

Muhammad Royyan Faqih Azhary¹, Ahmad Firdaus², M. Hazim³, Achmad Roziqi⁴, Advan Navis Zubaidi⁵

A HISTORICAL-PHILOLOGICAL REASSESSMENT OF AL-ARBA'ŪNA FI AL-TASAWWUF AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY SUFI ENGAGEMENTS WITH HADITH

^{1,2,3,4}Ma'had Aly Hasyim Asy'ari, Indonesia

⁵Vrije University Amsterdam, Netherlands

Email: royyanfaqihlamongan@gmail.com¹

Received:

2025-11-21

Received in revised form:

2025-12-01

Accepted:

2025-12-10

Available online:

2025-12-23

Abstract: *This study analyzes the epistemological intersection between Sufism and Hadith Science through an in-depth examination of the work of Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf. Using a historical-philological method, the research reveals the mechanism of the "methodological dialogue" initiated by al-Sulamī, which seeks to reconcile the authority of hadith transmission (naql) with the spiritual epistemology of Sufism (kashf). Empirical philological findings indicate that the majority of hadiths in this collection are of weak (ḍa'if) or even fabricated (maḍḍū') status, yet doctrinally, al-Sulamī strategically employs them to construct a Sufi ethical-spiritual foundation centered on the concepts of zuḥūd, maḥabbah, and ma'rifaḥ. This study clearly distinguishes between the findings of problematic sanad authenticity and al-Sulamī's interpretative claims that validate hadith through the alignment of meaning (ṣiḥḥat al-ma'nā) and spiritual considerations. The resulting epistemological insight demonstrates that this work is not merely a harmonious reconciliation, but rather a negotiation arena reflecting the creative tension between the historical-textual authority of the muḥaddithūn and the inner experiential authority of the Sufis within the medieval Islamic intellectual tradition.*

Keywords: *al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf; Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī; Sufi Hadith Tradition.*

INTRODUCTION

The spread of Islam in the first and second centuries AH demonstrated remarkably significant development, marked by the emergence of various fundamental understandings of religious teachings. Muslim society during this period viewed Islam not only as a belief system but also as a form of obedience and sincerity in worshipping Allah SWT. This perspective gave rise to figures known as pious and ascetic individuals, who were believed to have authentically implemented the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW through the message he brought (Rahim, 2022). Entering the subsequent period, the tradition of Muslim piety evolved through an interpretative process of the values contained in the Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, and elements of local tradition. These values were then systematized into a discursive formation that was documented and passed down to society and future generations. This process, whether conscious or not, contained a dimension of critique, given that the practice of piety at that time was individual and highly subjective. This criticism, through the mechanisms available in its era, became the seed for the birth of the study of tasawwuf (Sufism), marking its recognition as a distinct scholarly discipline (Melchert, 1996).

Conceptually, tasawwuf refers to teachings and practices that direct a Muslim directly to Allah (al-ṭarīqah ilā Allāh). This teaching model is rooted in the personal example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who lived a simple yet earnest life. His character was inseparable from the pure light of the Qur'an, which became the ideal foundation of tasawwuf in Islam. Within this framework, Sufis strive to emulate the attributes of God. A popular expression among them is *al-takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh 'alā qadri al-basyar*, which means to behave in accordance with Allah's attributes to the extent of human capability. Hossein Nasr notes that in Islamic history, no group has demonstrated love for the Prophet SAW and the spirit of emulating his life and character as the Sufis have ((Nasr, 2009).

One Sufi figure prominent in piety and asceticism is Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412 H/1021 CE). He was not only a practitioner of tasawwuf but also an intellectual who studied and wrote about it from various perspectives (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1997). Unlike some other Sufi figures, al-Sulamī emphasized that tasawwuf must be based on full obedience to the Qur'an, restraint of base desires, respect for the teacher (shaykh), and a forgiving nature. According to him, a true servant ('abd) is one who has become truly free (ḥurr) from everything other than Allah. When the heart's desire aligns with His will, then all of Allah's decrees are accepted with full contentment and without any rejection (qanā'ah) (Sara, 2002). For al-Sulamī, tasawwuf is the core or deepest dimension of Islamic revelation, functioning as a noble and profound endeavor in achieving tawhid (Sahabuddin, 1996).

In its early development, tasawwuf was understood as a path to sincere worship of Allah SWT. However, by the third century AH, it transformed into a means of attaining *ma'rifah* (true gnosis of Allah SWT). During this period, tasawwuf evolved from mere spiritual practice into a discipline with a theoretical foundation tested through empirical experience (Asmaran, 2003). Although studies on tasawwuf and Sufi hermeneutics have been widely

conducted, specific research on al-Sulamī's hadith-based Sufi thought through the analysis of his book *al-Arba'ūna fī al-Taṣawwuf* remains scarce.

From the perspective of hadith transmission, from the second century AH until its golden age in the third century, there were groups of Sufis who actively received and narrated hadith with quality equal to other transmitters. Maryam Bakhtiyar records that early-generation Sufis were generally memorizers and interpreters of the Qur'an, as well as hadith narrators documented through sound transmission processes (Bakhtiyar, 2014). Meanwhile, Suryaningsih asserts that the second to fourth centuries AH were the golden age of Islamic intellectual tradition, which saw the emergence of many figures mastering various fields such as theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*), hadith, and tasawwuf. This enabled the birth of scholars with more than one academic authority, such as a *mutakallim* who was also a *muhaddis*, or a *muhaddis* who was also a Sufi (Suryaningsih, 2013).

In some cases, a hadith text can be interpreted from various perspectives. Qur'anic exegetes generally view hadith as an explanation of Qur'anic verses, while jurists utilize it as a basis for legal stipulation. Conversely, Sufi scholars use hadith to reinforce the Sufi teachings they build (Ahsin and Suryadilaga, 2020). This methodological difference is evident in how each discipline assesses the quality of a hadith before understanding its content. Qur'anic exegetes and jurists are very meticulous in verifying the validity of a hadith before making it an authoritative source, while Sufi scholars often rely on non-conventional methods like *liqā'* (encounter with the Prophet in a conscious state or dream) and *kashf* (spiritual unveiling) as instruments for proving hadith (Kudhori, 2018).

The contribution of tasawwuf scholars to the world of hadith did not stop in the classical period. This scholarly tradition continued into the modern era, as reflected in figures like Shaykh Najmuddīn al-Kurdī, a *murshid* of the Naqshbandiyya order in Egypt. A study by Hafizh Ilham Bachtiar entitled "The Contribution of Taṣawwuf Ulama in Preserving Ḥadīth through the Taḥqīq Tradition: A Figure Study of Shaykh Najmuddīn al-Kurdī" reveals that al-Kurdī made significant contributions to hadith preservation through the tradition of *taḥqīq* (textual verification) of several hadith books. His method included detailed explanation of narrator biographies (*ʿilm al-rijāl*) and commentary (*syarḥ*) on ambiguous sentences (Bachtiar, 2022).

Several related studies have been conducted, such as Hilman Mulyana's thesis on death in *Haqaiq al-Tafsir* (Hilman, 2018), Septiawadi's study on Sufi symbolism (Septiawadi, 2018), and Muh Sofiuddin's work on al-Sulamī (Sofiuddin, 2018). Although valuable, these studies show a similar pattern: they investigate Sufi hermeneutics largely through Qur'anic lenses, while leaving the hadith dimension—particularly in *al-Arba'ūna fī al-Taṣawwuf*—substantially underexplored.

Despite offering a broad historical and intellectual overview, previous scholarship has not synthesized how Sufi piety, early ascetic practices, Sufi hermeneutics, and hadith criticism converge in the figure of al-Sulamī. More importantly, there is no meta-analysis demonstrating how existing literature collectively overlooks the intersection between Sufism and hadith in *al-Arba'ūna fī al-Taṣawwuf*. The epistemological and methodological

claims of Sufi scholars—particularly their reliance on experiential epistemology such as *liqā' al-nabī* and *kashf*—have not been systematically examined in comparison with mainstream hadith methodology. This gap renders unclear the epistemic legitimacy, methodological coherence, and historical implications of Sufi hadith usage.

Based on the above observations, this research seeks to fill crucial academic gaps. First, tasawwuf studies have predominantly focused on Qur'anic interpretation, while the interface between hadith and Sufi epistemology in *al-Arba'ūna fi al-Taṣawwuf* remains insufficiently examined. Second, no study has critically analyzed this work as a source of Sufi hadiths, including evaluation of sanad and matan quality using established hadith criticism. Third, the ways al-Sulamī reads, interprets, and operationalizes hadith within a Sufi epistemic framework require systematic textual and historical scrutiny to clarify their implications for the formation of Sufi knowledge.

Thus, this study argues for the necessity of empirically testing the epistemic legitimacy of Sufi approaches to hadith through close textual analysis, rigorous hadith evaluation, and contextual historical interpretation. This approach not only refines our understanding of al-Sulamī's contribution but also enriches broader debates on the authority of hadith within Sufi intellectual traditions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative textual–historical approach that seeks to understand how al-Sulamī constructs, interprets, and situates the forty hadiths in *al-Arba'ūna fi al-Taṣawwuf* within the broader landscape of early Sufi thought (al-Sulamī, 1999). Rather than treating each method as a separate tool, the research follows a narrative-driven workflow in which the different approaches naturally inform one another (John, 2014).

The process begins with an attentive reading of the primary text. Each hadith is approached not merely as an isolated report but as part of a carefully curated collection intended to articulate the spiritual ethos of early Sufism. From this reading, the narrative texture of the work gradually emerges—its recurring motifs, its doctrinal emphases, and the interpretive gestures that al-Sulamī performs as he organizes these traditions. During this stage, the material is carefully extracted, noting the form of each narration, its wording, and its relation to other textual witnesses. This initial engagement lays the foundation for the subsequent analytical layers.

As the textual landscape becomes clearer, the study turns to the question of authenticity by engaging the classical tools of sanad–matan criticism. This is not applied in a rigid or mechanical manner; rather, it serves to situate each narration within the wider hadith tradition and to understand how its textual integrity shapes the meanings that al-Sulamī draws from it. Establishing this grounding allows the thematic contours of the collection to be explored with greater clarity. Themes such as *zūhd*, *maḥabba*, and *ma'rifa* begin to cohere as interpretive pathways through which al-Sulamī expresses the ethical and spiritual sensibilities of the Sufi tradition.

Building on these foundations, the study enters the hermeneutical dimension. Here, the focus shifts from what the reports transmit to how they are spiritually activated in Sufi discourse. The interpretive strategies used in al-Sulamī's other writings—most notably *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*—provide a guide for recognizing the patterns through which exoteric meanings are deepened into esoteric insights (al-Sulamī, 1969). This interpretive movement is not arbitrary; it follows recognizable conventions of Sufi reflection that link the outward form of a narration with its inward resonance. Understanding these conventions allows the study to appreciate how al-Sulamī reads the prophetic legacy not only as a doctrinal source but as a pathway of inner transformation.

The final narrative layer involves placing these readings within their historical context. This requires drawing on a range of complementary sources: al-Sulamī's biographical writings, the intellectual climate of fourth-century Khurāsān, and modern scholarship on early Sufi engagement with hadith. This triangulation does not serve simply to verify facts but to illuminate the world of ideas within which *al-Arba'ūna fī al-Taṣawwuf* took shape. It is in this interplay between text and context that al-Sulamī's distinctive contribution becomes visible—namely, his attempt to ground Sufi spirituality in the authoritative language of the prophetic tradition (Christopher, 2001).

By weaving together these interpretive movements—textual reading, authenticity assessment, thematic exploration, spiritual interpretation, and historical contextualization—the study aims to present a coherent understanding of how al-Sulamī integrates the hadith tradition into the construction of Sufi identity and authority. This narrative methodology allows the analysis to remain faithful to the complexity of the material while offering a transparent account of how each interpretive step leads naturally to the next.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The History of Sufism and Its Development

There are various views from scholars and experts regarding the meaning and origin of the word Tasawwuf (Sufism). Some argue that Tasawwuf comes from the word "*Shafa*," which means pure, clean, or immaculate. Meanwhile, others are of the view that Tasawwuf is related to "*Ahl al-Ṣuffah*," a community that lived during the time of the Prophet Muhammad who were always focused on worshipping Allah, prioritized the afterlife, and abandoned worldly life (Bachrun and Hasan, 2010). According to linguists, the term Sufi originates from the ancient Greek word "*Theosofie*," which means the knowledge of God. This word was then adapted and pronounced in Arabic as Tasawwuf (Hamka, 2017). Etymologically, the term Tasawwuf comes from Arabic, namely "*tashawwafa*," "*yatashawwafu*," and "*tashawwufan*." Scholars have differing opinions regarding the origin of this word (Samahrani, 1987). Some argue that it comes from "*shuf*" (wool), "*shaff*" (row), "*shafa*" (clarity), and "*shuffah*" (the portico of the Prophet's Mosque which was occupied by some of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah).

The figure who pioneered the Sufi lifestyle was Hasan al-Basri, a *Tabi'in* (successor) who died in 110 H / 728 CE. He was the first scholar to discuss spiritual teachings, including the science of the inner self, the purity of morals, and the effort to purify the soul from blameworthy characteristics. His teachings were always based on the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. In its early formation, Sufism focused on morals, which are extensively regulated in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The primary sources of Sufism are the teachings of Islam, derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, as well as the practices and statements of the Companions. The practices and statements of the Companions were certainly not outside the scope of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, the two main sources of Sufism are the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Ath-Thusi, 1960). The foundations of Sufism in the Qur'an include various verses that emphasize the spiritual relationship between humans and Allah, as well as the importance of morals and the purification of the soul.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفُ رَ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ [التحریم: 8]

Meaning: "O you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance. Perhaps your Lord will remove from you your misdeeds and admit you into gardens beneath which rivers flow [on] the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right; they will say, 'Our Lord, perfect for us our light and forgive us. Indeed, You are over all things competent.'" (QS. At-Tabrim (66): 8)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ [المائدة: 54]

Meaning: "O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion - Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him [who are] humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers; they strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic. That is the favor of Allah; He bestows it upon whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing." (QS. Al-Ma'idah (5): 54)

Besides the Qur'an, the hadiths of the Messenger of Allah also provide a normative basis for the development of Sufism. Within them, many explanations are found that emphasize the spiritual dimension of humans as an integral part of religious life. These hadiths not only guide the community in the outward aspects of Shari'ah but also direct them towards the purification of the heart, the formation of morals, and the strengthening of the spiritual relationship with Allah. One important referenced hadith is:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ

The wording of the hadith *Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu* is found in various literatures without a continuous *sanad* (chain of transmission) back to the Prophet

Muhammad (SAW). From the perspective of classical hadith sciences, its status is thus indicated as *la asbha labu* (having no basis of transmission) or *laisa labu isnad* (having no *isnad*). Several prominent hadith authorities, such as Imam Nawawi and Ibn Taymiyyah, explicitly reject the authenticity of its *sanad*. Al-Nawawi asserted that this hadith is *laisa bi-tsabit* (not established), while According to Al-‘Ajlūnī in *Kashf al-Khafa*, quoting the statement of Ibn Taimiyyah, who affirmed that the hadith is fabricated (*manḍūʿ*) (al-‘Ajlūnī, 2000). Earlier, al-Nawawī also stated that this narration is not authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) (al-Nawawī, 2006). As for Al-Suyuti, he included this hadith in his work *Al-Hawi lil Fatawa* under the chapter *Al-Qaul al-Ashbah fi Hadith Man ‘Arafa Nafsahu Faqad ‘Arafa Rabbahu*, and he did not provide any comment on the quotation he recorded (Al-Suyuthi, 2004). However, it is highly likely his opinion is not far from the aforementioned scholars. Abu al-Muzaffar Ibn al-Sa‘ani added that this statement is not known in the *marfu‘* form (attributed to the Prophet), but rather originates from the saying of Yahya bin Mu‘adh al-Razi, a Sufi figure. These assessments are rooted in the rigorous methodology of hadith criticism (*‘ulum al-hadith*), which emphasizes the analysis of both *sanad* (chain of narrators) and *matan* (text) based on objective parameters such as the reliability (*tsiqah*) of narrators and the content's conformity with the Qur’an and authentic hadiths.

However, a fascinating phenomenon occurs within the Sufi tradition. Despite being acknowledged as weak or even fabricated in terms of its *sanad*, the statement *Man ‘arafa nafsahu* became immensely popular and is frequently cited by major figures like Ibn ‘Arabi, Hamzah Fansuri, and Burhanuddin al-Baqo‘i. In fact, as reported by Shaykh Hijazi al-Wa‘izh, Ibn ‘Arabi argued that even though it is not authentic in terms of transmission, it is authentic "through the path of *kashf* (spiritual unveiling)." This statement reveals a fundamental epistemological divergence between hadith scholars (*muhaddithin*) and Sufis.

This difference between Hadith Criticism and Sufi Epistemology is not merely a technical one; it reflects two distinct paradigms for validating knowledge. On one hand lies the Naqlī-‘Aqlī (Transmissional-Rational) Paradigm dominant in Hadith Sciences, wherein religious knowledge—including the Prophetic tradition—must be verified through a historically traceable, objective, and verifiable chain of transmission (*sanad*), whether mutawatir or rigorously authenticated ahad. Here, truth is anchored in the accuracy of transmission and the coherence of content with foundational Islamic sources such as the Qur’an and established sunnah.

On the other hand stands the Kashfī-Dhawqī (Intuitive-Experiential) Paradigm characteristic of Sufism, which opens pathways to spiritual truth through direct inner experience, inspired illumination (*ilham*), or mystical unveiling (*kashf*) attained by those who have reached elevated spiritual stations (*maqamat*). Within this framework, the essential truth of meaning (*haqiqah al-ma‘na*) may hold greater weight than the formal validity of a transmission chain, so long as the content aligns with the principles of the Shari‘ah and fosters closeness to Allah.

Therefore, when Sufi scholars persistently cite *Man ‘arafa nafsahu*, they are not heedlessly disregarding hadith sciences; rather, they are operating within a different epistemological framework. The quotation is viewed as a *hikmah* (wisdom) containing profound spiritual

truth, irrespective of its formal *sanad* status. This practice reveals a pattern in Sufi textual tradition: the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge wherein spiritual experience (*dhawq*) and illumination (*kashf*) can serve as additional, or even alternative, sources of authorization for texts that are transmissionally weak.

Despite the debate over its authenticity, the content (*matan*) of the statement *Man 'arafa nafsahu* is generally understood to be in harmony with orthodox Islamic doctrine. Imam Nawawi interpreted it as an acknowledgment of human weakness, dependence, and servitude, which in turn opens the door to recognizing the majesty, power, and perfection of Allah. This interpretation aligns with the authentic saying of the Prophet, "*Tafakkaru fi khalqillah wa la tafakkaru fi dzatillah*" (Reflect on the creation of Allah and do not reflect on His Essence). Recognizing oneself as a transient and weak creature becomes an indirect path to knowing the Eternal, All-Powerful Creator.

It is this interpretation that makes the statement relevant as a tool for critiquing misunderstood pantheistic beliefs (such as extreme *wahdat al-wujud*), as used by Abdus Shamad al-Palembani and Nuruddin al-Raniri. Far from supporting the unification of essence (*ittihad*) between God and creation, its content instead affirms an absolute ontological distinction (*mubayanah*): by recognizing the essence of oneself as a created being, one becomes increasingly aware of the transcendence (*tanzih*) of God. In this context, the hadith *Man 'arafa nafsahu* functions as a spiritual reminder of the infinite distance between the Creator and the created (Syifa et al., 2024).

To strengthen a sound spiritual framework, it is crucial to integrate this discourse with hadiths that have a strong foundation. One of these is the *qudsi* hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari:

.....مَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّى أُحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ: كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ..."

("...My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees...") It is recorded by Al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Hadith No. 6502).

This authentic hadith provides a solid normative foundation for the spiritual relationship between the servant and God. It explains that true "recognition" and "closeness" (*ma'rifah* and *qurb*) are achieved through continuous devotion (*taqarrub*), culminating in the station of divine love (*mahabbah*). In this state, Allah's presence and support become so dominant within the servant, without obliterating the Creator-creature distinction. Thus, this hadith of al-Bukhari can be seen as both a concretization and a corrective to the spirit of *Man 'arafa nafsahu*. It offers a sound, measurable, and Shari'ah-based path (*thariqah*) to achieve a similar spiritual goal—closeness to Allah—without falling into claims of extreme ontological unity and without relying on a weak text.

The author analyzes that the debate surrounding *Man 'arafa nafsahu* reveals more than just a technical authentication issue. It highlights the creative tension and dialogue between the normative discipline of hadith science and a Sufi epistemology more inclusive of inner experience. Sufis cite it not because they ignore hadith sciences, but because they

acknowledge another hierarchy of truth (*kashf*) and find high spiritual value in its content. However, to safeguard creedal soundness and the Shari'ah framework, it is essential to always reference and align such spiritual understanding with hadiths whose authenticity has been rigorously tested, like the hadith of al-Bukhari above. Thus, the dialectic between *naql* (transmission) and *kashf* (illumination), between Shari'ah and *Haqiqah*, can proceed productively without compromising the religion's foundational principles.

Biography of Abdurrahman al-Sulamī

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā al-Sulamī al-Azdī (325/330–412 AH; 937/942–1021 CE) was a Sufi, a hadith scholar, and a highly prolific author from Nishapur (al-Sulamī, 2001). His family background reflects a unique combination of asceticism—embodied by his father, a humble and honest Sufi—and the elevated social status inherited from his mother's lineage. From an early age he was guided in Sufism by his father, and after his father's death when he was fifteen, he was raised by his influential maternal family (Atiah, 2006).

His spiritual formation deepened when he was sent to a relative, Abū Sahl al-Sulūkī, a moderate Sufi rooted in the Baghdad tradition and the teachings of al-Junayd. The influence of al-Sulūkī, combined with that of his grandfather—who followed the Malāmīyah path—shaped al-Sulamī's distinctive Sufi orientation: spiritually profound but firmly grounded in hadith scholarship and the framework of the Shari'ah (Daris, 2025). Like many scholars of the 4th–5th/10th–11th centuries, he began his religious education within his own family before studying under prominent figures of his time. He mastered Arabic, the Qur'an, tafsīr, hadith, and fiqh from an early age, including under his maternal grandfather, 'Amr Ismā'il ibn Nujayd, a leading theologian. His teachers included major intellectuals such as al-Dāraqutnī, al-Sarrāj, al-Naṣrābādī, al-Abzārī, and al-Aṣṣfahānī.

Al-Sulamī later undertook scholarly travels (*riḥlah*) to Baghdad, the intellectual center of the 4th/10th century Islamic world. There he advanced his study of hadith and engaged with a vibrant intellectual atmosphere that brought together traditions of hadith orthodoxy, theology, and Sufi spirituality. His association with the students of al-Shiblī linked him directly to the Junaydī Sufi tradition. Through these travels, he became embedded in a transregional scholarly network—stretching across Nishapur, Iraq, Merv, and the Hijaz—that strengthened his epistemic authority both as a transmitter and interpreter of Sufi heritage (<http://www.sufiz.com>).

Major scholars offered testimonies reflecting the broad recognition he received. Al-Ḥākim described him as “highly skilled in listening to and transmitting hadith, and meticulous in his transmission.” Abū Nu'aym affirmed that he had achieved “complete mastery of the sciences of Sufism and summarized them according to the teachings of the early friends of God.” Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī referred to him simply as “a hadith scholar,” while al-Dhahabī bestowed a series of titles upon him—*Imam*, *ḥāfiẓ*, *muḥaddith*, *Shaykh of Khurasan*, and “a great Sufi”—underscoring the breadth of his intellectual stature (Zulfiqar Ayub, 2015). His scholarly activity remained intense for roughly four decades. He continuously sought, studied, wrote, and collected hadith across various intellectual

centers. He authored more than one hundred works in history, hadith, tafsīr, and Sufism. Many renowned scholars—including al-Ḥākim Abū 'Abd Allāh and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī—received and transmitted hadith from him. Beyond his extensive work in hadith, al-Sulamī played a pivotal role in preserving *akhbār ṣūfiyyah*, the early reports of Sufi experiences and teachings.

Despite his wide-ranging authority, al-Sulamī was not without critics. Some scholars, such as Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Qattān, considered him not *thiqah* (reliable). Although this assessment is often regarded as a minority view, it reflects significant dynamics of the period: tensions between the hadith establishment, which emphasized technical precision in transmission, and Sufi scholars, who frequently foregrounded inner meaning and spiritual experience. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī rejected the accusation, and Ibn al-Subkī affirmed that al-Sulamī was *thiqah*, stating that al-Qattān's judgment could not be relied upon (Salamah et al. 2025).

In fact, debates over his reliability illuminate al-Sulamī's position at a critical intersection of Islamic intellectual history: between the epistemology of hadith and Sufi hermeneutics. In the 4th–5th centuries AH, when the scholarly authority of Sufis and non-Sufis was still being negotiated, a figure like al-Sulamī naturally drew attention and scrutiny. His dual role as a compiler of *akhbār ṣūfiyyah* and a Sufi teacher who was also a hadith expert shows how disciplinary boundaries were being contested—between orthodox hadith criticism on one side and evolving spiritual interpretive methodologies on the other (Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, n.d.). Thus, al-Sulamī's scholarly travels, transregional networks, and prolific writing were not merely signs of his intellectual breadth; they became the foundation of his epistemic authority in the eyes of Sufi communities and many hadith scholars. At the same time, criticism directed toward him reveals the intellectual tensions within Nishapur and the broader Islamic world concerning who may interpret tradition, who qualifies as a legitimate transmitter, and how the relationship between the outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*batīn*) dimensions of knowledge should be understood.

In this light, the biography of al-Sulamī cannot be reduced to a list of teachers, journeys, and works. It represents the portrait of an intellectual situated at the crossroads of competing scholarly paradigms—where Sufis and hadith scholars interacted, contested, and mutually shaped one another. Al-Sulamī thus stands as a significant reflection of the epistemological dynamics of classical Islamic thought.

A Philological Study of the Book *al-Arba'ūn fi al-Taṣawwuf*

1. Philological Findings: Manuscripts, Criticism, and Hadith Status

The book *Al-Arba'ūn fi al-Taṣawwuf* by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad ibn al-Husain al-Sulami (d. 412 AH/1021 CE) holds a significant position in the treasury of Sunni Sufism. Philologically, the oldest manuscripts of this work are held in the Berlin Library (MS Sprenger 191) and the Köprülü Library in Istanbul (MS 725) (Brockelmann, 1937). Its critical edition was published by Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata in 1999, complete with *takhrīj* and *sanad* analysis (al-Sulamī, 1999). The structure of this book is

relatively simple yet rich in meaning: each hadith is accompanied by a brief *sharh* (explanation) from al-Sulami, which often includes quotations from earlier Sufi figures such as al-Junayd or Sahl al-Tustari (Gerhard, 1977).

However, critical philological findings reveal a fundamental challenge to the authority of this book. According to Abī 'Āṣim al-Barakātī al-Miṣrī in *Zīnat al-Arf fi Takhrīj al-Arba'īn fi al-Taṣawwuf*, of all the hadiths contained within it, only about a quarter can be categorized as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic). In more detail, seven *ṣaḥīḥ* hadiths were found (numbers 2, 14, 18, 22, 27, 36, 39), three *ḥasan* hadiths (numbers 4, 26, 37), one *ṣaḥīḥ* but *mursal* (number 16), while the majority of the others are of weak (*ḍa'if*), very weak status, and some are even classified as forged (*maḍḍū'*) and baseless (al-Miṣrī, n.d.). Criticism of al-Sulami's capacity as a narrator is also recorded. Al-Khaṭīb in *Tarīkh Baghdād* mentions that some scholars considered al-Sulami not to be a narrator who could be relied upon as a primary reference in the field of hadith transmission, although his contributions to writing Sufi works are still acknowledged (al-Miṣrī, n.d.). These findings show that, philologically, this book contains a significant authenticity problem and requires critical verification before being used as a normative foundation.

2. Doctrinal Analysis: Theological-Sufi Synthesis and the Three-Dimensional Framework

Despite the weakness of its chains of transmission, the primary value of this book lies in the doctrinal analysis and theological-Sufi synthesis developed by al-Sulami. He deliberately selected and interpreted hadiths—even though some are problematic in terms of transmission—to build a Sunnī foundation for Sufi concepts such as *ṣubūd* (asceticism), *maḥabbah* (divine love), *ma'rifah* (gnosis), and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) (Annemarie, 1975). In this context, the weakness of the *sanad* opens up space for understanding al-Sulami's strategy: he was not merely collecting hadiths but using hadith texts as a medium to construct a coherent Sufi epistemological framework. The selection of hadiths about "the world is a prison for the believer" or the *qudsī* hadith "I was a hidden treasure" is explained through profound interpretations from Sufi masters, thus transcending literal-juridical readings toward an esoteric-spiritual understanding.

This synthesis reaches its peak in al-Sulami's conceptual framework, which divides the Sufi path into three interconnected dimensions: the science of servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*), the science of gnosis (*ma'rifah*), and the divine science (*rabbāniyyah*). This tripartite framework is not merely a classification but a spiritual architecture showing how outward practice (*'ubūdiyyah*) must be guided by inner knowledge (*ma'rifah*) to achieve alignment with the Divine Will (*rabbāniyyah*). This concept is rooted in the thought of al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, where the relationship between God as the "Great Cause" and the servant as the "small cause" meets in *ma'rifah*. Thus, even though its *sanad* is weak, the content (*matn*) and interpretation (*sharḥ*) offered by al-Sulami function to validate and systematize Sufi spiritual experience within the framework of hadith language and authority (Alexander Knysh, 2000).

3. Historical-Intellectual Significance: Authority, Criticism, and Influence

The philological findings regarding the weak *sanad* and the ambitious doctrinal construction must be read within a broader historical-intellectual context. The book *Al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf* was written during the development of the *arba'ūn* genre (collections of 40 hadiths) and the rise of Sunni Sufism, as well as being a response to criticism from *fuqahā'* who doubted the Prophetic basis of Sufi teachings (Melchert, 2001). Here, the problematic philological condition of the book actually clarifies al-Sulami's intellectual purpose: he sought to build a bridge between the strict discipline of hadith science and the world of Sufi inner experience, even at the risk of facing authenticity criticism.

The historical significance of this book is evident from the influence and criticism it received. On one hand, this work became an important reference for later Sufis; al-Ghazali in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, for example, quotes several hadiths from this book (Al-Ghazālī, 2005). On the other hand, sharp criticism came from scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyyah, who rejected al-Sulami's Sufi interpretations of certain hadiths, especially those touching on the concepts of *fanā'* and *ittiḥād*, which were considered to deviate from the apparent meaning (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1998; Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). This dialectic between acceptance and rejection shows the position of al-Sulami's book as both a meeting point and a battlefield between *naqlī* authority (hadith) and *kashfī* authority (spiritual experience) in Islam.

Furthermore, al-Sulami's contributions extend beyond his *Arba'ūn* book. His inclination towards "biographical Sufism" (*al-adabī*), which became his hallmark, is manifested in his major work *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*. This work is not only historical documentation but also an effort to preserve the integrity of spiritual transmission and form a moral guide for future generations. His concern for spiritual decline—recorded by his student al-Qushayri in his *Risālah*—demonstrates an awareness of the perennial challenge of maintaining balance between *sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah*.

4. Synthesis and Analytical Coherence

By separating the three layers of analysis above, it becomes clear that the significance of *Al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf* lies in the dynamic interaction between its problematic philological condition, its innovative doctrinal construction, and its broad historical influence. This book is a concrete example of how a Sufi intellectual sought to synthesize the authority of textual transmission (*naql*) with the authority of inner experience (*kashf*), even while facing methodological criticism from hadith scholars. Thus, this study not only reveals the content of a book but also illustrates a larger dynamic in the history of Islamic thought: the struggle to define and solidify the sources of legitimacy for spiritual knowledge. Al-Sulami's three-dimensional framework (*'ubūdiyyah*—*ma'rifa*—*rabbāniyyah*) can then be understood not as a disconnected conclusion, but as the logical culmination of his effort to build a solid theological foundation for the structure of Sunni Sufism, rooted in the *sunnah* while open to the depths of esoteric meaning.

Hadith Criticism and the Debate on Authority

1. The Authenticity of Hadith Transmission According to Hadith Scholars

Hadithscholars have developed fundamental principles for criticizing the authenticity of hadith (*dirāyat al-ḥadīth*), which can be divided into two categories: criticism related to the *isnād* system and criticism related to the *matn* (text) of the hadith. The most frequently discussed subject in hadith literature concerning the system includes the issues of biography and assessment of hadith transmitters (*asmā' al-rijāl*), encompassing: (a) chronology; (b) biography; (c) assessment of hadith transmitters; (d) their hierarchical status as narrators; (e) aspects of life that can help determine their identity, truthfulness, and validity; (f) evidence of the hadiths narrated by them accompanied by commentary from hadith critics; and (g) methods of delivering and receiving hadith (Idri, 2015).

The assessment of the *isnād* system, its origins, and its application in hadith, along with the development of biographical literature and the qualifications of transmitters, became important subjects of study in hadith scholarship from the *sanad* perspective. Hadith scholars tend to view the *sanad* as an external part that also functions as an investigation into the evidence for the truth of the *matn*. As a chain of people linking the *matn* of the hadith, the *sanad* serves as a path connecting the narrator to the original source of the hadith. Thus, the *sanad* plays a crucial role in proving the validity of the *matn*, as through the *sanad*, the truth of the hadith can be proven historically (Syahrul, 2020).

The principles of *sanad* criticism can be broadly summarized as follows. First, every hadith must be traceable back to the first recipient and conveyer, with a connected chain between narrators who have clear identities, trustworthy character, and guaranteed quality of intelligence (memory) and high degree of integrity. Second, every hadith that records an event sometimes witnessed by many people must be narrated according to its original form by several narrators (Siddiqi 1996). Third, every hadith must be free from characteristics that can damage its authenticity value, whether caused by a hidden defect (*'illat*) or an anomaly (*shādh*) identified after more in-depth research (Shodiq et al., 2025).

The determination of hadith authenticity can be assessed through the criteria of a *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound) hadith, namely: (a) its chain is continuous (*muttasil*); (b) its narrators are just (*'ādil*); (c) the narrator has strong memory (*ḍābit*); (d) it is free from anomaly (*shādh*); and (e) it is free from defect (*'illah*). Criteria (a), (b), and (c) relate to the *sanad*, while (d) and (e) relate to both the *sanad* and the *matn*. Meanwhile, the determination of the soundness of a hadith in terms of its *matn* can be seen in the wording and/or meaning content which indicates that the hadith does not contain a lie against the Messenger of Allah, either in speech or in actions he performed (Umar, 2008). According to *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Adlabī*, a hadith is declared authentic in terms of its *matn* if it meets the following conditions: (a) it does not contradict the *Qur'an*; (b) it does not contradict a sound hadith; (c) it does not contradict *al-sīrah al-nabawīyah* (the Prophet's

biography); (d) it does not contradict reason; (e) it does not contradict sensory perception; (f) it does not contradict history; (g) the hadith does not resemble the speech of the Prophet; (h) the hadith contains carelessness; (i) the hadith contains a base meaning; and (j) the hadith more closely resembles a statement of later scholars (khalaf) (al-Idlibî, 2007).

Muḥammad Zubayr Şiddiqî explains that the authenticity of a hadith can be determined through the application of several principles of matn criticism. First, a hadith must not contradict other hadiths dealing with similar issues and which have been accepted as sound by competent narrators. Furthermore, the hadith must also be consistent with the text of the Qur'an and the agreed-upon basic principles of Islam. Second, the hadith must not contradict reason, natural law, and general experience. Next, hadiths describing disproportionate rewards for good deeds or severe punishments that are not commensurate should generally be rejected.

Another principle to note is that hadiths containing praise or virtues for specific individuals, tribes, or places should also be rejected. Furthermore, hadiths containing future predictions mentioning specific times should be avoided. Finally, hadiths stating things that could harm the prophetic status of the Prophet or expressions that do not suit his character must also be rejected (Royyan, 2025). Thus, the application of these principles is essential in assessing the authenticity of a hadith (Siddiqi, 1996).

Although the principles outlined above have established the classical framework of hadith criticism, scholars differ in their understanding of the philosophical and hermeneutical foundations underlying these criteria. For instance, the requirement that a matn must not contradict reason or sensory perception has been debated extensively since the formative period, given that the category of “contradicting reason” is inherently relative and interpreted differently across theological traditions such as the Mu‘tazilah, Ash‘ariyyah, and Ahl al-Ḥadīth (Brown, 2009). Some scholars even criticized the expansion of this criterion because it risks introducing subjective preferences into the process of hadith verification (Motzki, 2011). Within the Sufi tradition, several of these criteria are understood in distinctive ways. Sufis developed an epistemology that places spiritual experience (dhawq), kashf, and ilhām as legitimate sources of knowledge, so the evaluation of a matn is not always grounded in empirical verification as in the hadith schools (William, 1989). A hadith that appears “irrational” according to certain theological standards may be interpreted symbolically or ishrā’ī rather than rejected. Consequently, the application of classical matn criteria—such as the prohibition against accepting hadith that “contradict sensory perception”—undergoes hermeneutical negotiation in Sufi texts. This reveals an ongoing contestation of epistemic authority that is not fully accommodated within normative hadith criticism (Alexander, 2000).

Moreover, most principles of matn criticism emerged from a long historical development, beginning with their embryonic form in the time of al-Shāfi‘ī, their elaboration by figures such as al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Khuzaymah, and finally their formal codification in the works of modern scholars such as al-Adlabī (Goldziher, 1890.) Yet,

these principles are often presented normatively in contemporary literature without tracing the evolution and debates surrounding them. Understanding this historical dynamic allows for a more nuanced reading of Sufi works such as *al-Arba'una fi al-Taṣawwuf*, since the Sufi genre does not always conform to the textual verification procedures employed by the muhaddithūn.

In this perspective, Sufi hermeneutics frequently reinterpret or even transcend classical criteria of authenticity. For example, some Sufis accept hadith on the basis of “soundness of meaning” (*ṣiḥḥat al-ma'nā*) rather than the validity of the isnād, or through spiritual mechanisms such as *liqā' al-Nabī* in wakefulness or in a dream (Karamustafa, 2007). Such comparative explanations are essential because they illuminate the epistemological foundations of the differences between hadith scholars and Sufi scholars in determining the authority of a text.

2. Methods of Hadith Transmission in the Sufi Tradition

Sufi scholars developed distinctive approaches to understanding the transmission of hadith. For them, hadith authority does not rest solely on the continuity of sanad as emphasized in normative hadith science. Beyond tracing chains of transmission, they also evaluate the conformity of a hadith's meaning to the Qur'an, the ethical force it conveys, and the spiritual integrity of the transmitter. Through this approach, the validity of a hadith is assessed not only historically but also through the lens of the transmitter's inner purity and spiritual refinement. This orientation situates Sufi hadith epistemology alongside—yet distinct from—the classical tradition of hadith criticism.

Within this tradition, two principal methods developed as hallmarks of Sufi hadith transmission: *liqā' al-Nabī* and *ṭarīq al-kashf* (*Sya'rani, 2002*). These methods highlight the unique epistemological commitments of Sufis and simultaneously open a debate on how spiritual experience can function as grounds for accepting a narration, and how these methods compare to the standards upheld in normative hadith scholarship.

a. Definition and Function of Sufi Hadith Transmission Methods

1) *Liqā' al-Nabī*

The method of *liqā' al-Nabī* is grounded in the belief that the Prophet Muhammad remains alive in the barzakh and can interact with God's chosen servants. Such encounters are believed to occur either in dreams or in fully conscious spiritual experiences. For this reason, some Sufis accept the possibility of receiving hadith directly from the Prophet even after his earthly passing (Siddiqi, 1996). The theological basis for this method refers to Qur'anic verses describing the continued life of the martyrs in the presence of God, such as:

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ (Q 2:154)

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ (Q 3:169)

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ
وَالصَّالِحِينَ (Q 4:69)

Sufis interpret these verses as affirming that life continues in the barzakh, and that the Prophet—whose rank surpasses that of the martyrs—has even greater claim to such spiritual vitality. A key hadith supporting this view is the Prophet's statement:

(Reported by al-Bayhaqī) الْأَنْبِيَاءُ أَحْيَاءُ فِي قُبُورِهِمْ يُصَلُّونَ

Al-Manāwī explains that *yuṣallūn* in this context signifies forms of *tasbīḥ* and *dhikr*. This reading reinforces the belief that the Prophet's spiritual life continues in a manner inaccessible to ordinary perception. In the realm of dreams, Sufis distinguish between dreams arising from the soul, dreams caused by satanic disturbance, and true dreams. Seeing the Prophet belongs to the last category, based on his saying:

(Reported by al-Bukhārī) مَنْ رَأَى فِي الْمَنَامِ فَسَيَرَانِي فِي الْيَقَظَةِ، وَلَا يَتَمَثَّلُ الشَّيْطَانُ بِي

This serves as the foundation of what Sufis term a “*sanad baṭin*,” a spiritual chain of transmission that parallels—but does not replicate—the historical sanad.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, as cited by al-Qaraḍāwī, notes that the abundance of hadith concerning dreams motivated al-Bukhārī to compose the *Kitāb al-Taʿbīr*. Thus, liqāʾ al-Nabī is not simply a mystical occurrence but functions as an epistemological pathway endowed with its own spiritual legitimacy (al-Qaradawī, 2004).

2) Ṭarīq al-Kashf

The ṭarīq al-kashf refers to the unveiling of inner veils, through which direct knowledge arises without the mediation of discursive reasoning. Sufi authorities offer varied definitions, but all emphasize that kashf emerges from a purified heart shaped by sustained *taẓkiyah* (al-Bakistani, 2005).

The discussion of kashf has been addressed by famous Sufi figures, such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (221-297 H.) and al-Qushayrī (346-465 H.). In his work, al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah, al-Qushayrī mentions a chapter titled al-Muḥāḍarah wa al-Mukāshafah wa al-Mushāhadah. He explains that this process occurs in stages, beginning with al-Muḥāḍarah, then al-Mukāshafah, and finally al-Mushāhadah. Al-Qushayrī defines al-Muḥāḍarah as the presence of the heart. Meanwhile, al-Mukāshafah is the presence of the heart accompanied by an explanation that does not require thinking about evidence. As for al-Mushāhadah, according to him, it is the experience of the presence of Allah, the Ultimate Truth, without any doubt whatsoever (*al-Qushayrī, n.d.*).

Imām al-Nawawī associates kashf with *‘ilm ladunnī*, knowledge granted directly by God outside conventional learning (Arni, 2006). Al-Ghazālī, as a prominent scholar in the field of Taṣawwuf, states that ‘Ilm Mukāshafah is the process of opening the veil, so that the ultimate truth (Jalīyat al-Ḥaqq) is seen clearly, without leaving any doubt. Kashf or Mukāshafah is an experience that can be undergone by humans who possess a pure heart, unaffected by worldly love that can stain the soul (Hasib et al., n.d.). According to the opinion of Imām al-Ghazālī, the perfection and purity of the soul from all kinds of ailments and impurities of the heart are conditions for obtaining Kashf. He opined that Kashf is the primary path to reaching the reality of knowledge and is part of the effort to attain the station of union with God. Thus, Kashf functions as a method for obtaining knowledge that becomes the stepping stone in the thinking process (Amin, 2012).

Al-Sulamī offers a more elaborate taxonomy of kashf, including disclosures concerning states, divine will, universal realities, and forms directly tied to the Divine *irādah*. This demonstrates that kashf is not merely intuition but a structured epistemological experience.

Al-Sulamī’s authority in articulating the concept of kashf is reinforced by major scholars. Al-Ḥākim praises his precision in hadith transmission. Abu Nu‘aym states that he mastered the sciences of Sufism in their totality. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī calls him a hadith expert. Al-Dhahabī celebrates him as an imam, a *ḥafīẓ*, a leading Muhaddith, the Shaykh of Khurasan, and a great Sufi (Zulfiqar, 2015). These attestations show that the tradition of kashf developed not outside the hadith sciences but alongside them, shaped by scholars whose authority spanned both domains.

b. Methodological Implications for Hadith Authority

Accepting hadith through liqā’ al-Nabī or kashf raises significant methodological concerns. Within Sufi epistemology, mystical experience possesses immediate authority as a source of truth. However, in normative hadith studies, such experiences are personal, non-verifiable, and cannot be tested through sanad or matn analysis. Thus, narrations received through these methods are generally treated as individual spiritual insights rather than public proofs for Islamic law. This marks a critical epistemological tension: Sufis emphasize inner authenticity, while hadith scholars emphasize historical verification. Such tension gives rise to classical debates over the limits of spiritual authority in establishing hadith authenticity (*Al-Wilattūrī*, 2004).

c. Historical Debates and Scholarly Criticism

The debate intensified when Ibn ‘Arabī claimed conscious encounters with the Prophet and asserted that he received authorization to transmit *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. He expanded kashf into several dimensions—*‘aqlī*, *qalbī*, *sirrī*, *rūḥī*, and *khafī*. These

claims prompted sharp criticism from hadith specialists who argued that intuitive knowledge cannot replace the methodology of sanad (Murtaza, 2022).

Nevertheless, some Sufi and legal scholars adopted a more cautious stance: they recognized the spiritual value of such experiences but restricted them to personal significance, not public legal authority. This spectrum of responses illustrates how Sufi hadith transmission has continually been negotiated within Islamic intellectual history.

d. Scholarly Evaluation and the Position of al-Suyūṭī

Imam al-Suyūṭī offers a more integrative position. In several works, he acknowledges that kashf holds a place within spiritual experience. Yet he insists that kashf cannot be relied upon for establishing hadith authenticity unless it aligns with the established principles of sanad and matn criticism. For al-Suyūṭī, kashf may function as an initial indicator or as spiritual confirmation, but it cannot replace the systematic methodologies central to hadith science. His perspective thus harmonizes spiritual insight with scholarly objectivity (Idri, 2015).

e. Analytical Conclusion

The methods of liqā' al-Nabī and ṭarīq al-kashf form an integral part of Sufi epistemology, which views truth as the fruit of inner purification and spiritual connection. However, when applied to hadith authentication, these methods raise crucial issues: spiritual experiences are personal and cannot be publicly verified.

History reveals a spectrum of responses—from strict rejection by hadith critics to limited acceptance as seen in al-Suyūṭī's nuanced stance. Accordingly, the study of Sufi hadith transmission requires an analytical framework that integrates both spiritual and historical epistemologies while examining how their respective claims to authority are negotiated within the Islamic scholarly tradition.

The Scholarly Relationship between Hadith and Sufism

The question of whether Hadith possesses autonomy as a source of Islamic teachings has long been debated. Certain scholars maintain that Hadith stands independently alongside the Qur'an, reinforcing and clarifying its injunctions (Zumaro et al., 2021). Their argument rests on several pillars: the Prophet's 'ismah in transmitting revelation; Qur'anic commands to obey the Prophet, such as Q.S. al-Hashr: 7; the abundance of narrations illustrating that several aspects of Islamic law derive their detail from hadith; and the report of Mu'adh ibn Jabal's mission to Yemen, which underscores hadith as a functional source of legal reasoning (*Al-Utsaimin*, 1994). Other scholars argue that hadith does not constitute an autonomous source; rather, every hadith ultimately returns to the Qur'an, whether implicitly or explicitly. According to this view, legal rulings found only in hadith are not additions to the Shari'ah but elaborations of Qur'anic principles.

The interpretation of Aishah regarding the verse "Wa innaka la'alā khuluqin 'azhīm," namely her statement that "the character of the Prophet was the Qur'an," reinforces this hermeneutical stance (Zumaro et al., 2021). Instead of concluding that questioning the

relationship between Qur'an and Hadith is a "fatal mistake," this debate should be understood as reflecting the broader theological stakes concerning the foundations of religious authority. Historically, Muslim scholars—Sufi and non-Sufi alike—negotiated their positions within this discourse, not by collapsing the distinction between the two sources, but by exploring how revelation, Prophetic practice, and spiritual experience intersect. Sufi Perspectives within the Qur'an–Hadith Debate While the earlier discussion presents two opposing theological views, Sufi engagement with hadith introduces a third epistemic orientation grounded in experiential knowledge (*ma'rifah*). For early Sufis, hadith was not merely a textual authority but also a medium for ethical formation, spiritual cultivation, and the internalization of Prophetic character. Thus, Sufi scholars did not simply align with either side of the autonomy debate; rather, they reframed the issue through their emphasis on inner receptivity, moral transformation, and spiritual verification.

Their approach does not deny the authority of hadith nor dissolve it into the Qur'an; instead, they integrate hadith into a broader spiritual pedagogy in which the Prophet's words and example serve as vehicles for refining the soul. Understanding their position requires examining the biographical trajectories of major Sufi transmitters—figures who embodied both rigorous hadith scholarship and deep spirituality. Sufi Scholars as Agents of Hadith Transmission Early Islamic history records numerous Sufi figures who were simultaneously recognized as accomplished transmitters of hadith. Their lives demonstrate how spiritual orientation informed, but did not replace, their commitment to rigorous transmission.

Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 H.), for example, was both an ascetic and a transmitter whose narrations appear widely across canonical works. Although some critics classified him as a *mudallis*, the wholesale dismissal of his narrations overlooks both his stature and the complexity of early transmission practices. His compilation of a hadith treatise—later destroyed by his own hand—suggests a careful and reflective engagement with Prophetic traditions. Similarly, Sufyan al-Thawri represents a paradigmatic synthesis of scholarly precision and spiritual depth. Praised as *Amir al-Mu'minin fi al-Hadith* by Shu'bah, Ibn 'Uyainah, Ibn 'Asim, and Ibn Ma'in, he exemplifies how rigorous hadith expertise flourished alongside Sufi sensibilities (Ats-Tsauri, 1983).

Testimonies from Ayyub al-Sakhtiyani and Shu'bah further affirm that his mastery was unparalleled (Adz-Dzahabi, 1985). Other Sufi transmitters—such as al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (d. 187 H.), Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari (d. 246 H.), and Abu Ja'far al-Burjulani (d. 238 H.)—likewise reveal that the spiritual ethos of Sufism did not conflict with hadith transmission. Al-Fudayl was praised as *thiqah* and devout; Ibn Abi al-Hawari served as teacher to eminent hadith authors; and al-Burjulani earned recognition among *jarḥ wa ta'dīl* scholars such as Ibn Hibban, al-Dhahabi, and Ibrahim al-Harbi (Masudi 2017). Classical sources including al-Fihrist, *Tarikh Baghdad*, *Mizan al-I'tidal*, and *Lisan al-Mizan* further situate him as a pivotal figure who integrated sanad mastery with ethical-spiritual discipline. Analytical Integration When read through the lens of the Qur'an–hadith autonomy debate, the contributions of these Sufi scholars illustrate that Sufism did not merely adopt or reject

the theological positions articulated by jurists and hadith theorists. Instead, Sufis negotiated the terms of textual authority by emphasizing lived piety, ethical transformation, and spiritual intentionality. Rather than viewing Sufism and hadith criticism as separate or opposing spheres, the evidence indicates a rich interplay: Sufi transmitters upheld the standards of sanad scrutiny while simultaneously cultivating a spiritual epistemology that valued the transformative power of Prophetic teachings. Thus, the relationship between Sufism and hadith is best understood not as opposition but as integration—each informing and strengthening the other (Arafat, 2017). Accordingly, the role of Sufi hadith transmitters must be recognized as an integral part of the Islamic scholarly tradition, reflecting a multifaceted negotiation between textual fidelity, spiritual insight, and lived devotion.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that al-Sulamī's *al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf* represents a foundational attempt to anchor early Sufi spirituality within the authoritative framework of Prophetic tradition. A balanced assessment, however, must move beyond simplistic narratives of “methodological conciliation” and acknowledge the deep-seated epistemological tensions embedded within the work.

Philological analysis reveals a core contradiction: while al-Sulamī sought legitimacy through the language of ḥadīth, a substantial portion of the compiled material is classified as weak (*ḍa'īf*) or even fabricated (*maḍḍū'*) according to classical *sanad* criticism. His methodology, which synthesizes standard transmission with Sufi epistemic instruments such as *liqā' al-nabī* and *kashf*, establishes its own hierarchy of validation—one in which the “truth of meaning” (*ṣiḥḥat al-ma'nā*) can supersede historical-empirical verification. Consequently, the text functions not as a harmonious reconciliation, but as an ongoing site of epistemological negotiation between the transmission-based authority (*naql*) upheld by *muhaddithūn* and the experiential, intuitive epistemology (*kashf*) advocated by Sufis. Criticism from scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzī, alongside the contested status of al-Sulamī himself in *rijāl* criticism, underscores that this relationship was often conflictual rather than conciliatory.

The historical-intellectual significance of al-Sulamī's synthesis must therefore be qualified. His influence on later Sufi figures—most notably al-Ghazālī—lies primarily in the hermeneutical precedent he established, rather than in the uncritical adoption of his ḥadīth corpus. Al-Ghazālī himself adopted a more cautious, theologically filtered approach. Al-Sulamī's key contribution was thus the institutionalization of reading ḥadīth through a Sufi hermeneutic, thereby providing a textual model for deriving ethical and gnostic teachings from the Prophetic tradition, even while operating at the margins of its canonical authenticity.

These findings enrich contemporary discourse on ḥadīth authority in Sufi traditions by shifting the analytical framework from a binary (*ṣaḥīḥ/ḍa'īf*) assessment toward a tripartite paradigm of authority: historical (*sanad*), doctrinal-ethical (alignment with Qur'ānic

principles), and spiritual-experiential (*kashf*). *Al-Arbaʿūn fī al-Taṣawwuf* exemplifies how, within Sufism, a ḥadīth's value and “functional authenticity” could be determined by its efficacy in supporting *taẓkiyat al-naḥs* and advancing *maʿrifah*, provided its *matn* remained consonant with foundational Islamic tenets.

In this light, al-Sulamī's work is better understood as a document of productive epistemological tension—one that captures early Sunni Sufism's endeavor to construct spiritual legitimacy through, and at times beyond, the disciplinary boundaries of classical ḥadīth science. This perspective not only reveals the complex dynamics of religious authority but also highlights the creative dialectic between textual orthodoxy and spiritual experientialism in Islamic intellectual history.

REFERENCES

- ‘Abd al-Akrīm al-Qushayrī. (n.d). *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*. Vol. 1. n.p.
- al-‘Ajlūnī, Ismā‘īl ibn Muḥammad. (2000). *Kashf al-Khafā’ wa Muḥṣil al-Ilbās ‘ammā Ishtabara min al-Aḥādīth ‘alā Alsinat al-Nās*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī.
- Ahsin, M.; and M. Alfatih Suryadilaga. (2020). “Interpretasi Sufistik Atas Hadis Melalui Sastra Dalam Syair Perahu Karya Hamzah Fansuri.” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Hadis* 21 (1): 193–216. <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2101-10>.
- al-Adlabī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad. (2007). *Manhaj Naqd al-Matn ‘Ind ‘Ulamā’ al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*. Beirut: Dār al-Aflāq al-Jadīdah.
- Arafat, Ahmad Tajuddin. (2017). “Interaksi Kaum Sufi Dengan Ahli Hadis: Melacak Akar Persinggungan Tasawuf Dan Hadis.” *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 2 (2): 129–55. <https://doi.org/10.21580/jish.22.2520>.
- Asmaran, M.A. (2003). *Pengantar Tasawuf*. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Azhary, Muhammad Royyan Faqih; Lukman Hakim; Ahmad Firdaus; Joharis bin Asis; and Ahmad Ubaydi Hasbillah. (2025). “Meninjau Validitas Hadis Perpecahan Umat Islam: Pendekatan Kritik ‘Ilal Matan.” *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research* 5 (3): 4865–83. <https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v5i3.19519>.
- Bachrun, Bachrun; and Hamdan Hasan. (2010). *Konsep Ilmu Tasawuf*. Bandung: Pustaka Setia.
- Bachtīar, Hafīz Ilham. (2022). “The Contribution of Taṣawuf Ulama in Preserving Ḥadīth through the Taḥqīq Tradition: A Figure Study of Shaykh Najmuddīn al-Kurdī.” *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.55987/njhs.v3i1.64>.
- Bakhtyar, Maryam. (2014). “Prophets Lifestyle, Criterion of Reflected Islamic Mysticism in Persian Sufical Texts.” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 3 (1): 192–98. <http://ajssh.leena-luna.co.jp/AJSSHPDFs/Vol.3%281%29/AJSSH2014%283.1-16%29.pdf>
- al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. (2022). *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Edited by Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā. Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr.
- Brown, Jonathan A.C. (2009). *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Chittick, William C. (1989). *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Goldziher, Ignaz. (1890). *Muhammedanische Studien*. Vol. 2. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- Hamka. (2017). *Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya*. Jakarta: Gema Insani.

- Hasib, Kholili; Zainal Abidin; and Neneng Uswatun Khasanah. (n.d). *Theology and Epistemology: The Study of Kasyaf (ʿIlm Kasyaf) in al-Ghazali's Thought*. Accessed August 13, 2025. <http://repo.unida.gontor.ac.id/1667/1/14%20Teologi%20dan%20Epistemologi%20Kajian%20tentang%20Ilmu.pdf>.
- Idri, Idri. (2015). "Metode Liqa Dan Kashf Dalam Periwaiyatan Hadis." *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 5 (2): 297–334. <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2015.5.2.297-334>.
- Karamustafa, Ahmet. (2007). *Sufism: The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Knysh, Alexander. (2000). *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kudhori, Muhammad. (2018). "Metode Kashf Dalam Penilaian Hadis: Studi Tashih Hadis Di Kalangan Kaum Sufi." *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (1): 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.18196/AIJIS.2018.0084.27-48>.
- Masudi, Idris. (2017). "Al-Burjulani Sufi Ahli Hadis Abad 3 Hijriyah." *Islami[dot]co*, June 10, 2017. <https://islami.co/al-burjulani-sufi-ahli-hadis-abad-3-hijriyah/>.
- Melchert, Christopher. (1996). "From Ascetism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E." *Studia Islamica*, no. 86, 51–70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1595736>.
- Melchert, Christopher. (2001). "The Piety of the Hadith Folk." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (4): 585–602. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3879670>.
- al-Miṣrī, Abī ʿĀṣim al-Barakātī. (n.d). *Zinat al-ʿArf fi Takbir al-Arbaʿin fi al-Taṣawwuf*. Manuscript.
- Motzki, Harald. (2011). *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools*. Translated by Marion H. Katz. Leiden: Brill.
- Mulyana, Hilman. (2018). "Kematian Perspektif Kitab Haqāʾiq al-Tafsīr." Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/40542>.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. (2009). *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*. New York: HarperCollins.
- al-Nawawī, Yahyā ibn Sharaf. (1994). *Arbaʿun al-Nawawīyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī.
- al-Nawawī, Yahyā ibn Sharaf. (2006). *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī.
- Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf al-. (2004). *Al-Ṣaḥwab al-Islāmiyyah bayna al-Juḥūd wa al-Taṭarruf*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq.

- Rahim, Muh Yusuf. (2022). "Pemikiran Tafsir Fazlur Rahman (Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Hukum Dan Sosial)." PhD diss., Institut PTIQ Jakarta. <https://repository.ptiq.ac.id/id/eprint/768/>.
- Ramadhan, M. Rizki Syahrul. (2020). "Metode Kritik Hadis Ali Mustafa Yaqub; Antara Teori Dan Aplikasi." *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 1 (1). <https://doi.org/10.55987/njhs.v1i1.5>.
- Sahabuddin. (1996). *Metode Mempelajari Ilmu Tasawuf, Menurut Ulama Sufi*. 2nd ed. Surabaya: Media Varia Ilmu.
- Salamah, Daris; Zaeni Anwar; Sekar Istiqomah; and Teguh Arafah Julianto. (2025). "Kajian Tafsir Al-Qur'an Dengan Pendekatan Sufistik." *AR ROSYAD: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Sosial Humaniora* 3 (2): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.55148/arrosyad.v3i2.1852>.
- al-Safiri al-Shāfi'i, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Aḥmad. (2004). *Al-Majālis al-Wa'ziyyah Fī Sharḥ Aḥādīth Khayr al-Bariyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Samahrani, Rahmat. (1987). *Pengantar Ilmu Tasawuf*. Jakarta: Bulan Bintang.
- Sara, Saviri. (2002). *Demikianlah Kaum Sufi Berbicara*. Translated by Ilyas Hasan. Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Shodiq, Muhammad; Muhammad Royyan Faqih Azhary; Muhammad Na'imul Muflich; and Amrulloh. (2025). "Analisis Kritis Metode Kritik Matan Al-Idlibi: Kontradiksi Hadis terhadap Al-Qur'an." *Qolamuna: Jurnal Studi Islam* 11 (01): 138–49. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0012-821x\(02\)00600-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0012-821x(02)00600-5).
- Siddiqi, Muhammad Zubayr. (1996). "The Sciences and Critique of Hadith." In *Hadith and Sunnah: Ideals and Realities*, edited by P.K. Koya, 41–78. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust. <https://forage.com/?mid=1385056>.
- Sofiuddin, Muh. (2018). "Sufisme Al-Sulami: Konsep Maqamat Dan Ahwal." *Jurnal TSAQAFAH* 14 (1): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v18i2.1865>.
- Suryaningsih, In. (2013). "Al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muwāfaqah Li al-Sharī'ah: Al-Taṣāluḥ Bayn al-Taṣawuf Wa al-Sharī'ah Bi Nusantara Fī al-Qarn al-Sādis 'Ashr al-Milādī." *Studia Islamika* 20 (1): 1–28. [10.15408/sdi.v20i1.350](https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v20i1.350).
- al-Sulamī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān. (1960). *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*. Edited by Nūr al-Dīn Shuraybah. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī.
- al-Sulamī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān. (1999). *Al-Arba'ūn fī al-Taṣawwuf*. Edited by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. (2004). *Al-Ḥawī lil-Fatāwā*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
- Sya'rani, Usman. (2002). *Otentisitas Hadis Nabi*. Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus.
- The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. (1997). Leiden: Brill.

- Uthmân Fallâtah, Umar b. Hasan. (2008). *Al-Wad' Fī al-Ḥadīth*. Vol. 1. Beirut: Muassasah Manāhil al-'Irfān.
- Ayub, Zulfīqar. (2015). *Biografi Para Elit: Kehidupan Ulama, Imam, dan Ahli Hadits*. Kuala Lumpur: Darul Fikir.
- Zumaro, Ahmad; Fitri Sari; Muhammad Fauzhan 'Azima; Arif Budiman; and Riska Susanti. (2021). *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*. 1st ed. Yogyakarta: Idea Press.