief,” but as a theory of the justification of testimony. The practical aspect of such justification can be seen in the combination of writing and personal instruction. Brown demonstrates that in the classical environment, simply taking a book from a shelf and using it independently was insufficient; hearing the text in the presence of a teacher and having one's copy checked constituted an addition to the book's chain of transmission. This practice also transforms the object of knowledge itself: hadith is not merely a sentence, but the sentence together with the procedure through which it reached the recipient.

Within this school, the individual responsibility of the transmitter was connected with communal practices of verification. As a result, the subject of knowledge was not merely an individual transmitter, but a scholarly network capable of mutual criticism. Each individual preserved one link in the transmission, while final confidence was established through consistency with other links and textual variants. This collectivity did not eliminate individual responsibility; rather, it expanded the possibility of identifying individual errors.

The increasing need for *isnad* was associated not only with fabricated hadiths, but also with political, regional, and religious processes. Political divisions in the early Muslim community, territorial expansion, and the emergence of religious groups made the question of “who transmitted it?” as important as the content itself. In a small community where people directly knew one another, social trust functioned as an implicit condition. As generations and geographical distances increased, however, this condition had to be explicitly documented. As a result, *isnad* became more than a list of personal names: it became a mechanism for situating a report within a particular scholarly and ethical environment.

To‘raev connects the emergence of *jarh wa ta’dil* with the political-religious circumstances following the first *fitna*, noting that the need to verify the religious affiliation and reliability of transmitters developed into an independent scholarly discipline. This process had two dimensions of caution: first, identifying the deliberate transmission of false reports; and second, distinguishing intentional falsehood from the mistakes of well-intentioned but weak transmitters. This distinction made it possible to prevent scholarly judgment from being reduced to moral condemnation.

The CIS researcher Murataliev analyzes the report attributed to Muhammad ibn Sirin, according to which the practice of asking for an *isnad* began “after the *fitna*,” as a key point in the history of classification. He also demonstrates that *isnad* served to distinguish narrations associated with *ahl al-Sunnah*. Thus, *isnad* not only constituted a response to historical crisis, but also became an institutional language for attributing reports, distributing responsibility, and opening reports to critical examination. Imam al-Bukhari can be characterized as one of the third/ninth-century hadith scholars who applied this institutional language of criticism consistently. It is difficult to assign the emergence of *isnad* to a single date because the practice of requesting sources, the recording of complete chains, and technical criticism developed gradually. Nevertheless, the cautious approach that emerged after the *fitna* constituted a historical turning point: conditions of trust that had previously remained implicit became explicit and debatable criteria.

The formation of the hadith school cannot be understood independently of geographical mobility. Narrations were collected around teachers in Medina, Mecca, Kufa, Basra, Baghdad, Nishapur, Merv, Bukhara, and other centers. In order to verify a report, traveling to the place where a transmitter lived was sometimes the only available option: similarities in names, dates of meetings, or teacher-student relationships could be clarified through local information. *Rihla fi talab al-hadith* may therefore be interpreted as a practice that served to establish the origin of narrations, the relationships among transmitters, and textual variants through direct investigation of sources.

Mustafiev emphasizes that scholarly journeys were necessary for identifying unknown transmitters, organizing *isnads*, and discovering textual variants, and that many hadith scholars traveled repeatedly throughout the Eastern and Western regions. The scholarly biography of Imam al-Bukhari demonstrates the breadth of this network. Brown, through a comparison of sources, notes that al-Bukhari studied with teachers in Balkh, Merv, Nishapur, Rayy, Baghdad, Basra, Kufa, Mecca, Medina, Egypt, and Syria.

This list of geographical locations has methodological significance. Each center represented a distinct reservoir of narrations and a particular critical tradition; a report from one region could be verified through a parallel chain from another. In the person of al-Bukhari, the scholarly environment of Central Asia became connected with the traditions of the Hijaz and Iraq. Consequently, defining the “Bukhari

school” solely in terms of the city of Bukhara fails to fully reflect its methodological geographical scope, which developed in Transoxiana and operated on a transregional scale.

The multidimensional nature of this experience reduced the risk of accepting local practice as a universal criterion and expanded the comparative basis of judgments concerning the selection of narrations. Travel also served as an intellectual safeguard against confinement within the scholar’s own circle of teachers. A famous narration in one center might be unknown in another or preserved in a different wording. Such differences could reveal either an error or the historical route through which the report had spread. At the same time, such variation could serve as an additional source of precision. For scholarly travel to produce results, it required an environment capable of receiving and preserving knowledge: study circles, mosques, private gatherings, *kuttab*, and the ethical norms governing teacher-student relationships. In this sense, hadith scholarship acquired the characteristics of a social institution from a very early period. The teacher transmitted a report; students wrote it down or memorized it; afterward, the copy was rechecked through recitation. The same narration could then be discussed in another gathering. A critical judgment thus did not remain the private intuition of a single individual but was tested within a community of specialists.

Brown demonstrates that the “living isnad” did not disappear with the emergence of books; rather, written collections and personal transmission continued as two parallel streams. This observation corrects the modernization model according to which written corpora suddenly replaced oral institutions. While the book provided a stable text, the teacher guaranteed the genealogy of the copy and the manner of its reading.

The Uzbek researcher Musaeva interprets scholarly continuity as a methodological feature of Imam al-Bukhari’s thought. Through his practical activities, the hadith scholar demonstrated that one could not become a complete specialist in hadith without knowing earlier scholarly heritage and the experiences of contemporaries. In this context, continuity does not merely mean repeating earlier judgments; it also includes reexamining them on the basis of new isnads and textual variants.

Thus, the institutional foundation of the school consisted of three elements: individual responsibility, communal oversight, and written memory. If any one of these elements is disrupted, the ontological integrity of the report—the connection between text, source, and transmission—becomes weaker. For this reason, a school cannot be limited to a building or an official position. Its boundaries are defined by shared questions, accepted scholarly ethics, and mutually recognized critical terminology. The Bukhari school should therefore be understood to include not only the author’s students but also the scholarly community that tested and developed his method.

The hadith scholarship of the ninth century cannot be separated from the theological and political environment of the period if we are to obtain a complete understanding of the historical process. During this period, *naql* and *‘aql* were not merely philosophical categories; they were positions connected with educational institutions, political authority, and communal identity. While *ahl al-hadith* prioritized textual evidence and the reports of the Salaf, *ahl al-ra’y* and representatives of *kalam* employed broader theoretical means of inference. In practice, however, the boundaries were not always absolute: a hadith scholar could engage in legal reasoning, while a jurist could use hadith as evidence. Nevertheless, the existence of these debates compelled scholars to develop a more precise concept of the “reliable report.”

Murtazin demonstrates that the distinction between *ahl al-hadith* and *ahl al-ra’y* during the seventh–ninth centuries developed around different approaches to the interpretation of sacred texts, while new

territories and emerging problems intensified this distinction. The *mihna* became a point at which this intellectual conflict acquired an explicitly political dimension. The Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an and its enforcement by state authority intensified the responsibility of scholars toward knowledge and political power. Murtazin analyzes the *mihna*, which began in 833, as well as the political transformation after 847 within this context.

The ontological position of Imam al-Bukhari's school developed within this intellectual and political environment. Reliance on a reliable chain of transmission was not so much a rejection of theoretical reasoning as a demand to identify the historical sources of religious judgments. In this sense, the relationship between revelation and experience also encompassed the process of establishing knowledge through testimony and scholarly evaluation.

Accordingly, al-Bukhari's involvement in debates concerning the wording of the Qur'an acquires a meaning broader than that of a mere biographical episode: scholarly authority had to be defended within political and theological boundaries. The strength of the critical method did not free the scholar from all forms of pressure, but it provided a means of distinguishing scholarly judgment from personal command.

The personal intellectual formation of Imam al-Bukhari occurred at the intersection of three factors: education begun at an early age, extensive geographical travel, and direct contact with critical teachers. Biographical traditions frequently emphasize his ability to identify errors from a young age; however, for scholarly analysis, the educational model indicated by these reports is more important than their laudatory tone. The student did not passively receive a narration; rather, he compared the teacher's text with other memories and copies. This practice subsequently shaped al-Bukhari's identity as both transmitter and critic.

Eido and Safi note that individuals in the early hadith environment acted as transmitters, critics, or transmitter-critics, and they characterize Imam al-Bukhari as belonging to the third category, combining both functions. This combination of roles is significant: the transmitter enters an existing network of knowledge, while the critic evaluates inconsistencies among reports and individuals within that network. If only the first role existed, the quantity of material would increase; without the second, the process of selection would remain weak. Conversely, if only criticism existed, the living source base would become narrow.

In Abdullayev's biographical account, it is stated that Imam al-Bukhari studied in the Hijaz for six years, subsequently met teachers in various scholarly centers, and began identifying errors in hadith from a young age. Such information is used within the framework of critical biography and with due consideration of its source limitations. These data demonstrate that al-Bukhari's individual abilities developed in connection with a critical environment, scholarly journeys, and a network of teachers.

This process should not be interpreted as the sudden emergence of a ready-made method, but rather as the gradual acquisition and restructuring of experience in *'ilm al-'ilal*, historical information, and hadith transmission. Therefore, explaining the genesis of the school solely through extraordinary memory would fail to adequately reflect its institutional conditions. Individual ability developed within this scholarly environment as a consistent methodological practice.

The stages of the development of hadith scholarship clarify the historical position of the Bukhari school. During the first period, the primary task was the preservation and transmission of reports; during the second, narrations were collected into written compilations and criticism of transmitters became stronger; during the third, individual genres, terminology, and rules of selection approached a

systematic form. Such periodization does not establish absolute boundaries: writing existed even during the earliest stage, while criticism also existed before formal terminology emerged. Its scholarly value lies in demonstrating how the dominant task changed over time.

Mustafoev refers to the third Islamic century as the stage of *tadwin* of hadith and related sciences. While *musnads* were primarily organized according to the names of Companions, he emphasizes that Imam al-Bukhari separated authentic narrations according to thematic chapters, thereby facilitating their retrieval and juristic understanding. This innovation should not be limited to the general description of his work as the “first authentic book,” because doing so would fail to reveal its methodological characteristics. In the collection, al-Bukhari demonstrated the results of criticism, while in *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* he presented the biographical infrastructure underlying that criticism.

To‘raev characterizes *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* as the result of Imam al-Bukhari’s extensive study of transmitters and narrations and as a source that directly influenced the selection judgments of later hadith scholars. Therefore, the formation of the school should not be defined by the date on which a single book was written, but rather by a continuous process consisting of collecting materials, compiling biographies of individuals, identifying hidden defects (*‘ilal*), and incorporating selected reports into a systematic composition.

The period of al-Bukhari may thus be described as a stage in which the processes of collecting materials, selecting them, and organizing them compositionally became increasingly developed. However, this transition does not diminish the value of earlier *musannaf* and *musnad* works. On the contrary, broad corpora, numerous transmission routes, and extensive critical experience were necessary for selection. The selectivity of a *Sahih* collection depended upon the broader reservoir of communal memory; not every report excluded from the collection was necessarily fabricated. Some may simply have been omitted because of the purpose, scope, or specific criteria of the work.

In Uzbek scholarly literature, Imam al-Bukhari’s legacy is often presented as a source of spiritual values, moral education, or national pride. This approach reveals its social significance, but in order to explain the philosophical genesis of the school, epistemic tools—*isnad*, text, transmitter, hidden defect, classification, and thematic organization—must be examined as an interconnected system. Otherwise, a general description of al-Bukhari as a “great hadith scholar” does not allow for a detailed explanation of his mechanisms for selecting and justifying knowledge.

The value of Musaeva’s research lies in the fact that she connects the theocentric foundation of *Al-Jami‘ al-Sahih* with human social existence and demonstrates that religious and secular, transcendental and anthropological layers operate together. Applying this conclusion to the ontology of hadith makes it clear that human experience is not an “external addition” to revelation. Without the human being who transmits, hears, verifies, and acts upon a report, hadith cannot acquire normative force in history. At the same time, *isnad* and critical criteria function as means of verification that limit subjectivity in the interpretation of reports.

Analyzing gift relationships through hadiths from *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Anokhin demonstrates that narrations are not limited to statements of faith but also function as sources regulating the conditions and prohibitions of property relations. This practical observation by a CIS legal scholar complements the local philosophical conclusion: the existence of hadith does not remain fixed within the text but is actualized anew within social relations.

The verification of *isnad* and text developed within the Bukhari school made it possible to analyze the social application of a narration in connection with its historical source. At this point, ontological and

normative analysis intersect: before determining what a report commands, it is necessary to establish to whom the report can genuinely be attributed. The jurist derives a rule from the text, while the hadith scholar verifies the source foundation of that rule. This division of labor produces a two-stage mechanism that protects the social authority of hadith from uncontrolled interpretation.

The existence of sharply differing paradigms concerning the historical value of sources in Western hadith studies encourages a reexamination of the Bukhari method. The skeptical approach refrains from treating late written collections as direct witnesses to the earliest period, whereas the traditional Muslim approach places a high degree of confidence in the isnads preserved through the science of hadith criticism. The problem is not to unconditionally choose one of these positions, but to identify the evidence that can be tested within a particular body of narrations.

For this purpose, Motzki analyzes isnad and textual variants together and demonstrates that the correlation between them can help reconstruct the history of transmission. This approach is not identical to the method of the classical hadith scholars: its primary concern is the dating and dissemination of narrations. Nevertheless, its principle of not separating textual variants from the isnad network is close to the comparative spirit of the Bukhari school. Maintaining this distinction is methodologically important: the modern historian conducts a probabilistic reconstruction, whereas the hadith scholar issues a judgment of acceptance or rejection for normative purposes.

Brown's research on canonization introduces another important qualification. The high canonical status of the *Sahihayn* did not emerge fully formed during the lifetimes of Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim; rather, a long historical process involving texts, authority, and communal needs transformed them into widely accepted standards. Therefore, the later prestige of the books should not be identified entirely with the author's method. The genesis of the Bukhari school refers to the critical practices of the ninth century, whereas the canonical reception of its works constitutes a social-historical development of later centuries.

This distinction makes it possible to analyze ontological status within historical processes. At the same time, canonization cannot be explained solely by the factor of authority. The critical quality of the text, its interpretive potential, and its ability to respond to the needs of various schools were also necessary conditions for its long-term reception. Social history does not replace methodology; rather, it explains the mechanisms through which methodology exerted influence.

The analysis above demonstrates that the formation of Imam al-Bukhari's school of hadith studies cannot be reduced to a single cause. Its ontological condition was the dual nature of hadith as both historical report and normative meaning. Its epistemological condition was the need to justify testimony through isnad, biographical evaluation of transmitters, and textual comparison. Its social condition was the existence of scholarly journeys, teacher-student networks, study circles, and communities of critics. Finally, political and theological debates added the dimensions of communal identity and political authority to the question of reliable reports.

As To'raev identifies, the information concerning 13,593 transmitters in *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* constitutes an extensive biographical information infrastructure that served as a basis for issuing judgments concerning authenticity. Eido and Safi, meanwhile, characterize Imam al-Bukhari's method as a hybrid model that accepts testimony as an independent source of knowledge while simultaneously subjecting it to complex criteria.

The analysis shows that within Imam al-Bukhari's school, the relationship between revelation and experience appears not as an opposition between "reason and transmitted tradition," but as the

establishment of the reliability of the human transmission of reports through verifiable evidence. Revelation provides the normative horizon; historical experience demonstrates the actual movement of the report through history; and critical methodology establishes a reliable connection between the two. Therefore, the Bukhari school cannot adequately be described either as merely a product of religious devotion or simply as a technique for collecting empirical information. Rather, it developed as a scholarly-philosophical system that brought meaning, persons, and history together within a unified field of verification. This conclusion provides a theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis: *isnad* is the historical trace of this system, the text is its semantic body, and authenticity (*sahih*) is the justified judgment reached concerning both.

These three elements can be studied separately, but the distinctive feature of the Bukhari school lies in its integration of them into a single decision-making process. As a result, the three concepts discussed in this section are connected along one coherent theoretical line.

Viewing the genesis of the school from the perspective of the functional differentiation of scholarly labor further clarifies this line. At the earliest stage, hearing, memorizing, recording, and transmitting a report were often combined within the activity of a single individual. As the corpus expanded, however, the functions of transmitter, critic, compiler, and commentator gradually became differentiated.

Mustafiev connects the process of *tadwin* in the third Islamic century not simply with an increase in the amount of material, but with the systematization of hadith types and the specialized sciences that served them. At the stage of Imam al-Bukhari, selection and thematic organization responded to this historical need. Eido and Safi distinguish between the functions of transmitter and critic and demonstrate that in the person of Imam al-Bukhari the authority of the transmitter and the authority to assess reliability were combined.

This differentiation cannot be equated with the rigid system of professional positions found in modern academic institutions. At that time, one scholar could perform several functions, and authority was based less on formal status than on practical knowledge and communal recognition. Nevertheless, the logical differentiation of functions clarified where errors should be sought: uncertainty in hearing concerned the transmitter's activity; the selection of variants concerned the compiler's decision; and the explanation of the basis for a judgment concerned criticism and commentary.

Murtazin demonstrates that theological debates and the political *mihna* of the ninth century intensified the polemical environment, but this external pressure was not the sole reason for *isnad*-based control. Political and theological circumstances added further responsibility to an already developing scholarly practice.

Thus, the Bukhari school was not the sudden emergence of a single method, but the maturation of an environment in which the authorities responsible for preserving, verifying, organizing, and reinterpreting knowledge mutually supervised one another. While revelation remained the normative source, the reliability of historical claims concerning it was established through this distributed system of scholarly responsibility.

This also clarifies the concept of "genesis": the beginning of the school cannot be confined to the date on which a particular book was written, because the criteria that produced the book had already been tested through earlier experiences of transmission and criticism. At the same time, it would be insufficient to describe it merely as a continuation of the earlier tradition, because the integration of various functions into a unified compositional judgment produced a new quality.

Thus, historical continuity does not negate methodological innovation; rather, innovation manifested itself in transforming existing practices into a coherent system. This criterion prevents the personal authority of Imam al-Bukhari from becoming the sole explanation of the school and connects his achievement with the critical experience accumulated by many generations.

The ontological status of hadith cannot be separated from the question of how it “exists.” It is not identical with a physical copy: a manuscript may disappear, while a narration may continue through another isnad, memory, or network of written transmission. At the same time, hadith is not purely ideal meaning, because its historical existence depends upon particular transmitters, gatherings, wording, and traces of writing.

Therefore, it is appropriate to understand this mode of existence within the framework of relational ontology: the identity of hadith is preserved not in a single carrier, but in the verifiable relationship among source, transmission, and reception. The treatment of the Qur’an, hadith, and the legal-scholarly heritage of Islam as an integrated field of thought, as well as the characterization of Imam al-Bukhari as a philosopher-scholar of hadith within this field, historically reinforces this conclusion.

Thus, the genesis of the school begins not with a collection of texts, but with a method of making reliable meaning exist and remain transmissible.

CONCLUSION

In explaining the ontological status of hadith, the relationship between “one text and multiple copies” is also of particular importance. The historical existence of a work does not require its manuscripts or editions to possess exactly the same material form; its unity is preserved through the mutual verification of wording, isnad, organization, and scholarly reception.

Differences in spelling, omitted words, or scribal annotations do not immediately destroy textual identity, but they create the need to determine which changes affect meaning. Here, the “existence” of hadith appears not as a ready-made and frozen object, but as a historical integrity reconstructed through evidence.

The different transmission and publication lines of *Al-Jami‘ al-Sahih* demonstrate how a work can be preserved over time. Variants are not merely threats to unity; they are also witnesses to the history of transmission. Modern textual criticism reveals these variants through a critical apparatus and shows the reader the reasons behind editorial decisions.

The ontological lesson of Imam al-Bukhari’s school is that the identity of heritage is protected not by concealing differences, but by systematically comparing them and reconstructing the fundamental structure of meaning on the basis of evidence.

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