

## SCHACHT'S CONVINCING THEORIES AND AL-A'ZAMI'S POWERFUL REBUTTALS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HADITH AUTHENTICITY IN ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the critical scholarly debate between Joseph Schacht and Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami regarding the origins and authenticity of Islamic jurisprudence, particularly focusing on the development of hadith literature and the isnad (chain of transmission) system. By examining Schacht's skeptical historical approach and Al-A'zami's methodological rebuttals, the article evaluates the implications of their positions on the study of Islamic law. The study adopts a comparative textual methodology and aims to highlight the enduring impact of this debate on contemporary Islamic legal scholarship.

### 1. Introduction

The study of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) has long been a central focus in the field of Islamic studies. Among the most influential yet controversial voices in this discourse is Joseph Schacht, whose seminal work *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950) challenged traditional understandings of the genesis and transmission of hadith. Schacht argued that much of Islamic law was developed through communal practices ('amal) and later legitimized by fabricated hadiths. He refused that Qur'on is not the central part of the legislations in Islam, but he claims that Prophet Muhammad might have made up hadiths without the allowing of Allah.

In contrast, Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami, a prominent scholar of hadith studies, offered a detailed refutation of Schacht's claims, emphasizing the early preservation and authentication of hadith literature. He gave the most reliable arguments to oppose Schacht's claims and stated that Schacht began to explore this field with his inferior disbeliefs and dilemmas.

This article aims to explore both perspectives within the broader academic context, applying methodological scrutiny to both positions to evaluate their credibility and contribution to Islamic legal historiography.

### 2. Methodology

This study employs a comparative textual analysis approach, focusing on primary and secondary sources that represent both Schacht's and Al-A'zami's viewpoints. The research involves:

Close reading of *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* by Schacht;

Analysis of Al-A'zami's rebuttal, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*;

Supporting literature from scholars like Jonathan Brown, Wael Hallaq, Harald Motzki, and others;

Methodological frameworks such as isnad-cum-matn analysis, historiographical comparison, and content analysis.

This approach allows for a critical evaluation of each scholar's assumptions, evidence, and reasoning. I assume that this kind of evaluation is necessary for this world and new generations because everyone needs to follow the faith of appropriate life span in every age.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Schacht's Main Claims

**Primacy of 'Amal:** Schacht posited that early Islamic legal thought developed from community practice rather than textual sources like the Qur'an or hadith (Schacht, 1950).

**Retroactive Hadith Fabrication:** He argued that many hadiths were back-projected to support evolving jurisprudence, rather than originating from the Prophet (Weiss, 1993).

**Invention of Isnad:** Schacht suggested that isnad chains were later constructions intended to lend authenticity to legal precedents (Schacht, 1950; Melchert, 2007).

**Skepticism Towards Early Documentation:** According to Schacht, no reliable hadith compilations existed before the second Islamic century, implying that early transmission was oral and unverified.

#### 3.2. Al-A'zami's Counterarguments

**Existence of Early Hadith Manuscripts:** Al-A'zami presented textual evidence of hadith collections that date back to the Prophet's companions, challenging Schacht's dating (Al-A'zami, 1961; Brown, 2009).

**Isnad as a Rigorous Method:** He argued that isnad is a sophisticated verification system rooted in the biographical evaluation ('ilm al-rijāl) of transmitters, not a fabricated afterthought (Motzki, 2004).

**Textual Consistency:** Through isnad-cum-matn analysis, Al-A'zami demonstrated the internal consistency of certain hadiths, indicating early and genuine transmission.

**Integration of Qur'an and Hadith:** Contrary to Schacht, Al-A'zami emphasized that Islamic law was derived from both Qur'an and hadith, not from practice alone.

### 4. Discussion

The contrast between Schacht and Al-A'zami reveals deep methodological and epistemological divides in Islamic legal historiography.

**Methodological Rigidity vs. Faith-Based Verification:** Schacht applies a Western critical-historical method, while Al-A'zami defends traditional Islamic methods, integrating both spiritual and scholarly rigor.

**Evidence Interpretation:** Schacht views the lack of early manuscripts as proof of fabrication, whereas Al-A'zami interprets oral culture and early written texts as evidence of authentic transmission.

**Academic Reception:** Schacht's work inspired Western Islamicists to re-examine early Islamic law with skepticism, but was widely rejected in the Muslim world. Al-A'zami's rebuttal, supported by scholars like Motzki and Brown, re-legitimized hadith studies from within the tradition.

Modern Implications: The debate shapes how Islamic law is viewed today—either as an evolving human endeavor (per Schacht), or as divinely rooted and historically preserved (per Al-A'zami).

## 5. Conclusion

The intellectual confrontation between Joseph Schacht and Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami remains a cornerstone in the study of Islamic jurisprudence. While Schacht's critical approach challenged the authenticity of hadith and reshaped Western academic perspectives, Al-A'zami's defense restored confidence in the traditional transmission mechanisms. This dialogue exemplifies the necessity of methodological pluralism and scholarly integrity in interpreting Islamic historical sources.

Future research could further explore interdisciplinary methodologies, such as digital isnad mapping or machine learning-based authenticity detection, to bridge the gap between these two paradigms.

## References

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