

A Critical Examination of Hadith Authenticity through the Theory of Projecting Back: An Analytical Study of Joseph Schacht's Viewpoint

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Abstract. The study of the authenticity of hadith has attracted the interest of many Western scholars who want to participate in expressing their understanding of Islamic science. Joseph Schacht, one of the Western scholars who was skeptical, put forward his theory in the form of Projecting back. Joseph with his theory questions the authenticity of the hadith which is stated in Islam to have come from the Prophet SAW. This research aims to explain the criticism of the authenticity of Joseph's hadith through projecting back theory. It was found that two basic questions were asked, namely: first, what is Joseph Schacht's projecting back theory in criticizing the authenticity of hadith. Second, how does the projecting back theory work in the process of narrating hadith. The method used in this research is qualitative, library research with descriptive analysis in explaining the projecting back theory, both in-depth description and how the theory works. The literature used in this research is in the form of supporting books and relevant journals. The results of this research can be understood as this theory argues that hadiths were created by scholars of the second and third centuries of the Hijriah by linking them to the Prophet to gain strong legitimacy. The way Schacht's theory works in criticizing the authenticity of hadith, especially the sanad, is considered different from that of hadith scholars. As compared to the reverse scheme, projecting back whose main source comes from mukharrij and ends as a place of legitimacy, namely the Prophet SAW. So it can be concluded that the projecting back theory initiated by Joseph Schacht has methodological limitations and is not fully supported by factual historical evidence in his argument.

Keywords: Criticism, Authenticity of Hadith, Projecting Back

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of Islam, the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) have attracted the attention of various groups. Beginning from the time when the Prophet himself conveyed hadiths to different audiences, this tradition continued from the era of the Companions to the Followers of the

Followers (Tabi' Tabi'in). However, the chain of hadith transmission that occurred within Islam has not been recognized by Orientalism. The term "Orientalism" itself is derived from two words: "orient," which comes from the Latin word *oriri*, meaning "to rise." Geographically, the term "orient" refers to the Eastern part of the world, while ethnologically, it denotes the peoples of the East. The subsequent term, "-ism," has various linguistic forms such as "isma," "ism," and in English is interpreted as "a doctrine, theory, or system."¹ Terminologically, Orientalism is defined as a field of scholarly study or as a method and methodology characterized by an inherent tendency to integrate Orientalism with other activities that aim to control, manipulate, or dominate the Eastern world.² An orientalist is also an expert in the languages, arts, literature, and cultures of Eastern peoples.³ Thus, an orientalist refers to a Westerner who studies the Eastern world; subsequently, this focus has narrowed to primarily encompass the Islamic world, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and other related subjects. Broadly speaking, the objectives of Western studies on Islam are for the purposes of colonial interests, the advancement of their own religions, and the pursuit of knowledge.

The first Western scholar considered to have laid the foundation for skepticism toward hadith studies was Ignaz Goldziher with his work entitled *Muhammedanische Studien*. Subsequently, a figure named Joseph Schacht emerged, known as a leading authority in the field of Islamic law. However, Schacht also had a significant impact on the hadith research conducted by Orientalists through his work *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Schacht is also recognized as an extreme and skeptical orientalist whose thoughts were still

¹Wahyudin Darmalaksana, *Hadis Dimata Orientalis: Telaah Atas Pandangan Ignaz Goldziher dan Joseph Schacht*, (Bandung: Benang Merah Press, 2014), h. 51-52

² Wahyudin Darmalaksana, *Hadis Dimata Orientalis*, h. 52-53

³"Hasil Pencarian - KBBI VI Daring," diakses 10 November 2024, <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/orientalis>.

constructed upon the ideas of Ignaz Goldziher, but his thinking was more focused on systematically establishing a general framework of hadith within Islamic law and legal theory.⁴

According to Joseph Schacht, the Prophet's hadiths concerning legal rulings are fabricated, created by scholars in the second and third centuries of the Hijri calendar. Joseph Schacht, known as an influential orientalist in the field of hadith studies, presented a sharp critique of hadith authenticity through a theory known as *projecting back*. Research on Joseph Schacht's *projecting back* theory has been extensively conducted by academic scholars. In this regard, there are three classifications related to this research. First, studies on Joseph Schacht's biography, his theory, and its refutations. Second, critical analyses of the *projecting back* theory and the *argumentum e silentio* concerning hadith authenticity or hadith criticism studies. Third, comparative studies between Joseph Schacht and Islamic scholars. Based on the classifications mentioned above, no research has yet focused specifically on critically examining hadith authenticity using Joseph Schacht's *projecting back* theory that discusses the background of his critique on hadith authenticity, the fundamental assumptions of the *projecting back* theory, and the operational mechanism of Schacht's *projecting back* theory. Therefore, this study is important to be further explored and analyzed.

This study aims to analyze Schacht's critique of hadith authenticity using the *projecting back* theory as the primary analytical tool. Throughout history, the authenticity of hadith has been a contested issue, particularly concerning the processes of transmission and compilation of hadith collections. Schacht's critique of hadith authenticity has elicited various reactions, both among Orientalists and Muslim scholars. On one hand, this theory views many hadiths

⁴Idri, *Hadis dan Orientalis: Perspektif Ulama dan Orientalis tentang Hadis Nabi*, (Depok: Kencana, 2017), h. 1-64

as historical fabrications that cannot be regarded as authentic sources. On the other hand, this critique has sparked debates regarding methodology in hadith studies and raised questions about how to assess the authenticity of texts that have undergone extensive transmission processes. Through this approach, the researcher will elucidate the *projecting back* theory and explore its operational mechanism in understanding the hadith transmission process. To achieve these objectives, this study addresses two research questions. First, what is Joseph Schacht's *projecting back* theory in critiquing hadith authenticity? Second, how does the *projecting back* theory function within the hadith transmission process?.

This study is a qualitative research conducted as a library study using descriptive analysis. According to Whitney, the descriptive method involves the search for facts with accurate interpretation. This method examines an object, a system of thought, or other phenomena. The purpose of this method is to produce a systematic, factual, and accurate description or depiction of facts, characteristics, and the relationships between the phenomena under investigation.⁵ Using the descriptive method, this study explains the *projecting back* theory, both in terms of describing the theory itself and its operational mechanism in examining hadith authenticity. In this research, the author utilizes literature from books and journals relevant to the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Joseph Schacht

Joseph Schacht is known as a highly influential orientalist and scholar of Eastern studies. He was born on March 15, 1902, in Rottburg (Sicily), Germany. His family background is considered a starting point that contributed to his understanding of religious studies. His father, Edward Schacht, was a Roman

⁵ Moh. Nazir, *Metode Penelitian*, (Bogor: Penerbit Ghalia Indonesia, 2011), h. 54

Catholic and a secondary school teacher, while his mother was named Maria Mahor. The religious and educated upbringing within his family encouraged his interest in religious matters. It is known that Schacht studied ancient Greek under a priest and also learned Latin, French, and English. Based on this information, Schacht is regarded as having grown and developed in a family and environment that valued religion, knowledge, and languages.

Schacht continued his academic studies at various universities, including in 1920 when he pursued classical philology, theology, and Eastern languages at the Universities of Breslau and Leipzig. His studies of the Eastern world began at these two institutions, which later led him to specialize in Islamic studies, particularly focusing on the history of hadith formation and Islamic law. In 1923, he completed his education at Breslau and earned his doctoral degree. A few years later, he was appointed as an assistant professor. Subsequently, in 1929, Schacht was promoted to professor in the field of Eastern languages.⁶

Joseph Schacht frequently traveled to the Middle East and North Africa, which ultimately led to his appointment as a lecturer at the University of Cairo from 1934 to 1939. He taught jurisprudence (fiqh), Arabic, and Syriac languages in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Arabic Language. This experience serves as concrete evidence that Schacht was well acquainted with and directly engaged in the Islamic world of the Middle East. He was not merely a scholar studying Islam from afar but also served as an instructor at Al-Azhar University. This background strengthened his research on hadith and Islamic law, as his work was based not only on Western literature but also on sources from the Middle East at that time.

⁶ Idri, *Hadis dan Orientalis: Perspektif Ulama dan Orientalis*, h. 179-180

In 1939, Schacht moved to England and married Louise Isabel Dorothy in 1945. He continued his postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford, earning a Master's degree in 1948 and a Doctorate in 1952. In 1954, Schacht embarked on an academic journey as a lecturer in the United States, conducted research in Nigeria, and later became a professor at Leiden University. He also served as a professor at Columbia University in New York until his death on August 1, 1969.⁷

Joseph Schacht's educational journey demonstrates his scholarly zeal and established him as a highly influential figure, particularly in the West. He authored several significant works on Islamic studies, notably *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* published in 1950 and *An Introduction to Islamic Law* published in 1960. While Schacht's focus appears primarily on Islamic law (fiqh), his work *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* also develops a theory initially proposed by Ignaz Goldziher concerning hadith criticism. In these two works, Schacht presents his research on hadith and concludes that the Prophet's hadiths, especially those related to Islamic law, were fabricated by scholars in the second and third centuries of the Hijri calendar.⁸ Consequently, Schacht's role in hadith studies is significant and well-recognized.

Background of Joseph Schacht's Critique on Hadith Authenticity

Joseph Schacht was an orientalist and expert in Islamic law, also known for his critical views on the authenticity of hadith and the transmission process. Based on his work titled *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Schacht is considered to have developed a theory originally proposed by Ignaz Goldziher. Goldziher's theory holds that hadiths do not originate from the Prophet

⁷ Nur Kholis Setiawan, Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Orientalisme Al-Quran dan Hadis*, (T.t: Nawesea Press, 2007), h. 179-180

⁸ Umma Farida, *Naqd al-Hadis*, (Kudus: STAIN Kudus, 2009), h. 243

Muhammad (peace be upon him) but are products of religious, historical, and social developments within Islam that emerged in the second century of the Hijri calendar.⁹ Schacht examined Islamic law by critically analyzing hadiths related to legal rulings and concluded that the Prophet's hadiths concerning law are fabricated. He based this conclusion on the argument that these hadiths were created by scholars in the second and third centuries Hijri.

In critiquing the authenticity of hadith, Schacht began from his understanding of the formation of Islamic law. According to the perception of Muslims, Islamic law constitutes a system that is divinely ordained and has no connection whatsoever with historical development. This is because the Qur'an and hadith are considered to have explained everything in detail. Based on this perception, Islamic law is viewed as lacking historical depth, a notion that Schacht sought to challenge and deconstruct.¹⁰ Using a socio-historical approach, Schacht concluded that Islamic law is not a divinely revealed norm but rather a historical phenomenon closely linked to social realities.¹¹ Thus, according to Schacht, Islamic law is a historical reality, and similarly, hadiths are the result of a historical developmental process. Schacht's discussion of the sunnah views it as a historical development that was practiced during the pre-Islamic Arab period, early Islam, and classical fiqh. In pre-Islamic Arabia, sunnah was defined as the customary practices of society aimed at guiding morality, transmitted orally by narrators. This is evidenced by the establishment of the *qadhi* or judge.

The sunnah tradition adopted by the pre-Islamic Arab period was further developed by the early Islamic Arab era, which sought to reinforce its identity. According to Schacht, the sunnah in Islam is merely a preservation of pre-Islamic

⁹ Idri, *Hadis dan Orientalis: Perspektif Ulama dan Orientalis*, h. 152

¹⁰ Nur Kholis Setiawan, Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Orientalisme Al-Quran*, h. 181-182

¹¹ Lilik Faiqoh, "Hermeneutika Otentisitas Hadis M. Mustofa Azami," *Farabi: Journal of Ushuluddin & Islamic Thought* 14 (2016), <https://www.academia.edu/download/54145204/3.pdf>.

Arab societal traditions. The analysis of sunnah continues by examining its use after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Umayyad period is known for the emergence of classical fiqh schools, marked by the appointment of Islamic judges (*qadhis*). These classical fiqh schools idealized continuity between existing social practices and those of their predecessors. Through this continuity, classical fiqh grounded its legal rulings on the authority of prominent figures from the past, extending back to early figures such as the Companions.

Furthermore, Schacht argues that this stance of the classical fiqh schools gained legitimacy through the *ahl al-hadith* (the people of hadith). From this point, Schacht's socio-historical study of the concept of sunnah or Islamic law emerges, wherein he contends that hadiths related to religious legal matters can hardly be considered authentic. This is because, according to him, such hadiths were created by jurists and hadith scholars who deliberately projected them backward in time to confer authoritative power. This process is what Schacht refers to as *projecting back*.¹² In order to obtain strong legitimacy for their fatwas, *qadhis* attributed these rulings to their immediate predecessors. Subsequently, the attribution extended to the Companions, who held high authority at the time, and ultimately culminated with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This process of attribution constitutes what Joseph Schacht describes as the construction of the *isnad* (chain of transmission) of hadith.¹³

¹² Nur Kholis Setiawan, Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Orientalisme Al-Quran*, h.183-185

¹³ Zidna Zuhdana, FatiaInast Tsuroya, dan Ahmad Zainal Mustofa, "Teori Projecting back dan Argumentum E-Silentio Joseph Schact Serta Aplikasinya dalam Studi Kritik Hadis," *Al-Bukhari: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 3, no. 2 (2020): 171–86.

Definition and Basic Assumptions of the Projecting Back Theory

The projecting back theory, also known as backward projection (*al-qadhf al-khalfi*), is a theory of retrospective attribution.¹⁴ It refers to the practice of ascribing the opinions of scholars from the second and third centuries Hijri to earlier scholars or figures, ultimately tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is because Schacht regarded hadith as a concept rooted in ancient Arab traditions that re-emerged as a central element of Islamic thought. In his study of the Prophet's hadiths, Schacht focused more on the *isnad* (chain of transmission) than on the *matan* (text).¹⁵ According to Schacht, the *isnad* of hadiths evidences arbitrariness and carelessness on the part of the scholars of that era.

In Islamic perspective, hadith consists of three essential elements: *sanad*, *matan*, and *rawi*. The *sanad* of a hadith is defined as the chain of transmission through which the *matan*—the text of the hadith—is conveyed by narrators who transmit it from its original source.¹⁶ When hadith scholars study the *sanad*, they focus on its definition and essential nature. This approach differs from that of Orientalists, who emphasize the origin of the *sanad*. Orientalists pay particular attention to when the *sanad* began to be used in hadith transmission and the historical emergence of the *sanad*. In his work *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Joseph Schacht argued that the majority of hadith *sanads* are fabricated. According to Schacht, it is understood that the *sanad* initially appeared in a simple form and later reached its perfected state in the second and third centuries Hijri. He further contended that the *sanad* was a product of the efforts of scholars during those centuries, who engineered chains of transmission by

¹⁴ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence: Tentang Asal Usul Hukum Islam dan Masalah Otentisitas Hadis*, Terj. Joko Supomo, (Yogyakarta: Insan Madani, 2010), h. 9

¹⁵ Umma Farida, *Naqd al-Hadis*, h.243

¹⁶ Nawir Yuslem, *Ulumul Hadis*, (t.t: PT. Mutiara Sumber Widya, 2001), h. 148

attributing hadiths to earlier figures, ultimately tracing back to the Prophet, in order to secure strong legitimacy for those hadiths.¹⁷

Orientalist skeptics also consider that hadiths do not truly originate from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They assume that hadiths have been manipulated by narrators from the periods of the Companions, Tabi'in, and Tabi' al-Tabi'in, thereby casting doubt on their authenticity. Orientalists further argue that the *isnad* system is a theory developed by hadith scholars and, according to them, this system did not exist during the time of the Prophet or his Companions.¹⁸ The projecting back theory proposed by Schacht is also a conclusion derived from his premise regarding the origins of Islamic law. This premise holds that Islamic law did not exist during the time of al-Sha'bi, and thus any hadiths related to Islamic law must have been fabricated by individuals after al-Sha'bi. This assumption is based on the view that Islamic law only became recognized following the appointment of *qadis* during the Umayyad era.¹⁹

The rulings issued by a *qadhi* require legitimacy from authorities of higher status. For instance, the people of Iraq attributed their opinions to Ibrahim al-Nakha'i; then, the *qadhi's* ruling was attributed to earlier figures such as Masruq. To strengthen the legitimacy further, the opinion was attributed back to a higher authority, namely a Companion, for example Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and ultimately, the opinion was traced back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).²⁰ This theoretical framework made the *isnad* (chain of transmission) the primary focus of Schacht, who regarded the *isnad* system—comprising chains of narration reaching back to the Prophet—as fabricated. In his study of hadith,

¹⁷ Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, h. 20-23

¹⁸ M. Ihsan Fauzi, "BANTAHAN TERHADAP TEORI-TEORI SKEPTISISME JOSEPH SCHACHT TENTANG HADIS," *Holistic al-Hadis* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1–19.

¹⁹ M. Ihsan Fauzi, "Joseph Schacht Dan Teori-Teori Skeptisisme Tentang Hadis Serta Bantahan Terhadapnya," *al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 12–27.

²⁰ Idri, *Hadis dan Orientalis: Perspektif Ulama dan Orientalis*, hlm. 186

Schacht emphasized the *sanad* (chain of transmission) more than the *matan* (text). Among the texts he examined were *Al-Muwatta* by Muhammad al-Shaybani, *Al-Umm*, and *Ar-Risalah* by al-Shafi'i.²¹ Several key points summarize Schacht's view of the *isnad* system as follows:

- a. The emergence of the *isnad* system occurred in the first and second centuries Hijri.
- b. The attribution of transmission by narrators was often arranged arbitrarily until it eventually reached earlier sources. This indicates an increasing incidence of hadith fabrication due to the use of backward projection.
- c. During the era of al-Shafi'i, several additional sources were introduced to reject hadiths that were traced back to a single source, among other measures.²²

Joseph Schacht utilized several texts in his study of the Prophet's hadiths, including *Al-Muwatta* by Imam Malik, *Al-Muwatta* by Imam Muhammad al-Shaybani, as well as *Al-Umm* and *Ar-Risalah* by Imam al-Shafi'i. Upon closer examination, these works are more accurately classified as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) texts rather than hadith collections, since the characteristics of fiqh and hadith literature differ. When studying or researching hadith, priority should ideally be given to hadith compilations themselves.²³ Schacht claimed to possess substantial evidence that many hadiths in canonical books have undergone *isnad* (chain of transmission) reconstruction. For example, a hadith originally narrated by a Tabi'i (second generation) recorded in *Al-Muwatta* was

²¹ Irzak Yuliardy Nugroho, "Orientalisme dan Hadits: Kritik terhadap Sanad Menurut Pemikiran Joseph Schacht," *Asy-Syari'ah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (2020): 155–70.

²² Idri, *Hadis dan Orientalis: Perspektif Ulama dan Orientalis*, h. 190

²³ Zuhdana, Tsuroya, dan Mustofa, "Teori Projecting back dan Argumentum E-Silentio Joseph Schact Serta Aplikasinya dalam Studi Kritik Hadis."

later transmitted by canonical compilers such as al-Bukhari, who employed methods to perfect the *isnad*, thereby making it appear as if the hadith originated directly from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This approach reflects Schacht's focus on the *sanad* aspect of hadith over the *matan* (text), highlighting his argument that many chains of transmission were constructed or modified to legitimize certain legal or theological positions developed post-Prophet. His methodology, which applies historical-critical hermeneutics, has sparked extensive debate and controversy within both Orientalist and Muslim scholarly circles, as it challenges traditional assumptions about hadith authenticity and authority.²⁴

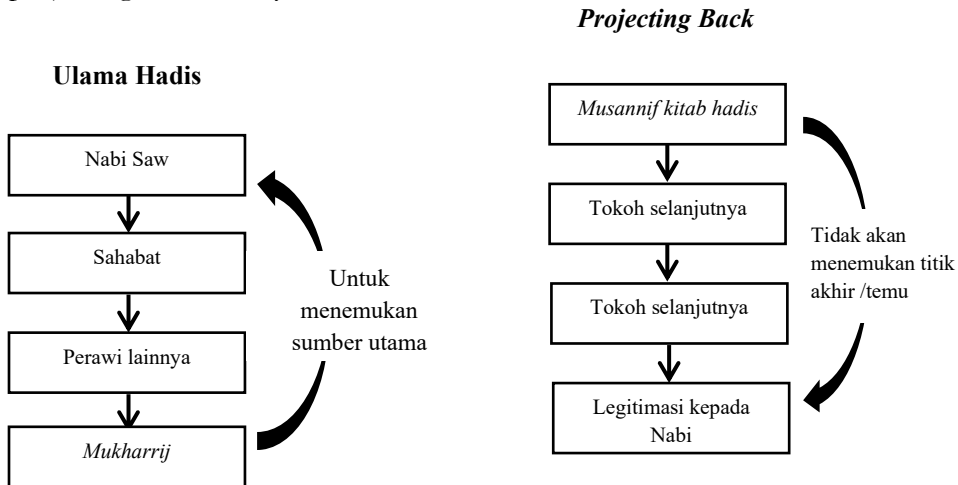
The Working Mechanism of Joseph Schacht's Projecting Back Theory

Based on the previous explanation regarding Joseph Schacht's projecting back theory, its working mechanism closely aligns with Schacht's assumptions about the *isnad* (chain of transmission). Schacht's projecting back theory assumes that hadiths originated from scholars of the second and third centuries Hijri and were then projected onto earlier or later figures. If illustrated as a schematic or hadith transmission chain, this theory begins with the *mukharrij* or compiler of hadith collections (such as Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and others), followed by subsequent authoritative figures, ultimately reaching the original source or the highest and most authoritative source of the hadith—the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).²⁵ However, in this case, the chain of transmission does not reach a definitive endpoint. According to Schacht's theory, he does not believe that hadiths were authored by the

²⁴ Muh Zuhri, "Perkembangan Kajian Hadis Kesarjanaan Barat," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 16, no. 2 (2015): 215–34.

²⁵ Zuhdana, Tsuroya, dan Mustofa, "Teori Projecting back dan Argumentum E-Silentio Joseph Schact Serta Aplikasinya dalam Studi Kritik Hadis."

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This contrasts with the application of the transmission chain by hadith scholars, who begin the chain with the Prophet as the original source, followed by the Companions who conveyed the hadiths, and ultimately ending with the *mukharrij* (compiler).²⁶ The following illustrates the difference in schematics between the hadith scholars' approach and Schacht's projecting back theory:



Based on the above schema, it can be understood that the application of Joseph Schacht's projecting back theory to the hadith transmission chain differs significantly from that proposed by hadith scholars. This view has also been criticized by hadith scholars, notably M.M. Azami. Azami argues that Schacht's theory is invalid because hadith transmission involves multiple chains of narration. He further states that the projecting back theory is illogical, as it is proven that identical hadith reports, in both form and meaning, exist across the literature of muhaddiths from various sects.²⁷ In the author's opinion, Schacht's projecting back theory, when used to critique hadith authenticity, still has weaknesses and can be readily refuted by Islamic scholars.

²⁶ M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Metodologi Penelitian Hadis Nabi*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1992), h. 53

²⁷ Nugroho, "Orientalisme dan Hadits."

CONCLUSION

Joseph Schacht is an orientalist figure who tends to focus on fiqh studies, but does not exclude the study of hadith because it is also a source of Islamic law. According to Schacht, the Prophet's hadiths about law are fabricated, created by scholars of the second and third centuries Hijri. Joseph Schacht is also known as an influential orientalist in the field of hadith studies, presenting sharp criticism of hadith authenticity through the theory known as projecting back. The projecting back theory is a backward projection theory, which attributes the opinions or statements of scholars from the second and third centuries Hijri to earlier scholars, reaching the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The working mechanism of this theory can be concluded as an inversion of the *isnad* scheme according to hadith scholars in general, with its main source being the *mukharrij* of hadith books, not the Prophet. This theory has also faced criticism, including from Islamic scholars, namely hadith scholars. Thus, it is concluded that the projecting back theory, according to some hadith scholars, is a weak and illogical theory. This paper only focuses on presenting a critique of hadith authenticity using the projecting back theory and illustrating the working mechanism of the theory, which is considered to still have limitations. However, these limitations can become a source for further research, examining Joseph's skeptical attitude toward the historical transmission of hadith with his theory more systematically and deeply, using different approaches and methods.

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