

OBJECTION ONE:
HISTORICAL PARALLELS AND THE
RELIABILITY OF HADITH

A Response to the Argument from Prior
Probability



PROJECT IHYA RESEARCH TEAM

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Table of Contents

Formulating the Objection.....	3
Little's First Objection.....	3
A Bayesian Steelman and the Cumulative Method.....	4
Defining the Point at Issue.....	6
Little's Argument in Compact Form.....	7
Preliminary Questions About Justification and Prior Probability.....	7
Possibility Is Not Probability.....	7
The Default Presumption Is Investigation.....	8
Similar Circumstances Do Not Produce the Same Result.....	12
Early Muslim Criticism.....	14
Critical Principles Before the Later Hadith Sciences.....	14
Truthfulness and the Problem of Lying.....	21
Accuracy and the Detection of Error.....	37
Connectedness and Direct Hearing.....	44
What the Early Evidence Does to Little's Prior.....	51
How Altered and Forged Reports Were Detected.....	52
Premodern Rigor Without Modern Institutions.....	53
Historical Features That Weaken Little's Prior.....	53
The Qur'an and the Community's Preservational Capacity.....	53
The Shape of Hadith Transmission.....	57
The Qur'an as Background Knowledge Rather Than a Hadith Proof.....	64
Moving from General Analogy to the Muslim Case.....	65
Why Incentives to Fabricate Did Not Operate Alone.....	65
Religious and Moral Counter Incentives.....	66
Public Oversight and the Cost of Lying.....	68
Incentives, Counter Incentives, and the Direction of the Evidence.....	71
Final Bayesian and Epistemological Assessment.....	73
Little's Burden of Justification.....	73
Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for the Skeptical Conclusion.....	73
Parsimony and the Total Evidence.....	74
Conclusion.....	75

Formulating the Objection

Little's First Objection

Little states the objection as follows:

#1. Prior Probability (42 min)

It is a general consensus among historians that people of all faith have been known to falsely attribute works. This has been the case for historical material from pagans, Jews, and Christians. Therefore, one should not assume that the material from Islam should be any different. Historians must assume that people are dishonest and then try to prove their honesty. Since historically, the situations were the same for other religious groups, it would be naive to think that Muslims are different in this regard. For perspective, the people of the faith at that time were not a single monolith. There were numerous factions, tribes, theological understandings, competing theories, skirmishes, battles, and even civil wars. All this creates an environment where individuals will have strong incentives to fabricate sources to strengthen their stance. Additionally, at the time, there was no rigorous scholarship and institutions for collecting and transmitting material or a consistent approach for validating its authenticity. All this opens the opportunity for much sloppy work to enter the Hadith corpus.¹

Little's first objection can be steelmanned as follows: historians recognize that religious communities have at times attributed texts and sayings to earlier authorities that did not originate with them, and because this happened among pagans, Jews, Christians, and other communities, Little argues that the Muslim case should not begin with an exemption from the same human possibilities. The argument, then, is not that Muslims were somehow uniquely dishonest, but that they were human beings situated within history, and if other communities produced false attributions when religious or political pressures made those attributions useful, the historian should at least allow the same mechanism to enter the prior probability assigned to hadith.

Little believes this prior becomes stronger once the circumstances of early Islam are added, since the early Muslim community experienced political struggle and later came to contain visible legal and theological disagreement. On his account, those pressures could create a reason for a person or faction to place a useful statement upon the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ, and the existence of those incentives makes fabrication something more serious than a remote theoretical possibility.

The objection is strengthened further by Little's claim that the earliest period lacked the kind of formalized scholarship and standardized verification that would have been

¹ Joshua Little, "21 Reasons Historians are Skeptical of Hadith", objection no. 1, "Prior Probability", at approximately 42 minutes. Quoted here verbatim. Available at: <https://qurantalkblog.com/2023/02/08/21-reasons-historians-are-skeptical-of-hadith/>.

necessary to keep unreliable material from entering the corpus. Given this, he argues that the historian should not begin by treating Muslim transmitters as truthful and then ask whether dishonesty occurred. Rather, reliability must be shown, especially where the historical environment supplied possible motives for false attribution.² The paper, then, will not strawman Little as though he maintains that every hadith is fabricated, since his position is clearly more nuanced than that. Put another way, he is arguing that Muslims were subject to the same broad human pressures found elsewhere and that, unless Muslim specific evidence changes the calculation, false attribution and back projection should be treated as serious historical expectations rather than possibilities that can simply be dismissed.

A Bayesian Steelman and the Cumulative Method

The objection can be stated through the Bayesian framework developed in the introductory paper. Let H_s stand for Little's skeptical thesis, where the hadith corpus is unusually vulnerable to fabrication and later back projection, while H_t stands for the traditional thesis, where the hadith tradition meaningfully preserves Prophetic material through transmission and criticism. Let E_1 stand for the evidence Little places into this first objection. The mathematical question, then, is not whether E_1 can be made compatible with skepticism, but whether E_1 is more expected if H_s is true than if H_t is true.

$$\frac{P(H_s | E_L, k)}{P(H_t | E_L, k)} = \frac{P(H_s | k)}{P(H_t | k)} \times \frac{P(E_L | H_s, k)}{P(E_L | H_t, k)}.$$

Put in simpler terms, the posterior odds tell us where the comparison stands after the evidence is considered, while the prior odds tell us where it stood before that evidence was introduced. The likelihood ratio, then, measures how strongly that particular evidence discriminates between the two explanations.

To steelman Little, suppose that before the Muslim specific evidence is considered, the general background knowledge taken from other religious traditions and ordinary human incentives gives H_s a prior probability of 0.60, while H_t is assigned 0.40. The prior odds are therefore 1.5 to 1 in favor of the skeptical thesis.

$$\frac{0.60}{0.40} = 1.5.$$

² Joshua Little, presentation of the first of his twenty-one objections to the hadith literature, approximately 42 minutes into the discussion; his statement is quoted in full above. Available at: <https://qurantalkblog.com/2023/02/08/21-reasons-historians-are-skeptical-of-hadith/>.

Suppose, further, that the body of evidence emphasized by Little is assigned a likelihood of 0.80 on H_s and 0.40 on H_t . This gives Little a likelihood ratio of 2 in his favor.

$$\frac{0.80}{0.40} = 2.$$

Applying that likelihood ratio to the 1.5 to 1 prior gives the following posterior odds.

$1.5 \times 2 = 3$. The result is posterior odds of 3 to 1 in favor of H_s , which is equivalent to a skeptical probability of 0.75 and a traditional probability of 0.25 under this illustrative model. The numbers are not historical measurements, and the paper will not treat them as though they were. Their purpose is to make the inferential structure visible, because Little's objection can be granted a strong initial advantage without allowing that advantage to remain permanent.

From this point forward, then, the 3 to 1 skeptical odds will function as the running starting point of the paper. Each genuinely new piece of Muslim specific evidence will update those odds, which means that the posterior produced by one stage becomes the prior odds for the next stage. This is important because the response is not a collection of unrelated arguments. It is one continuous Bayesian case in which the total evidence is allowed to accumulate.

One qualification is necessary before those updates begin. The evidence discussed throughout the paper is not always independent, since a Qur'anic command to verify reports may help explain the later moral condemnation of lying, while early concern for direct hearing may be related to the later development of isnād criticism. It would therefore be a mistake to multiply every raw Bayes factor as though the pieces of evidence had arisen independently of one another (have a read of the intro to get a better appreciation of this fact). The running calculations will instead use conditional likelihoods, where each new item is evaluated after the evidence already introduced has been taken into account.

$$O_i = O_{i-1} \times P(E_i | H_s, E <_i, k) / P(E_i | H_t, E <_i, k)$$

Here O_i represents the running odds of H_s over H_t after the new evidence E_i has been introduced, while $E <_i$ represents the evidence already considered. A Bayes factor below 1 therefore moves the running odds toward the traditional thesis, while a factor above 1 moves them toward the skeptical thesis. Where an item would look very strong if treated in isolation but overlaps substantially with earlier evidence, the cumulative model will deliberately use a more conservative conditional value so that the same underlying fact is not counted twice.

This Bayesian structure will also be tied to the criteria of historical justification established in the introductory paper. Explanatory power concerns whether one hypothesis makes the observed evidence more expected than its rival, which is captured directly by the

likelihood ratio. Explanatory scope concerns how much of the total evidence a hypothesis can explain without changing its story from one section to the next. Parsimony concerns the number and kind of auxiliary assumptions required to preserve a hypothesis when contrary evidence appears, while consistency and the ability to account for contrary data determine whether the explanation remains coherent rather than becoming ad hoc. The mathematical analysis, then, is not meant to replace these criteria of justification. It is a way of making their comparative force more explicit.

Not every paragraph or every historical detail will receive its own numerical update. Some points establish a rule of reasoning rather than a new historical fact, and some later pieces of evidence are too dependent upon earlier ones to justify another multiplier. Where no update is made, the reader should assume the point has been taken into account in an earlier form of the equation.

Defining the Point at Issue

Before the historical evidence is considered, the point at issue has to be defined carefully, because the question is not whether some Muslims attempted to fabricate religious material or whether false attribution ever occurred within the community. The Muslim tradition already grants both propositions and developed categories for reports that were fabricated or otherwise defective. The question relevant to Little's stronger conclusion is whether fabrication succeeded on such a scale that later Muslims came to build their doctrine and practice upon material that had displaced, or made inaccessible, a meaningful body of genuine Prophetic teaching.

There is, then, an important difference between attempted corruption and successful authoritative corruption. A fabrication that is proposed and later detected tells us something about the existence of a motive to lie, but it also tells us something about the capacity of a community to reject that lie. A fabrication that becomes authoritative despite the available mechanisms of criticism would be much more damaging. Little's conclusion requires the second kind of case to dominate the historical picture, not merely the existence of the first.

This distinction also clarifies the burden of justification. If the claim were only that some hadith are weak or fabricated, little argument would be needed because the tradition itself accepts that conclusion. If the claim is that the corpus is unusually unreliable when compared with other bodies of historical testimony, the skeptical thesis must possess enough explanatory power to show why fabrication was widespread and successful, enough explanatory scope to account for the Muslim-specific evidence of criticism, and enough parsimony to do so without continually adding unsupported auxiliary explanations whenever evidence of preservation appears.

Little's Argument in Compact Form

Put in its strongest compact form, Little's argument begins from the claim that false attribution and interpolation were common features of earlier religious history and that the same kinds of pressures existed among early Muslims. He then adds that the earliest Muslim community did not yet possess a sufficiently established critical method to control transmission, which means that changing political and doctrinal needs could repeatedly create new incentives for attributing reports to the Prophet ﷺ. The skeptical prior, on this account, should therefore remain high until Muslim specific evidence establishes that the relevant pressures were resisted or that the reports were subjected to meaningful controls.

Preliminary Questions About Justification and Prior Probability

Possibility Is Not Probability

The first preliminary concerns a distinction that will control much of what follows. The fact that a person is capable of lying does not show that he lied in the report being examined, just as the fact that a person is capable of forgetting does not show that he forgot on the particular occasion under discussion. If bare human possibility were enough to establish a defeater, every person would have to be treated as dishonest or mistaken before any evidence about his conduct was considered, which would make ordinary testimonial knowledge almost impossible.

Where nothing is known about a person, suspension of judgment may be perfectly reasonable, since the available evidence may not justify either trust or accusation. The situation changes, however, when a person's conduct has been observed repeatedly and his reports can be compared with what is otherwise known, because a history of truthfulness or error becomes part of the background knowledge that rationally affects the probability of a later report.

If a narrator has repeatedly been found truthful over an extended period, the probability of truthfulness in a later report is not rationally identical to the probability assigned to a person already shown to fabricate material. Put another way, the possibility of lying remains in both cases, but the evidential state is different, and justification concerns the evidence one actually possesses rather than every event that remains metaphysically possible.

Once an act of lying is established, the evidential situation changes again and the probability assigned to that narrator's unsupported reports must fall accordingly. The point, then, is not that a person should be declared trustworthy forever after one favorable observation, but that probabilities should move when evidence moves rather than remaining fixed at a universal suspicion that ignores the narrator's actual record.

This is why the traditional language of preponderant probability is relevant to the present discussion. Historical judgments about narrators rarely amount to mathematical certainty, yet they may still be justified where the evidence makes one description of the narrator more probable than its alternatives, and the same standard applies to the skeptical accusation of fabrication.

The same point can be stated through the language of defeaters used in the introductory paper. A possible defeater tells us that something could have gone wrong, while an actual defeater gives us a reason to think that the possibility applies to the report or transmitter before us. Little's first objection supplies a number of possible mechanisms of error, but those mechanisms become historically probative only when the evidence connects them to the Muslim transmission system in a way that makes the skeptical explanation more probable.

This, as will be shown, does not amount to blind trust. An unknown transmitter may justify suspension, and a narrator shown to be dishonest or inaccurate may justify rejection. The point here, then, is that the movement from general human fallibility to a judgment against a particular person, report, or corpus requires filling an evidential gap, and without that gap being filled, one has described a possibility rather than established a defeater.

The epistemology of testimony makes this especially important, since human beings rely upon testimony in history and in many other fields without personally observing the events being reported. Testimony is fallible, but fallibility does not make it epistemically worthless or without any actual value. The question is whether the particular testimony possesses positive indicators of reliability and whether sufficient defeaters have been established against it.

This preliminary does not change the running 3 to 1 odds by itself, because it is a rule governing how evidence should be interpreted rather than a new historical fact about early Islam (that is, its role is methodological). It prevents the later calculations from treating the mere possibility of lying as though it were already evidence that lying occurred.

The Default Presumption Is Investigation

Little's statement that historians should assume dishonesty until honesty is proven raises a second question, namely, what a rational default should look like before the state of a narrator or report has been investigated. There are three possible positions. One may begin by presuming dishonesty, one may begin by presuming trustworthiness, or one may refuse both descriptions until the evidence is sufficient to justify one of them.

The first option creates an immediate problem because calling a person untrustworthy is itself a substantive judgment about his character, and that judgment requires evidence in the same way that a judgment of trustworthiness does. Historical caution may justify refusing to rely upon an unknown narrator, but caution is not the same thing as proving that the person is a liar.

The opposite position was held by a minority of hadith critics, such as Ibn Ḥibbān in the particular way described below, but the dominant critical approach did not simply assume that an unknown narrator was upright. The critics instead distinguished between what had been established about a person and what remained unknown.

One could, of course, try to make dishonesty the starting assumption and refuse to call a narrator trustworthy until evidence is produced in his favor, but the problem is that this already says more than the evidence allows, since an unknown condition is not the same thing as a known condition of dishonesty. The historian may be justified in withholding reliance upon the person, but he is not yet justified in describing him as a liar.

The opposite view would begin with truthfulness and retain it unless some defeater appears, and some hadith critics came closer to this position. Ibn Ḥibbān, for example, treated an unknown narrator as upright once his personal identity was known, unless a particular criticism against him later appeared.³ The more common approach, however, was more cautious than either extreme, since it required the narrator's actual state to be investigated rather than supplied by a universal presumption.

The practical result, then, is that the hadith critics did not operate with one undifferentiated prior for every transmitter. They asked what evidence existed for truthfulness and what evidence existed for accuracy, because a truthful narrator could still make mistakes and a person whose condition was unknown could not be treated as equivalent to someone whose reliability had repeatedly been tested.

Given this, then, the critics were effectively dealing with several different evidential situations rather than asking one binary question about every person who transmitted a report. Where both truthfulness and accuracy had been established through evidence, the narrator's report could carry the status of *ṣaḥīḥ* because the available information made truthful and accurate transmission the preponderant explanation. The judgment was therefore probabilistic, not a declaration that the narrator had become incapable of error.

Where deliberate lying had actually been established, the evidential situation changed in the opposite direction and the person's unsupported transmission was rejected as fabricated or forged. Put another way, the judgment followed the evidence about the narrator rather than applying the same prior to everyone.

A third situation arose where a narrator was known to be truthful but was also known to make errors with enough frequency that his solitary transmission could not bear the same weight. This distinction is especially important for the present paper, since it shows that the critics did not collapse inaccuracy into dishonesty, but treated the two as different failure mechanisms with different historical implications.

³ Ibn Ḥajar reports that Ibn Ḥibbān held that once a narrator's personal anonymity (*jahālat al-ʿayn*) is removed, he is deemed upright until a specific disparagement of him comes to light. Ibn Ḥajar found this position surprising, remarking: «The majority hold the contrary.» Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 AH), *Lisān al-Mīzān* (1/208), ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1st ed., 2002 CE). On this issue, compare also the view of the contemporary scholar ʿAbd Allāh b. Yūsuf al-Judayʿ, *Taḥrīr ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth* (1/325-334) (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Rayyān li-l-Ṭibāʾa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1st ed., 1424 AH / 2003 CE).

The final broad situation was the *majhūl* narrator, where neither a sufficient case for truthfulness nor lying had been established and the person's precision was likewise unknown. Many critics would not use his solitary report as proof, not because they had already decided that he fabricated it, but because the positive conditions needed for acceptance had not yet been established. In terms of justification, then, the report could fail to cross the threshold for acceptance without the critic possessing enough evidence to call it forged.

Seen this way, the rejection of an isolated report from an unknown narrator does not depend upon an accusation that the narrator is lying. It depends upon the absence of the positive conditions required for acceptance. The distinction matters because a report can fail to reach the threshold of justification without there being enough evidence to describe it as fabricated.

Contextual evidence, however, could still change that result. If the report of an otherwise unknown narrator agreed with stronger material transmitted through other routes, or if other relevant indicators supported what he had related, some critics could accept the report because its evidential support no longer came from the unknown narrator standing alone. The justification, then, came from the total evidence surrounding the report rather than from a charitable assumption about the man himself.

Where neither the narrator's trustworthiness nor any meaningful corroborating indicator could be established, most critics simply did not accept the report. This is a suspension produced by insufficient positive evidence, which should be kept separate from the stronger claim that the narrator has been shown to lie.

At times a critic could go further and accuse an unknown narrator of lying, but that stronger judgment required stronger contextual evidence pointing in that direction. The mere fact that the person's condition was unknown was not enough, and this matters because the accusation itself has to satisfy a burden of justification rather than functioning as the default.

A smaller group was more willing to accept the solitary report of an unknown narrator when no lie had been discovered from him, partly because they expected a repeated pattern of fabrication to become visible to the critics. Even this approach did not make the report immune from error, since the narration was still measured against stronger hadith and other established evidence, which means that a conflict capable of making error more probable could still defeat the report.

The broader methodology, then, does not begin from a fixed declaration that every narrator is truthful or that every narrator is dishonest. It begins from investigation. Where truthfulness and precision are established, the report gains evidential weight. Where lying is established, the report loses that weight dramatically. Where the state remains unknown, the critic may suspend rather than pretend to possess evidence that he does not have.

This is closer to the structure of Bayesian reasoning than Little's formulation suggests, since the probability assigned to a report changes with the information available about the transmitter rather than being frozen at a single prior that ignores later evidence.

Even a narrator judged truthful remains open to further testing, because truthfulness does not guarantee perfect memory. The critics therefore continued to compare his reports and could lower confidence in a particular narration when stronger evidence suggested that he had erred.

What emerges, then, is a critical theory that separates moral reliability from accuracy and then separates both of those questions from the final status of a particular report. That is precisely the kind of distinction a justified historical method should make, since collapsing every error into dishonesty would have less explanatory power than a model capable of distinguishing different causes of defect.

The same evidential logic applies once the unit of analysis moves from the narrator to the report itself. A narration does not become false merely because the conditions of acceptance have not yet been established, and it does not become authentic merely because no one has proved deliberate fabrication. Ibn Ḥajar's formulation is useful here because it separates the relevant evidential states rather than forcing every report into the false binary Little's wording might suggest.⁴

1. Where the recognized conditions of acceptance are present, the narration is treated as *ṣaḥīḥ* on the basis of preponderant probability, which means that the judgment rests upon positive evidence sufficient to justify acceptance without pretending to reach infallibility.

2. Where an actual ground for rejection appears, whether because a narrator is shown to lie, because his error rate is too high, or because his otherwise reliable report conflicts with stronger evidence, the narration is rejected because a defeater has moved from a mere possibility into the evidential record.

3. Where neither the positive conditions of acceptance nor a positive ground of rejection has been established, as can occur with an unsupported report from an unknown narrator, the critics may suspend acting upon it. The practical result resembles rejection, but the epistemic reason is different, since the report is set aside for failing to become justified rather than for having been proved false.

Taken together, then, these categories show that acceptance was tied to positive evidence about both the narrator and the report. Truthfulness had to be established, accuracy had to be assessed, and a narration could still be rejected when stronger evidence disclosed an error in its chain or content.

The tradition therefore did not treat hadith texts as immune from distortion. It allowed for outright fabrication and for the more ordinary problem in which a truthful narrator changes the wording or meaning through error, and the critical method had to be capable of dealing with both possibilities.

⁴ Aḥmad b. 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), *Nuzhat al-Nazar fī Tawḍīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Muṣṭalaḥ Ahl al-Athar* (51), ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Ṣabāḥ, 3rd ed., 1421 AH / 2000 CE).

The important point for Little's objection is that this is not the epistemology of a community that simply assumes every attribution is true. The method makes acceptance conditional upon evidence and keeps the possibility of error open even after a narrator has been judged upright.

What emerges from this preliminary, then, is not a rule of automatic trust and not a rule of automatic suspicion. The operative presumption is investigation, where the critic attempts to establish the state of the narrator and then asks whether the particular report survives comparison with the rest of the evidence.

Little's statement that historians must assume dishonesty therefore mixes two different ideas. It is reasonable to require evidence before an unknown report is used as proof, but that does not justify assigning the moral state of dishonesty before the investigation has begun. The hadith method is strict enough to withhold acceptance from an unknown narrator while still refusing to call him a liar without evidence.

This preliminary also does not receive a separate multiplier in the running Bayesian case, because it primarily tells us how different kinds of narrator evidence should alter a probability once that evidence is available. It will become relevant numerically when the historical sections show that early Muslims were actually making these distinctions rather than merely possessing them as later theory.

Similar Circumstances Do Not Produce the Same Result

Little's analogy also depends upon the idea that similar historical pressures create a sufficiently similar expectation of conduct. Sectarian rivalry and competition for authority can certainly create motives for fabrication, and the paper has no reason to deny that point. The difficulty begins when a motive is treated as though it determines the response of every community exposed to it.

Similar environments can increase the possibility of similar behavior, but they do not make the behavior inevitable. Human conduct is shaped by the pressure itself and by the restraints operating against that pressure, which means that the same opportunity to fabricate may produce different outcomes where the moral culture or the mechanisms of detection differ. A historical analogy is justified only to the extent that the similarities are relevant to the outcome being inferred.

Given this, beliefs and social expectations matter because they change the cost of a lie and the likelihood that a person will act upon an available incentive. The existence of a motive, then, is only one variable in the historical model.

Put another way, similar circumstances do not guarantee the same response, and a comparison that assumes the response before examining the system specific evidence has already placed the conclusion into its background assumptions. This is why Little's statement that it would be naive to think Muslims differed from other religious groups carries little weight, since the relevant question is not whether Muslims were capable of the same conduct (they clearly were), but whether the Muslim transmission environment

contained differences that made successful large scale corruption less expected than the analogy assumes.

The same point applies within a single community. The fact that some people fabricated does not establish that the community as a whole participated in the fabrication or that the fabrications became authoritative. Little's argument therefore has to move from the existence of forgers to the historical success of their forgeries, and that second step requires evidence.

Furthermore, this is also a question of explanatory power. If the skeptical hypothesis predicts that similar pressures should generate successful corruption while the traditional thesis predicts that those pressures can exist alongside meaningful preservation, the evidence that distinguishes the two will be the evidence concerning what the Muslim system actually did with those pressures.

In fact, even a high degree of similarity between two societies would not settle the matter if one relevant difference materially changes the probability of the outcome. A single system breaker can therefore matter more than a long list of superficial similarities when that difference bears directly upon transmission and error detection (as we will show God willing).

Little must therefore justify the move from similarity of circumstances to similarity of result rather than treating that move as self evident. He must also show that the differences introduced throughout this paper are too weak to change the expected outcome, because once the mechanisms of preservation differ, the analogy can no longer carry the skeptical conclusion without a further argument.

The conduct of a community, then, is not determined by circumstances alone. The historical explanation must include the pressures toward fabrication and the forces operating against them, and the balance between those factors is exactly what the later Bayesian updates are meant to represent.

The last thing to be said, given these prelims, is that Little's appeal to historical parallels may be described either as an analogy between religious communities, or as an induction from a number of communities to religious communities more generally. Either way, the inference remains limited until the features responsible for corruption are shown to operate in the same way in the Muslim case, because evidence from another system affects the prior but does not determine the posterior before the evidence from Islam is introduced.

This is why, in the beginning of the paper, we granted Little's skeptical prior rather than pretending that corruption in other religious traditions is irrelevant. The problem would arise if the same analogical evidence were counted again at this stage, since it has already been built into E_1 and already helped produce the 3 to 1 skeptical starting odds.

In the earlier standalone illustration, the analogical evidence E_a was assigned $P(E_a \mid H_s, k) = 0.90$ and $P(E_a \mid H_t, k) = 0.85$, which gives a likelihood ratio of only about 1.06. That example remains useful because it shows that corruption in other religions is almost equally compatible with both hypotheses. To be clear, it does in fact justify investigation, but it does very little by itself to distinguish the Muslim preservation thesis from the skeptical thesis.

$$\frac{P(E_A \mid H_S, k)}{P(E_A \mid H_T, k)} = \frac{0.90}{0.85} \approx 1.06.$$

This is where the idea of a system breaker becomes relevant. If two communities face incentives to fabricate but one of them develops practices that materially increase the probability of detection, the shared incentive no longer justifies an expectation of the same result. Little must show that the difference was ineffective rather than assuming that it was.

The same requirement follows from the criteria of justification. A parsimonious explanation should not assume similarity where the historical systems differ in ways directly connected to the outcome, while an explanation with adequate scope must account for the Muslim specific features rather than treating them as irrelevant additions to a prior that has already decided the case.

Early Muslim Criticism

Critical Principles Before the Later Hadith Sciences

Little's historical claim is that the earliest Muslims lacked a meaningful critical method, and this point matters because the skeptical prior becomes much stronger if reports were circulating in an environment where transmitters were not being tested and where there was no practical concern for the reliability of what was attributed to the Prophet ﷺ, as found in other religious traditions.

What the section, then, attempts to show is something more modest than the claim that the fully developed terminology of later hadith criticism existed from the first day of Islam. The relevant question is whether the operative principles of criticism were already present early enough to affect transmission, because a later technical vocabulary can formalize an earlier practice without creating that practice from nothing.

If the earliest Muslims were already verifying reports, distinguishing truthful people from unreliable ones, correcting errors in memory, and asking whether a report had been heard directly, Little cannot describe the first generations as though meaningful control appeared only after the damage had already been done.

The historical evidence below, then, will be read with that narrower question in mind. We are looking for early practices that would be expected under a community concerned with preserving Prophetic material, and we will ask whether those practices are more easily explained by H_t or by the stronger skeptical picture in which the corpus became unusually unreliable before criticism became effective.

The earliest place to begin is the Qur'anic and Prophetic framework itself, because the community did not enter the post Prophetic period without any rules governing testimony or religious attribution. Long before the later terminology of *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḍa'īf* was standardized, the sources already gave Muslims reasons to verify news and to treat false religious attribution as a serious issue.

This point by itself would establish only a normative foundation, not the success of every later act of criticism, which is why it will receive a conservative Bayesian weight. Its importance is that it makes Little's picture of a completely unregulated starting environment less expected.

The clearest starting point, then, is the Qur'anic command that a report coming from a morally unreliable source should be verified rather than accepted merely because it has been stated. Moreover, it places scrutiny at the point of reception, which means that the hearer is not asked to treat every report as self authenticating.

This is expressed in the words of Allah Most High, "If a wicked person comes to you with news, verify it".⁵ Ibn 'Āshūr reads this verse as a foundation for investigating the condition of the person who carries a report before that report is accepted.⁶ He also points out that the obligation operates on both sides of testimony, since the person conveying information is responsible for speaking from knowledge while the person receiving it is responsible for testing what reaches him rather than accepting it without scrutiny.⁷ The relevance of this verse, then, is that it places verification into the Muslim epistemic framework from the beginning. A report can come from a morally compromised person, and when it does, the recipient is told to investigate before allowing the report to produce belief or action.

Because this instruction was part of the Qur'anic material recited within the community, it also supplied a public norm rather than an obscure rule known only to a later specialist. That fact alone, of course, does not completely prove the reliability of the early Muslim testimony as a valid epistemic source of information, but it makes an early culture completely clueless about source criticism and verification methods less expected.

The same Qur'anic framework also teaches the community that religious texts can be distorted by people who know better. The possibility of textual corruption, then, was not something the Muslim community had to discover centuries later, because the Qur'an itself presents the distortion of revelation as a real human danger.

⁵ The Noble Qur'ān, 49:6, al-Ḥujurāt.

⁶ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr al-Tūnisī (d. 1393 AH), al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr (26/230, 2333) (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, n.d., 1984 CE).

⁷ Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr (26/233).

The Qur'an also gives the community examples of earlier peoples changing religious material, which means that textual distortion was already presented as a real human possibility rather than as a danger Muslims only learned to imagine centuries later.

The words of Allah Most High, "And indeed there is a party among them who twist their tongues with the Scripture so that you would suppose it to be from the Scripture, though it is not from the Scripture; and they say, 'It is from Allah,' though it is not from Allah; and they speak falsehood against Allah while they know".⁸ And His words, Most High.

"A party of them would hear the word of Allah and then distort it after they had understood it, while they knew".⁹ The force of this point becomes stronger once lying about Allah is treated as a grave religious offense, because the concern is not merely ordinary dishonesty but the attribution of a religious teaching to revelation when no such authority exists.

A false attribution to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ falls within the same religious problem, since the person who places an invented teaching upon the Prophet gives that teaching an authority it did not possess.

This supplies another part of the early critical background, because the cost of a false religious attribution was built into the moral and theological framework of the community.

The Qur'anic texts below show how repeatedly that principle was expressed.

1. Allah Most High says, "Say: those who fabricate lies against Allah shall not prosper".¹⁰ The explanation given for the words "إن الذين يفترون على الله الكذب" is that false attribution to Allah includes assigning to Him rulings, actions, statements, or qualities that He never gave Himself, and doing so conceals the religious truth while misleading people about what their religion actually requires.¹¹ The accompanying denial of success, then, gives this false attribution both a worldly and an otherworldly cost. The point relevant here is not to derive a historical conclusion from theology alone, but to recognize that the community's own moral framework treated invented religious authority as a serious offense rather than a harmless form of storytelling. The source preserves the wording "لا يفلحون".

2. Allah, exalted is He, says

﴿وَلَا تَقُولُوا مَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمُ الْكُذْبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِّتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكُذْبَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكُذْبَ لَا يَفْلَحُونَ﴾

That is to say, "And do not say, concerning what your tongues falsely describe, 'This is lawful and this is unlawful,' so as to forge a lie against Allah; indeed, those who forge lies against Allah will not prosper."¹² The same principle appears where the Qur'an forbids

⁸ The Noble Qur'an, 3:78, Āl 'Imrān.

⁹ The Noble Qur'an, 2:75, al-Baqara.

¹⁰ The Noble Qur'an, 10:69, Yūnus.

¹¹ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr al-Tūnisī (d. 1393 AH), al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr (11/232-233), (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Naṣh, n.d., 1984 CE).

¹² The Noble Quran 16:116, Sūrat al-Naḥl.

declaring something lawful or unlawful without revelation, since an invented legal judgment becomes a lie about Allah once divine authority is claimed for something that was never revealed.

The exegetical point, then, is that speaking in the language of divine law without a revelatory basis is itself treated as false attribution, which gives the early community another reason to care about whether a religious claim can actually be traced to its source.¹³

3. Allah, exalted is He, says

﴿انظر كيف يفترون على الله الكذب وكفى به إثما مبينا﴾

That is to say, “See how they fabricate the lie against Allah; sufficient is that as a manifest sin.”¹⁴ The phrase “وكفى به إثما مبينا” reinforces the same point by describing fabrication against Allah as a manifest and serious sin.¹⁵ This same meaning appears in the Prophetic hadith, for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “The most mendacious of people are those who lie most against Allah, exalted is He”.¹⁶

4. Allah, exalted is He, says

﴿وإذا فعلوا فاحشة قالوا وجدنا عليها آباءنا والله أمرنا بها قل إن الله لا يأمر بالفحشاء أتقولون على الله ما لا تعلمون﴾

That is to say, “And when they commit an indecency, they say: ‘We found our fathers doing it, and Allah has commanded us to do it.’ Say: Allah does not command indecency. Do you say about Allah what you do not know?”¹⁷ Here the question “أتقولون على الله ما لا تعلمون” functions as a rebuke, since the people being addressed are attributing a divine command without knowledge capable of supporting that attribution.

The criticism, then, falls upon the gap between the authority being claimed and the evidence available for the claim. They possessed no transmitted basis from Allah for the statement “والله أمرنا بها”, and the Qur’an condemns precisely that unsupported movement from assertion to divine attribution.¹⁸ The concern with truthfulness also appears in the Qur’anic requirements governing testimony, where the standing of the person giving the report matters before the testimony is allowed to carry legal weight. This analogy between testimony and narration later becomes explicit in the language of hadith critics, but the epistemic principle itself is much earlier.

¹³ Abū al-Barakāt ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710 AH), *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa-Ḥaqā’iq al-Ta’wīl* (2/239), ed. Yūsuf ‘Alī Budaywī (Beirut: Dār al-Kalīm al-Ṭayyib, 1st ed., 1419 AH / 1998 CE).

¹⁴ The Noble Quran 4:50, Sūrat al-Nisā’.

¹⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Naysābūrī (d. 468 AH), *al-Wasīṭ fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Majīd* (2/66), ed. ‘Adil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1415 AH / 1994 CE); and Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Dā’im al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 756 AH), *al-Durr al-Maṣūn fī ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb al-Maknūn* (4/5), ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Kharrāṭ (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.).

¹⁶ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (1/447) no. 389; Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt said: «a ṣaḥīḥ hadith».

¹⁷ The Noble Quran 7:28, Sūrat al-A’rāf.

¹⁸ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* (8-B/84-85).

Allah, exalted is He, says ﴿وَأَشْهِدُوا ذَوِي عَدْلٍ مِنْكُمْ﴾ That is to say, “And call to witness two just men from among you.”¹⁹

And He, exalted is He, says

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا شَهَادَةُ بَيْنَكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَوْتُ حِينَ الْوَصِيَّةِ اثْنَانِ ذَوَا عَدْلٍ مِنْكُمْ﴾

That is to say, “O you who believe, testimony among you when death approaches one of you at the time of the bequest: two just men from among you.”²⁰ Moreover, Allah, exalted is He, says

﴿قَالَتِ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبْتَ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ إِنْ خَيْرٌ مِنْ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيَّ الْأَمِينِ﴾

The verse concerning hiring likewise connects competence with trustworthiness. The person being relied upon must be capable of carrying out what is entrusted to him and must also be safe from betrayal, which provides an early conceptual parallel to the later hadith distinction between the narrator’s moral reliability and his ability to preserve what he transmits. Hence, we read: “One of the two said: O my father, hire him; truly the best you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.”²¹ Ibn ‘Abbās reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Were people to be given whatever they claimed, the blood and property of others would be lost.”²² In another narration, “Were people to be given whatever they claimed, men would lay claim to the property and blood of others; rather, the burden of proof rests upon the claimant, and the oath upon the one who denies”.²³ And ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said, “We now hold you accountable only for what is outwardly apparent to us of your deeds. Whoever shows us good, we trust him and draw him near; his inner state is no concern of ours, for Allah will call him to account for what is within him. And whoever shows us evil, we neither trust him nor believe him”.²⁴ Taken together, these texts show that the Muslim community was not taught to separate testimony from the character and competence of the person giving it. The judicial setting makes this especially clear, since a claim can affect real rights and therefore cannot be accepted merely because someone has uttered it.

The analogy to hadith, then, is straightforward without requiring the two domains to be identical. If a person’s testimony concerning another individual’s property or rights requires truthfulness and sufficient retention, a report that is being used to establish the religion for an entire community, likewise, gives the recipient at least as much reason to care about those same epistemic qualities.

Later hadith scholars themselves made this connection explicit. Bahz b. Asad, for example, described a sound isnād as “the testimonies of upright men, one concerning another”, while an isnād containing a defect carried a liability, and he reasoned that if a small

¹⁹ The Noble Quran 65:2, Sūrat al-Ṭalāq.

²⁰ The Noble Quran 5:106, Sūrat al-Mā’ida.

²¹ The Noble Quran 5:106, Sūrat al-Mā’ida.

²² Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/35) no. 4552, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1st ed., 1422 AH).

²³ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH), al-Sunan al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/188) no. 3386, ed. ‘Abd al-Mu’īṭ Amīn Qal’ajī (Karachi, Pakistan: Jāmi’at al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 1st ed., 1410 AH / 1989 CE).

²⁴ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (3/169) no. 2641.

financial claim requires upright witnesses, the religion has an even greater claim to be taken from reliable people. He also said “These are the testimonies of upright men, one concerning another”. And “There is a liability in this”. The report itself preserves the following wording. “If a man were owed ten dirhams by another who then denied it, he could not recover them except through two upright witnesses; the religion of Allah has an even greater right to be taken only from the upright”.²⁵ Abū Nu‘aym al-Faḍl b. Dukayn expressed the same idea when he described hadith transmission as one of the greatest forms of testimony. Hence, he says: “These are nothing but testimonies, and this matter of ours (meaning hadith) is among the greatest of testimonies”.²⁶ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj likewise distinguished narration from courtroom testimony in their particular conditions while still treating truthfulness and uprightness as central requirements shared by both, so that a person whose lying disqualifies his testimony cannot simply become reliable when the subject changes to religious transmission.²⁷ The Prophetic warnings against transmitting what one has reason to think is false add another layer to the same framework, because they move the issue from the general prohibition of lying to the specific responsibility of a person who passes on a report attributed to the Prophet.

This responsibility is made more specific in the report of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, where the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said, “Whoever relates a hadith from me while he considers it to be a lie is himself one of the liars”.²⁸ Al-Nawawī explains that the well known reading of *yurā* carries the sense that the transmitter supposes the report to be false, while another linguistically possible reading can carry the sense that “he knows” it to be false. Either way, the epistemic point is important, since responsibility attaches not only to the original inventor but also to the person who passes on material when he has sufficient reason to think the attribution is false.²⁹ The same concern appears in the report of Abū Hurayra, where the Prophet ﷺ warns of “deceivers and liars” who would bring reports unknown to earlier generations and tells the community to beware of them:

“At the end of time there will be deceivers and liars who will bring you hadiths that neither you nor your fathers have ever heard; so beware of them, lest they lead you astray and put you to trial”.³⁰ These reports, then, do not merely say that fabrication is imaginable. They present false attribution as something the community is expected to distinguish from

²⁵ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327 AH), *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl* (2/16), no named editor (Hyderabad, India: Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1st ed., 1271 AH / 1952 CE); Abū Aḥmad ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Adī al-Jurjānī (d. 365 AH), *al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl* (1/251), ed. ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and two others (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1418 AH / 1997 CE); and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), *al-Kifāya fī ‘Ilm al-Riwāya* (77), ed. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Sūraqī and Ibrāhīm Ḥamdī al-Madanī (Medina: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.).

²⁶ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), *al-Kifāya fī ‘Ilm al-Riwāya* (77), ed. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Sūraqī and Ibrāhīm Ḥamdī al-Madanī (Medina: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.).

²⁷ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261 AH), *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/8), ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1st ed., 1412 AH / 1991 CE).

²⁸ Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājāh al-Qazwīnī (d. 273 AH), *al-Sunan* (1/25) no. 38, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūṭ and others (Egypt: Dār al-Risāla al-‘Ālamiyya, 1st ed., 1430 AH / 2009 CE).

²⁹ Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH), *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1/64-65), no named editor (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2nd ed., 1392 AH).

³⁰ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261 AH), *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/12) no. 7, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1st ed., 1412 AH / 1991 CE).

truthful transmission, and they attach responsibility to the careless spread of material once there is reason to doubt it. That is already much closer to a critical methodology than to the uncontrolled environment Little's prior assumes.

The same critical logic also reaches the content of a text, because the Qur'an appeals to consistency and reflection as a way of testing a claim rather than treating every assertion of religious authority as self validating.

This principle can be seen, then, in the following words of Allah Most High.

﴿أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا﴾

That is to say, "Will they not then reflect upon the Qur'ān? Had it been from other than Allah, they would have found in it much inconsistency."³¹ The verse, then, denies that the Noble Qur'an contains the kinds of inconsistency that would be expected from a text produced through ordinary human distortion, and this denial operates at more than one level.

1. According to the exegetical discussion cited, the absence of contradiction extends to the meanings and reports of the Qur'an, whose teachings are understood as internally harmonious and whose reports correspond to reality.³² 2. The same argument is extended to the Qur'an's composition, which is treated as maintaining its rhetorical quality rather than displaying the unevenness that would be expected from ordinary human production.³³ 3. The commentators also include moral and conceptual coherence within the same discussion, since the text is not understood to contain a corrupt meaning or a command that departs from truth and virtue.³⁴ The point of the verse, according to Ibn 'Āshūr, is to direct the objector back toward reflection upon the text rather than allowing the accusation of inconsistency to stand without examination.³⁵ Seen this way, the argument assumes that a claim about the source of a text can be tested by asking what kinds of internal features would be expected if the proposed source were correct. That mode of reasoning is relevant to the present paper because matn criticism works through the same broad question, namely, whether the content we observe is what we should expect under the attribution being made.

$$O_1 = 3 \times (0.55 / 0.85) \approx 1.94$$

³¹ The Noble Quran 4:82, Sūrat al-Nisā'.

³² Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685 AH), *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta'wīl* (2/86), ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mar'ashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1st ed., 1418 AH); and Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710 AH), *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa-Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* (1/378), ed. Yūsuf 'Alī Budaywī (Beirut: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, 1st ed., 1419 AH / 1998 CE).

³³ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta'wīl* (2/68); and al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa-Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* (1/378).

³⁴ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* (1/223-224).

³⁵ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr al-Tūnisī (d. 1393 AH), *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* (5/137), (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, n.d., 1984 CE).

Hence, as with the point about testimony, the Qur'anic appeal to reflection does not by itself produce the later science of matn criticism, but it does supply the more basic principle that the content of a religious claim can be examined for contradiction and corruption. This again makes it difficult to describe the earliest normative framework as though only the identity of the speaker mattered while the content itself was beyond criticism.

Taken together, these texts establish an early normative environment in which reports could be investigated, religious falsehood was condemned, witnesses were assessed, and the content of a claim could be reflected upon. They do not yet prove that every later critical procedure was already operating in its mature form, but they do make the complete absence of a critical framework less expected than Little's objection suggests.

This is the first point at which genuinely Muslim specific evidence enters the running calculation (the next point will be dependent on the following Bayes factor). Let E_1 represent the early normative framework of verification discussed above. Because a skeptical model can still allow a community to possess strong rules that it later fails to follow, E_1 should not be given an exaggerated Bayes factor. A conservative conditional assignment might therefore give $P(E_1 | H_s, E_1, k) = 0.55$ and $P(E_1 | H_t, E_1, k) = 0.85$.

The skeptical thesis still remains favored after this first update, with H_s at roughly 66 percent and H_t at roughly 34 percent. Hence, the existence of Qur'anic injunctions of verification matters in our epistemic assessment of the given environment and time period, but nonetheless, a rule is not the same thing as established practice, so the evidence only raises the traditional thesis from 25 percent to 34 percent without pretending that the first historical issue has already decided the entire debate. To be clear, the point here isn't where these exact numbers are coming from, but rather, that there still has been some substantial increase in H_t , but not to the point where it outweighs H_s in probability.

In terms of justification, E_1 improves the explanatory scope of H_t because the traditional model naturally expects a community concerned with Prophetic preservation to begin with rules against false attribution. The skeptical thesis can explain the same evidence, but that would appear nonparsimonious, and hence, must later show that these rules were too weak to influence the actual transmission process. The next evidence, then, concerns whether the early Muslims acted upon these principles.

Truthfulness and the Problem of Lying

As will be shown, the tradition maintains that the earliest Muslims were aware that lying could enter religious transmission and that the truthfulness of the person reporting hadith mattered to whether his report could be relied upon.

The evidence here comes from the spread of warnings against lying upon the Prophet, from statements condemning falsehood, and from early instructions that hadith should be taken from a trustworthy person rather than from anyone who claimed access to religious knowledge.

One of the strongest places to begin is the wide circulation of the hadith, “Whoever deliberately lies about me, let him take his seat in the Fire”, because its early spread shows that the problem of false Prophetic attribution was part of the moral consciousness of the transmitting community rather than a concern invented only after the classical collections appeared.

Among the Companions who narrated this hadith are: ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 AH),³⁶ ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32 AH),³⁷ al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwām (d. 36 AH),³⁸ ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH),³⁹ al-Mughīra b. Shu‘ba (d. 50 AH),⁴⁰ Abū Hurayra (d. 57 AH),⁴¹ ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir al-Juhanī (d. ca. 60 AH),⁴² Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH),⁴³ Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (d. 63 AH),⁴⁴ ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 63 AH),⁴⁵ Zayd b. Arqam (d. 66 AH),⁴⁶ ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH),⁴⁷ Salama b. al-Akwa‘ (d. 74 AH),⁴⁸ Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 77 AH),⁴⁹ and Anas b. Mālīk (d. 92 AH).⁵⁰ What matters for the present argument is the breadth of the early transmission. More than ten Companions who died before the year 64 AH or around it are cited below as transmitters of this warning, which makes it difficult to describe concern about lying upon the Prophet as a late reaction created after the first generations had passed. The warning was also carried through numerous Successors from these Companions, which is relevant because its force does not depend upon one isolated line of transmission or one later collector.

To be clear, this, of course, does not mean that the mere existence of a warning implies that fabrication would automatically be detected, but it changes the expected behavior of a community that repeatedly hears that false attribution to the Prophet is a grave sin, and it therefore belongs as part of the analysis alongside the political incentives emphasized by Little.

The report also fits a wider early awareness that religious lying could occur. Abū Hurayra transmits the warning that nearly thirty impostors would appear claiming to be messengers of Allah, which means that false religious authority was not an unfamiliar category within the earliest Muslim worldview. Hence, if a person can falsely claim prophethood, then inventing a statement and attributing it to the Prophet is plainly within

³⁶ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), al-Musnad (1/410), no. 326, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt et al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE); Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrih.

³⁷ Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), al-Sunan (5/35), no. 2659, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir et al. (Egypt: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2nd ed., 1395 AH / 1975 CE).

³⁸ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/33), no. 107.

³⁹ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/33), no. 106; Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/9), no. 1.

⁴⁰ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/10), no. 4.

⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/33), no. 110; Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/10), no. 3.

⁴² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (28/641), no. 17431; Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it ṣaḥīḥ.

⁴³ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (28/118), no. 16916; Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrih.

⁴⁴ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (18/94), no. 11536.

⁴⁵ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/170), no. 3461; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (4/414-415), no. 2675.

⁴⁶ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (32/13), no. 19266; Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it ṣaḥīḥ on the criterion of Muslim.

⁴⁷ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (4/414-415), no. 2675; Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrih.

⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/33), no. 109.

⁴⁹ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (22/158), no. 14255; Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt graded it on the criterion of Muslim.

⁵⁰ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/10), no. 2.

the range of dangers an early community could understand. As the hadith mentions “The Hour will not come until lying impostors (dajjālūn), nearly thirty in number, are sent forth, each of them claiming to be the messenger of Allah”.⁵¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH) said, “That the Messenger of Allah ﷺ threatened his community with the Fire for lying is proof that he knew that lies would be told against him ﷺ”.⁵² The warning, then, does more than concede that lying is possible, as it creates a reason to guard against it, which becomes historically relevant once later reports show Muslims testing transmitters and distinguishing error from deliberate dishonesty.

Now, as some will rightfully point out, using hadith to establish an early concern about the reliability of hadith is circular, since the authenticity of the material is itself part of what is being debated. However, to, again, be clear here, these reports are being mentioned not simply by assuming their authenticity in isolation. Rather, the force of the evidence comes from the breadth of transmission and its agreement with Qur’anic prohibitions of false religious attribution, as well as the wider early culture of condemning lying that is documented below. Hence:

1. The circularity objection is also weakened by the fact that the warning is transmitted through a large number of routes and has been described as mutawātir, or at minimum as mashhūr and mustafīd. We are not asking the reader to trust one disputed hadith merely because a later collection labels it authentic.
2. The warning also converges with Qur’anic material that independently condemns false religious attribution, which gives the content an evidential support not created by the hadith corpus alone.
3. A third consideration is the wider conduct and language of the Companions and Successors, since the sources repeatedly preserve condemnations of lying about Allah and His religion.

Taken together, then, these considerations make an early anti fabrication norm more plausible even before one asks whether every individual wording has been authenticated to a reasonable degree.

The same awareness can be approached from a different direction. The earliest Muslims did not need a later hadith critic to teach them that a person could lie about religion, since false claims of prophethood had already appeared during the Prophetic period and in the first century. Seen this way then, a false claim to prophethood is more radical than the

⁵¹ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/12) no. 7, and (4/2239) no. 157; Cited in suspended form by Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa’ādāt al-Mubārak b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (d. 606 AH), Jāmi‘ al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl (1/1/158), ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā’ūt and another (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ḥalwānī, Maṭba‘at al-Mallāḥ, and Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, n.d., 1389 AH / 1969 CE); Ibn al-Mulaqqin said: «I have not found this hadith as such», and Muḥammad b. Darwīsh al-Ḥūt said: «It is not known to be a hadith». Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804 AH), Tadhkirat al-Muḥtāj ilā Aḥādīth al-Minhāj (48), ed. Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 1994 CE); and Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Darwīsh al-Ḥūt (d. 1277 AH), Asnā al-Maṭālib fī Aḥādīth Mukhtalifat al-Marātib (162) no. 769, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1418 AH, 1997 CE).

⁵² Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr al-Qurṭubī (d. 463 AH), al-Tamhīd limā fī al-Muwaṭṭa’ min al-Ma‘ānī wa-l-Asānīd (1/44), ed. Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad al-‘Alawī and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Kabīr al-Bakrī (Morocco: Ministry of General Endowments and Islamic Affairs, no edition, 1487 AH).

fabrication of an individual report, and a community capable of recognizing the first possibility cannot plausibly be described as conceptually unaware of the second. The historical question, then, becomes whether that awareness developed into practices capable of distinguishing trustworthy transmission from false or inaccurate transmission, which is what the remaining section of this paper attempts to show.

Statements from the Companions and Successors repeatedly condemn lying, and these statements matter because Little's model emphasizes incentives that would encourage false attribution while a complete causal explanation must also include the costs that made some people refuse it.

1. Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13 AH) said, "What earth would carry me, and what sky would shade me, if I were to say concerning Allah that which I do not know?"⁵³ The relevance of Abū Bakr's statement is that inventing words for the Prophet would ultimately amount to speaking about Allah's religion without knowledge, since the false report would create a divine or Prophetic authority that did not actually exist.

Abū Bakr also said, while upon the pulpit: "Beware of lying, for lying stands apart from faith".⁵⁴

2. 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd (d. 32 AH) said, "Beware of narration, the narration of lies, for lying is unacceptable whether in earnest or in jest".⁵⁵

3. al-Aḥnaf b. Qays (d. 67 AH) said, "No man of honour ever betrayed a trust, and no man of intelligence ever lied".⁵⁶ al-Aḥnaf b. Qays also said to his son: "It suffices you, as to the nobility of truthfulness, that the truthful man's word is accepted even concerning his enemy; and, as to the baseness of lying, that the liar's word is accepted neither concerning his friend nor his enemy".⁵⁷

4. The poet Miskīn al-Dārimī (d. 89 AH) said,⁵⁸ "Speak the truth to people when you address them, and leave lying to whoever wishes to lie".⁵⁹ He also said, "When the noble man is given to lying, that lying mars the nobility that is in him."

⁵³ Mālik b. Anas al-Aṣbahī al-Madanī (d. 179 AH), al-Muwaṭṭa', recension of Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zuhri (2/166) no. 2079, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf and Maḥmūd Khalīl (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, no edition, 1412 AH); Sa'd b. Manṣūr (d. 227 AH), al-Tafsīr (1/168) no. 39, ed. Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl Ḥumayyid (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣumay' lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1st ed., 1417 AH, 1997 CE); and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), al-Jāmi' li-Akhḫāq al-Rāwī wa-Ādāb al-Sāmi' (2/193) no. 1585, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, no edition, 1403 AH, 1983 CE).

⁵⁴ Ibn 'Adī, al-Kāmil (1/103).

⁵⁵ Ibn 'Adī, al-Kāmil (1/103); and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH), al-Musnad (7/10) no. 3896, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ, 'Ādil Murshid, and others (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH, 2001 CE). Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ said: «Its isnād is authentic».

⁵⁶ Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Hibat Allāh Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571 AH), Ta'rīkh Dimashq (24/343), ed. 'Amr b. Gharāma al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr lil-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', no edition number, 1415 AH, 1995 CE).

⁵⁷ Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī (d. 733 AH), Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab (3/238), no editor named (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā'i' al-Qawmiyya, 1st ed., 1423 AH).

⁵⁸ Miskīn al-Dārimī's name is Rabī'a b. 'Āmir b. Unayf b. Shurayḥ b. 'Amr b. Zayd b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Udus b. Dārim b. Mālik b. Ḥanzala b. Mālik b. Zayd Manāt b. Tamīm; «Miskīn» was his sobriquet. Yāqūt b. 'Abd Allāh al-Rūmī al-Ḥamawī (d. 626 AH), Mu'jam al-Udabā' (3/1299), ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 1414 AH / 1993 CE).

⁵⁹ Kārīn Ṣādir, Dīwān Shi'r Miskīn al-Dārimī (239), (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1st ed., 2000 CE).

“Truthfulness is the finest thing you can do; nothing equals truthfulness, neither glory nor lineage”.⁶⁰ He also said, “Is one who speaks the truth like one who lies?”,⁶¹ meaning, the two are not equal.

5. ‘Amir al-Sha‘bī (d. 104 AH) said, “The believer may be folded upon any trait of character except treachery and lying”.⁶²

6. Muṭarrif b. Ṭarīf al-Kūfī (d. 141 AH) said, “It would not please me to have told a lie, even were the world and all it contains mine”.⁶³ These statements do not establish that every member of the early community was truthful. The intent here is to show that their value is cumulative, that is, the value comes from their number. They describe an environment in which truthfulness was praised and lying was treated as morally degrading, which makes the expected response to a political incentive different from a model that treats the incentive as though no counter pressure existed.

By the generation that learned directly from the Companions, the concern had also become an explicit condition for taking hadith. The point was no longer simply that lying was sinful, but that the person from whom religious material was received had to be someone whose transmission could actually be relied upon.

The reports below show that this requirement was expressed in different places and by different early authorities.

1. It is related that ‘Uqba b. Nāfi‘ al-Qurashī (d. in the Maghrib in 63 AH)⁶⁴ said to his sons as death approached him: “I enjoin upon you three things”, mentioning among them: “Do not take the hadith of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ except from a trustworthy narrator”.⁶⁵

2. Sulaymān b. Mūsā⁶⁶ stated that he mentioned to Ṭāwūs, who died in 106 AH,⁶⁷ that a certain person had related a report to him, whereupon Ṭāwūs replied, “If your companion is malī, then take from him”.⁶⁸ Al-Nawawī explains the word “malī” here as a person whose truthfulness and precision make him dependable in narration, much as a financially solvent person can be relied upon to discharge what he owes.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Kārīn Ṣādir, *Dīwān Shi‘r Miskīn al-Dārimī* (19), (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1st ed., 2000 CE).

⁶¹ Kārīn Ṣādir, *Dīwān Shi‘r Miskīn al-Dārimī* (269), (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1st ed., 2000 CE).

⁶² ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211 AH), al-Muṣannaf, with Jāmi‘ Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (11/161) no. 20201, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī (India: al-Majlis al-‘Ilmī, 2nd ed., 1403 AH).

⁶³ Abū Zur‘a ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Amr al-Naṣrī al-Dimashqī (d. 281 AH), Ta‘rīkh Abī Zur‘a al-Dimashqī (549), ed. Shukr Allāh Ni‘mat Allāh al-Qūjānī (Damascus: Majma‘ al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya, n.ed., n.d.); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327 AH), al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta‘dīl (1/42, 8/313), no editor named (Hyderabad, India: Majlis Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1st ed., 1271 AH / 1952 CE); and Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl (28/66), ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1400 AH / 1980 CE).

⁶⁴ ‘Uqba b. Nāfi‘ al-Qurashī was a Successor. Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad b. Yūnus al-Ṣadafī al-Miṣrī (d. 347 AH), Ta‘rīkh al-Miṣriyyīn min Ta‘rīkh Ibn Yūnus (1/349-350) no. 953, no editor named (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1421 AH).

⁶⁵ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), al-Kifāya fī ‘Ilm al-Riwāya (32), ed. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Sūraqī and Ibrāhīm Ḥamdī al-Madanī (Medina: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, n.ed., n.d.).

⁶⁶ Sulaymān b. Mūsā al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī was a Successor of the Successors. Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Thiqāt (6/379).

⁶⁷ Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān al-Yamānī was a Successor. Ṭāwūs said: «I met fifty of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ». al-Dhahabī, Ta‘rīkh al-Islām (3/67), and Ibn Ḥajar, Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb (281) no. 3009.

⁶⁸ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/15).

⁶⁹ al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (1/85).

3. Sa'd b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf (d. 125 AH) ⁷⁰ said, "None but the reliable narrators (thiqāt) may narrate from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ", ⁷¹ meaning, hadith is accepted only from the reliable narrators.⁷² The same logic continued in later generations, where 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī compared hadith with judicial judgment because both require evidence rather than a charitable assumption about the person speaking.⁷³ This juxtaposition is important because judicial judgment cannot rest upon goodwill alone. It depends upon reasons that justify accepting one account over another.

Hadith, on this understanding, works in the same way. A narrator must be shown to be trustworthy and his report remains open to testing for error, which means that the acceptance of Prophetic testimony was tied to an evidential threshold rather than to the mere existence of an attribution.

Hence, the later centrality of the isnād is easier to understand against this background. If the identity and condition of the transmitter did not matter, there would be little reason to preserve the chain at all. Once the narrator's reliability becomes part of the evidence, however, the chain becomes the means through which the claim can be traced and the people carrying it can be investigated.

Now, one may object here and point out that if a critical process already existed among the earliest Muslims, why do we not find early reports explicitly rejected with the later label of fabrication?

The absence of that particular judgment does not show the absence of criticism, because the sources below describe deliberate lying among the Companions and the earliest Successors as extremely rare or absent. A critical method does not have to produce a rejection for a defect that has not yet appeared in the sample before it. What matters is whether the community was capable of recognizing the defect when it did appear and whether it was already testing other defects, especially error in memory and attribution.

The biographical evidence surrounding the Companions who transmitted hadith provides another data point, because the question is not only what rules the community possessed but what is actually reported about the people carrying Prophetic material. When those biographies are traced through the works of narrator criticism and the literature devoted to the Companions, one finds no Companion narrator who was charged with deliberately fabricating a report against the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.⁷⁴ This absence, together with the

⁷⁰ Sa'd b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf was a Successor. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt* (4/297), and Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (230) no. 2227.

⁷¹ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/15).

⁷² al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1/87).

⁷³ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī was one of the followers of the followers of the Successors. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt* (8/373); Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Amr b. Mūsā al-'Uqaylī al-Makkī (d. 322 AH), *al-Ḍu'afā' al-Kabīr* (1/9), ed. 'Abd al-Mu'tī Amīn Qal'ajī (Beirut: Dār al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1404 AH / 1984 CE).

⁷⁴ Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH), *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (1/249), ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Medina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Noble Qur'ān, n.d., 1416 AH / 1995 CE); and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān b. Qāymāz al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), *al-Ruwāt al-Thiqāt al-Mutakallam fihim bimā lā Yūjib Raddahum* (24), ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1st ed., 1412 AH / 1992 CE).

wider evidence used by the tradition, lies behind the Sunni judgment concerning the uprightness of the Companions.⁷⁵ For our purposes, the important point here is to recognize the historical claim upon which it partly rests, namely, that deliberate Prophetic fabrication is not identified among the Companion transmitters in the way it later is among known fabricators.

Moreover, the social setting also matters. Between the Prophet's death in 11 AH and the year 64 AH, large numbers of Companions remained alive, and many of them had directly participated in the events being narrated. A false report concerning a public event or a well known feature of the Prophet's life therefore did not enter a vacuum in which no living person could compare it with first hand memory. This does not make fabrication impossible, but it raises the expected cost of inventing material about matters known to a broad body of contemporaries, which is precisely the sort of factor a probabilistic model has to include.

The claim that deliberate lying was rare in the earliest period does not rest upon one statement. The sources approach the issue from several directions, and the cumulative value comes from the convergence between general descriptions of the generation and judgments concerning particular transmitters.

Hence, some reports describe the earliest community in general as one in which lying about the Prophet had not yet become a normal feature of transmission.

1. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68 AH) denied that the Companions lied. Hishām b. Ḥujayr narrated from Ṭāwūs, from Ibn 'Abbās, who said, "We used to narrate from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when no one lied about him; but once people took to riding every mount, the unruly and the docile alike, we gave up narrating from him".⁷⁶ The expression "when no one lied about him" is being used to describe the transmitting environment Ibn 'Abbās remembered among the Companions, and its evidential relevance lies in the contrast he draws between that earlier setting and a later period in which he became more cautious about who was carrying reports.

2. The same point was made by al-Barā' b. 'Azīb, who died in 72 AH, when he explicitly denied that the Companions lied and stated the following.

"Not everything we narrate to you from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ did we hear from him directly; some of it we heard ourselves, and some of it our companions narrated to us, and we do not lie".⁷⁷ The plural language in al-Barā's statement matters because he is

⁷⁵ Abū 'Umar Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurtubī (d. 463 AH), *al-Istī'āb fī Ma'rifat al-Aṣḥāb* (1/19), ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1st ed., 1412 AH / 1992 CE), and *al-Tamhīd limā fī al-Muwaṭṭa' min al-Ma'ānī wa-l-Asānīd* (22/47), ed. Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad al-'Alawī and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Kabīr al-Bakrī (Morocco: Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, n.d., 1387 AH); Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643 AH), *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (293-294), ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Syria: Dār al-Fikr, and Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, n.d., 1406 AH / 1986 CE); Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH), *al-Taqrīb wa-l-Taysīr li-Ma'rifat Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr* (92), ed. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Khusht (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1st ed., 1405 AH / 1985 CE); and Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), *Ikhtīṣār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (181-182), ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2nd ed., n.d.).

⁷⁶ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/12-13).

⁷⁷ Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kāmil* (1/261).

describing the Companions as a transmitting group, including the ordinary practice in which one Companion could report what another Companion had heard directly from the Prophet.

3. Anas b. Mālik, who died in 92 AH, likewise denied that the Companions lied. Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl narrated that Anas said, “Not everything we narrate to you did we hear from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, but we never used to lie to one another”.⁷⁸ Another version states, “but we never suspected one another”.⁷⁹ Qatāda b. Dī‘āma narrated from Anas b. Mālik a ḥadīth on the prohibition of wine, in which a man asked Anas: “Did you hear it from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ yourself?”

He replied, “Yes, or it was narrated to me by one who does not lie. By Allah, we did not lie, nor did we even know what lying was”.⁸⁰ Anas’s expression about not knowing lying is clearly hyperbolic, since the concept of lying was obviously known to them. Its force is to deny that lying was part of the normal practice of the group he is describing. The source preserves the wording “nor did we even know what lying was”.

4. Abū Umāma related a ḥadīth, and Khālīd b. Yazīd asked him: “O Abū Umāma, did you hear this from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?” He replied, “Allah grant forgiveness! You ask whether I heard this from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ? Indeed, we lived among a people who did not lie to us, nor were we ever accused of lying”.⁸¹

5. Abū al-‘Āliya Rufay‘ b. Mihrān (d. 90 AH) said, “You pray and fast more than those who came before you, but lying has run upon your tongues”.⁸² Abū al-‘Āliya’s criticism also works by contrasting his own generation with the one before it, since he speaks as though lying had become more visible among the later people than it had been among their predecessors.

The evidence becomes more specific when early authorities clear particular Companions of lying or affirm their truthfulness in direct terms.

Examples include the following.

1. The Prophet ﷺ described Abū Dharr as truthful, saying: “The sky has not shaded, nor has the earth borne, a man more truthful of speech than Abū Dharr”.⁸³

2. Likewise, a great many narrators described Abū Bakr by the epithet “al-Ṣiddīq”.

The title al-Ṣiddīq attached to Abū Bakr is relevant for the same reason. It functions as a public description of extraordinary truthfulness rather than as part of his lineage, which is evidence about how his character was remembered by the transmitting community.

⁷⁸ Abū Aḥmad ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Adī al-Jurjānī (d. 365 AH), al-Kāmil fī Du‘afā’ al-Rijāl (1/261), ed. ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and two others (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1418 AH / 1997 CE).

⁷⁹ Muḥammad b. Sa‘d al-Baghdādī (d. 230 AH), al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā (7/21), ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1st ed., 1968 CE).

⁸⁰ Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil (1/263).

⁸¹ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (36/638) no. 22302.

⁸² ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211 AH), al-Muṣannaf, with Jāmi‘ Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (11/160) no. 20199, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī (India: al-Majlis al-‘Ilmī, 2nd ed., 1403 AH).

⁸³ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (11/206), no. 6630. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūṭ said: ḥasan li-ghayrihi.

3. Similarly, Abū Bakr said to Zayd b. Thābit. “You are a young, intelligent man, and we harbour no suspicion against you”.⁸⁴ Abū Bakr’s words to Zayd, “we harbour no suspicion against you”, are likewise a direct statement that the person being entrusted with the task was not regarded as someone suspected of falsification or invention.

4. Likewise, ‘Umar dismissed any suspicion of lying on the part of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, even though he had asked him for a witness to a hadith he narrated. After Abū Mūsā brought him the witnesses, he said to him: “I did not suspect you; I only feared that people might attribute to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ what he did not say”.⁸⁵

5. ‘Ā’isha’s treatment of Ibn ‘Umar is especially useful for the distinction this paper has been emphasizing. She could reject his accuracy in a particular report while still saying, “He has not lied; rather, he forgot or erred”.⁸⁶ The critic, then, did not need to move from disagreement straight to a charge of fabrication.

Another wording makes the same epistemic distinction explicit, “You are relating to me from men who are neither liars nor accused of lying; but hearing can err”.⁸⁷

6. Likewise, when ‘Ā’isha recounted the story of the slander (al-ifk), she said, “Then Sa’d b. ‘Ubāda stood up, the chief of al-Khazraj. Before that he had been a righteous man, but tribal zeal carried him away”.⁸⁸ Calling Sa’d b. ‘Ubāda “a righteous man” in this context is relevant to the broader character evidence because righteousness includes the expectation of truthfulness, even though the report also shows that a generally righteous person can still be affected by tribal emotion.

7. Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Mu‘āwiya was not one to be suspected of lying about the Messenger of Allah ﷺ”.⁸⁹ Likewise Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said, “Mu‘āwiya was not suspected of lying in what he related from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ”.⁹⁰

8. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “Jundub related to us in this very mosque, and we have not forgotten since, nor do we fear that Jundub would lie about the Prophet ﷺ. He said: A man was afflicted with wounds and killed himself, whereupon Allah, Exalted is He, said: My servant has forestalled Me with his own soul; I have forbidden him Paradise”.⁹¹

9. Mālīk b. Abī ‘Āmir al-Aṣbaḥī (d. 74 AH) narrated. I was with Ṭalḥa b. ‘Ubayd Allāh (d. 36 AH) when a man came in and said, O Abū Muḥammad, we do not know whether this

⁸⁴ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/71), no. 4679.

⁸⁵ Mālīk b. Anas al-Aṣbaḥī al-Madanī (d. 179 AH), al-Muwaṭṭa’, the recension of Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zuhrī (2/142), no. 2030, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Khalīl (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, n.d., 1412 AH).

⁸⁶ Mālīk b. Anas al-Aṣbaḥī al-Madanī (d. 179 AH), al-Muwaṭṭa’, the recension of Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zuhrī (1/394), no. 997, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Khalīl (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, n.d., 1412 AH); Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/643), no. 932; and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), al-Musnad (41/277), no. 24758, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ et al. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE).

⁸⁷ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/641), no. 929; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (1/387), no. 288; and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH), al-Sunan al-Kubrā (4/122), no. 7177, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 3rd ed., 1424 AH / 2003 CE).

⁸⁸ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (3/175), no. 2661.

⁸⁹ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (28/77), no. 16863. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ said: this isnād is ḥasan.

⁹⁰ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (6/215-216), no. 4134. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ said: its isnād is ṣaḥīḥ.

⁹¹ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/96), no. 1364.

Yemeni, meaning Abū Hurayra, knows the Messenger of Allah better than you do, or whether he attributes to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ what he did not say. Ṭalḥa b. ‘Ubayd Allāh replied, “By Allah, we have no doubt that he heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ what we did not hear, and learned what we did not learn. We were men of means, with households and families, and we would come to the Prophet of Allah ﷺ at the two ends of the day and then return; whereas he was a poor man with neither wealth nor family. His hand was ever with the hand of the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, and he went wherever he went. So we have no doubt that he learned what we did not learn and heard what we did not hear; and we have never found anyone with any good in him who would attribute to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ what he did not say”, meaning Abū Hurayra.⁹² Abū Ishāq al-Sabīṭ also transmits a direct characterization of al-Barā’ b. ‘Āzib through the Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Khaṭmī, and the value of the wording is that the judgment about the narrator’s truthfulness is made explicit rather than inferred after the fact.

The wording is, “‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Khaṭmī (d. between 61 and 70 AH) narrated to me, saying, al-Barā’ b. ‘Āzib, who is no liar, narrated to me”. Both men were Companions, and al-Barā’ died in 72 AH.⁹³ Masrūq b. al-Ajda’ likewise introduced Ibn Mas‘ūd by saying that he was, in their estimation, “no liar”. Hence his statement: “‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd, who in our estimation was no liar, narrated to us”.⁹⁴ Masrūq likewise introduced ‘Ā’isha through the language of exceptional truthfulness, showing again that the character assessment of a transmitter could be made publicly and attached to the person from whom knowledge was being taken.

The full wording is, “There narrated to me the Ṣiddīqa, daughter of the Ṣiddīq, the beloved of the Beloved of Allah, the vindicated one”, meaning ‘Ā’isha. The wording, then, preserves the public language of truthfulness attached to a particular transmitter rather than leaving her character entirely unassessed.⁹⁵ Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī similarly described the Companion ‘Awf b. Mālīk as “the beloved and trustworthy one”, adding that he was

⁹² Abū Ya’lā Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. al-Muthannā al-Mawṣilī (d. 307 AH), al-Musnad (2/10), no. 636, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Damascus: Dār al-Ma’mūn li-l-Turāth, 1st ed., 1404 AH / 1984 CE). Ḥusayn Salīm Asad said: its narrators are trustworthy, except that Ibn Ishāq transmitted with ‘an’ana; al-Ḥākim recorded it in al-Mustadrak and declared it ṣaḥīḥ.

⁹³ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/140) no. 690; and Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/345) no. 474. The scholars differed over who uttered the phrase «who is no liar» and to whom it refers. It is said that the speaker was ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd and the person meant was al-Barā’ b. ‘Āzib, which is the more evident view, as indicated by the context; and it is said that the speaker was Abū Ishāq and the person meant was ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd. al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī al-Sabtī (d. 544 AH), Ikmal al-Mu’lim bi-Fawā’id Muslim (2/389), ed. Yaḥyā Ismā’īl (Egypt: Dār al-Wafā’ li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī’, 1st ed., 1419 AH / 1998 CE); Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804 AH), al-Tawḍīḥ li-Sharḥ al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/520), ed. Dār al-Falāḥ li-l-Baḥth al-‘Ilmī wa-Taḥqīq al-Turāth (Damascus: Dār al-Nawādir, 1st ed., 1429 AH / 2008 CE).

⁹⁴ Abū Ja’far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Salāma al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321 AH), Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār (11/402) no. 4514, ed. Shu’ayb al-Arna’ūt (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1415 AH / 1994 CE); Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Amr b. ‘Abd al-Khālīq al-Bazzār (d. 292 AH), al-Musnad, known as al-Baḥr al-Zakḥkhār (5/318) no. 1936, ed. Maḥfūz al-Raḥmān Zayn Allāh, ‘Ādil Sa’d, and Ṣabrī ‘Abd al-Khālīq al-Shāfi’ (Medina: Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa-l-Ḥikam, 1st ed., 1988 CE); and Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360 AH), al-Mu’jam al-Awsaṭ (3/213) no. 2949, ed. Ṭāriq b. ‘Awād Allāh and ‘Abd al-Muḥsin b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusaynī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, no edition, 1415 AH / 1995 CE).

⁹⁵ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (43/169) no. 26044. Shu’ayb al-Arna’ūt said: «a ṣaḥīḥ hadith».

trustworthy in his own estimation. As the report states: “There narrated to me the beloved and trustworthy one; beloved he is to me, and trustworthy he is in my estimation: ‘Awf b. Mālik al-Ashja’ī”.⁹⁶ The same kind of character judgment could also move from a Companion to a Successor. In the report cited here, Ibn ‘Abbās is said to have instructed people to believe what ‘Ikrima related from him because “he has not lied about me”, and Abū Umāma As‘ad b. Sahl confirms hearing that statement: “Whatever ‘Ikrima relates to you from me, believe him, for he has not lied about me”.⁹⁷ The same pattern appears in praise of particular Companions, where the language used about their closeness to the Prophet or their accuracy in retaining his teaching would make little sense if they were simultaneously regarded as people who could not be trusted to report him truthfully.

Among these reports is the statement of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar to Abū Hurayra, “You, Abū Hurayra, kept the closest company of us all with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and knew his hadith best among us”.⁹⁸ Another wording adds that he was the one who best retained the Prophet’s hadith among them.⁹⁹ The significance of Ibn ‘Umar’s praise of Abū Hurayra, then, is not merely that he possessed many reports, but that a fellow Companion describes him as particularly close to the Prophet and especially knowledgeable about his hadith, which functions as positive testimony concerning his access and retention.

There are also cases in which a Companion openly denies lying about the Prophet and the people hearing him accept the statement, which provides another window into how that narrator was viewed by his contemporaries.

This willingness to acknowledge possible error without accusing the narrator of lying can be seen through the following examples.

1. What Suwayd b. Ghafala related from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, that he said, “When I relate to you something from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, to fall headlong from the sky would be dearer to me than to lie about him”.¹⁰⁰ Those present did not respond to ‘Alī’s declaration by treating him as a person whose denial of lying was itself doubtful. Within the report, his statement functions as an accepted description of the seriousness with which he regarded attribution to the Prophet.

2. What Shaddād b. ‘Abd Allāh and Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr related from Abū Umāma and ‘Amr b. ‘Abasa. They mentioned a lengthy hadith, at the end of which Abū Umāma says to ‘Amr b. ‘Abasa. “O ‘Amr b. ‘Abasa, consider what you are saying: in a single station is this man given all that?” ‘Amr b. ‘Abasa replied, “O Abū Umāma, I have grown old in years, my bones have grown frail, and my appointed time has drawn near; I have no need to lie about Allah or about the Messenger of Allah. Had I not heard it from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ but once, or twice, or three times (he went on counting up to seven times), I would never have

⁹⁶ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/721) no. 1043.

⁹⁷ Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn al-Baḡhdādī (d. 233 AH), Ta‘rīkh Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn, the recension of ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad al-Dūrī (3/259) no. 1217, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf (Mecca: Markaz al-Baḥṭh al-‘Ilmī wa-Ḥyā’ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 1399 AH / 1979 CE).

⁹⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (8/21) no. 4453.

⁹⁹ Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), al-Sunan (5/684) no. 3836, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir and others (Egypt: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2nd ed., 1395 AH / 1975 CE).

¹⁰⁰ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/200) no. 3611.

related it; but I heard it more times than that”.¹⁰¹ The same is true in the exchange with ‘Amr b. ‘Abasa. His answer does not merely insist that he remembers one isolated hearing, but grounds his confidence in repeated exposure to the report, which is exactly the kind of background evidence that can raise the probability of accurate retention.

3. The report of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ka’b b. Mālik, from his father, from his grandfather Ka’b b. Mālik, who related the long hadith recounting the story of his repentance, at the end of which he says, “I said: O Messenger of Allah, Allah Most High delivered me only through truthfulness, and part of my repentance is that I shall speak nothing but the truth for as long as I live.” Ka’b b. Mālik said, “By Allah, I know of no Muslim whom Allah has tested with truthfulness in speech more excellently than He, blessed and exalted is He, has tested me, from the time I said that to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. By Allah, I have not deliberately told a single lie from the moment I said that to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ down to this very day, and I hope that Allah will preserve me for the days that remain”.¹⁰² Ka’b b. Mālik’s statement likewise makes truthfulness part of the historical character being presented, and those transmitting the report preserve his claim that he had deliberately avoided lying from the time of his repentance onward.

4. The report of Muṭarrif b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Shikhkhīr, who said, “A hadith of Abū Dharr reached me, and I longed to meet him. I met him and said, O Abū Dharr, a hadith of yours has reached me, and I had been longing to meet you and ask you about it. He said, You have now met me, so ask. I said, It has reached me that you say. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. There are three whom Allah loves and three whom Allah hates. He said, Yes, and I do not think I would lie against my beloved friend Muḥammad ﷺ, repeating it three times”, to the end of the hadith.¹⁰³ Abū Dharr’s repeated denial that he would lie against the Prophet works in the same way. It is not a mathematical proof of every report he gave, but it belongs to the cumulative character evidence that a justified historical assessment should not simply discard.

Most important for the critical method, the sources repeatedly distinguish a narrator who made an error from a narrator who deliberately lied. This distinction has greater explanatory power than a model that collapses every discrepancy into fabrication, because it recognizes that a truthful witness can still mishear or forget while leaving the accusation of deliberate invention to cases where the evidence actually supports it.

1. ‘Ā’isha judged Abū Hurayra to have erred in a hadith, yet she did not accuse him of lying. She said, “May Allah have mercy on Abū Hurayra; he heard poorly, and so he answered poorly”.¹⁰⁴

2. She likewise judged him to have erred in another hadith, without accusing him of lying.

¹⁰¹ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/570) no. 832.

¹⁰² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (25/74), no. 15789.

¹⁰³ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (35/421), no. 21530.

¹⁰⁴ Abū Ja’far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Salāma al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321 AH), Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār (2/367), no. 910, ed. Shu’ayb al-Arnā’ūt (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1415 AH / 1994 CE); Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim (d. 405 AH), al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn (2/234), no. 2855, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1411 AH / 1990 CE); and al-Bayhaqī, al-Sunan al-Kubrā (10/99), no. 19991.

Makhūl reports that it was said to ‘Ā’isha that Abū Hurayra says, The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Ill omen lies in three things: the house, the woman, and the horse.” ‘Ā’isha said, “Abū Hurayra did not retain it properly, for he entered while the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was saying: May Allah destroy the Jews; they say that ill omen lies in three things: the house, the woman, and the horse. He heard the end of the hadith but did not hear its beginning”.¹⁰⁵ The same pattern extends to the senior Successors. After tracing the prominent early transmitters, the tradition preserves many examples of poor memory and ordinary error, but deliberate fabrication among the senior Successors appears as an exceptional rather than normal description. Hence, if the skeptical thesis requires widespread successful fabrication at a very early stage, the scarcity of identified deliberate liars among the transmitters closest to the first generation becomes evidence that the model must explain. Al-Dhahabī, in fact, makes the same point: “As for the Successors, one who lies deliberately is virtually nonexistent among them, though they do have errors and lapses”.¹⁰⁶ One of the younger Successors around whom the accusation of lying is disputed is ‘Umāra b. Juwayn al-Baṣrī, who died in 134 AH and is counted by Ibn Ḥajar among the younger Successors because of his transmission from Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī and Ibn ‘Umar.¹⁰⁷ The disagreement over ‘Umāra is itself useful for understanding the method, because the critical labels do not all describe the same defect and the evidence has to be weighed before one turns a negative judgment into an accusation of deliberate fabrication. Ḥammād b. Zayd, one transmission from Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn, and al-Jūzajānī are among those who treated him as a liar.¹⁰⁸ Other critics instead described him as *matrūk*, which points toward very poor retention and frequent error rather than necessarily deliberate invention. This judgment is transmitted from Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn through Ibn Miḥraz and is also associated with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Nasā’ī, Ibn Ḥibbān, and Ibn Ḥajar, who summarized him as “*matrūk*, and some accused him of lying”.¹⁰⁹ Al-Dāraquṭnī and Ibn ‘Adī were more lenient

¹⁰⁵ Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 204 AH), *al-Musnad* (3/124), no. 1641, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Egypt: Dār Hajar, 1st ed., 1419 AH / 1999 CE).

¹⁰⁶ al-Dhahabī, *al-Ruwāt al-Thiqāt al-Mutakallam fihim bimā lā Yūjib Raddahum* (24).

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (408), no. 4830. The term «*matrūk*» in this context means that he was abandoned owing to the severity of his weakness and the frequency of his errors; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl* (6/363); and Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl* (21/233), ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1400 AH / 1980 CE).

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl* (6/363-364); Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl* (6/364); and Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn al-Baghdādī (d. 233 AH), *Su’ālāt Ibn al-Junayd li-Abī Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn* (271), ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf (Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1st ed., 1408 AH / 1988 CE); Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya’qūb al-Sa’dī al-Jūzajānī (d. 259 AH), *Aḥwāl al-Rijāl* (159), ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Bastawī (Faisalabad, Pakistan: Ḥadīth Academy, no edition, no publication year).

¹⁰⁹ Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn al-Baghdādī (d. 233 AH), *Ma’rifat al-Rijāl ‘an Yaḥyā b. Ma’īn* (1/54), ed. Muḥammad Kāmil al-Qaṣṣār (Damascus: Majma’ al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya, 1st ed., 1405 AH / 1985 CE); Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), *Masā’il al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, riwāyat Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Hānī’ al-Naysābūrī* (2/231), no. 2270, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 1394 AH); and Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354 AH), *al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn wa-l-Ḍu’afā’ wa-l-Matrūkīn* (2/177), ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa’y, 1st ed., 1396 AH); Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. Shu’ayb al-Nasā’ī (d. 303 AH), *al-Ḍu’afā’ wa-l-Matrūkūn* (84), no. 476, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa’y, 1st ed., 1396 AH); and al-Sunan al-Kubrā (5/176), no. 5365, ed. Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Mun’im Shalabī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE); Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, *al-Majrūḥīn* (2/177); Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (408), no. 4830. The term «*matrūk*» in this context means that he was abandoned owing to the severity of his weakness and the frequency of his errors.

still and treated his material as weak but usable for corroboration.¹¹⁰ The disagreement, then, is itself evidence that the critics were trying to identify the cause and degree of unreliability rather than applying one undifferentiated label to every defective transmitter.

Where the critics did not call ‘Umāra a liar, the defects in his reports were therefore explained through severe weakness of memory rather than deliberate fabrication.

Al-Mughīra b. Sa‘īd al-Kūfī provides a clearer example of a person widely accused of lying. He died around 119 or 120 AH and was counted among the Successors by al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr. A number of early and later critics described him as a liar, although the nature of that lying is itself relevant, since some reports concern invented claims about ‘Alī or a false claim to prophethood. Ibn ‘Adī states that he knew of no fully chained Prophetic hadith from him, while Ibn Ḥibbān says that he fabricated hadith, hence his statement: “I know of no ḥadīth of his with a full chain (musnad)” and “he used to fabricate ḥadīth”.¹¹¹ A serious estimate of the prevalence of lying among the Successors, then, cannot be produced by collecting every negative label into one number. One has to identify who was actually accused, whether the critics agreed, and what kind of falsehood was involved, since a false claim to prophethood or an invented statement about ‘Alī is not automatically evidence that the same person successfully inserted Prophetic hadith into the corpus.

The distinction between the senior and junior Successors also appears in al-Shāfi‘ī’s treatment of mursals reports. He was more willing to accept the mural transmission of senior Successors under conditions because they generally transmitted from Companions, while the later group had wider access to weak transmitters.¹¹² Ibn Rajab likewise notes that weak and fabricated material becomes more visible among the junior Successors as

¹¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385 AH), al-Ḍu‘afā’ wa-l-Matrūkūn (2/164), no. 378, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Muḥammad al-Qashqarī (Medina: Majallat al-Jāmi‘a al-Islāmiyya, no edition, 1403 AH); Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl (6/149).

¹¹¹ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk (7/128), ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 2nd ed., 1387 AH); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān b. Qāyṡ al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), Mīzān al-Itidāl (4/162), ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr, 1st ed., 1382 AH / 1963 CE); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān b. Qāyṡ al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), al-Mughnī fī al-Ḍu‘afā’ (2/672) no. 6379, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr (no publisher, no edition, no year); and Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), al-Takmil fī al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl wa-Ma‘rifat al-Thiqāt wa-l-Ḍu‘afā’ wa-l-Majāhīl (1/134), ed. Shādī b. Muḥammad b. Sālim Āl Nu‘mān (Yemen: Markaz al-Nu‘mān li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya wa-Taḥqīq al-Turāth wa-l-Tarjama, 1st ed., 1432 AH / 2011 CE); Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/19); Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān b. Jawān al-Fārisī al-Fasawī (d. 277 AH), al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-Ta’rīkh (2/776), ed. Akram Diyā’ al-‘Umarī (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 2nd ed., 1401 AH / 1981 CE); Al-‘Uqaylī, al-Ḍu‘afā’ al-Kabīr (4/180); Al-‘Uqaylī, al-Ḍu‘afā’ al-Kabīr (4/179); Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Majrūḥīn (3/7); Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl (8/73); Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), al-Takmil fī al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl wa-Ma‘rifat al-Thiqāt wa-l-Ḍu‘afā’ wa-l-Majāhīl (1/134), ed. Shādī b. Muḥammad b. Sālim Āl Nu‘mān (Yemen: Markaz al-Nu‘mān li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya wa-Taḥqīq al-Turāth wa-l-Tarjama, 1st ed., 1432 AH / 2011 CE); Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān, al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-Ta’rīkh (3/50); Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl (3/71); and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), al-Muttafiq wa-l-Muftariq (3/1938), ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Āyidin al-Ḥamīdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qādir li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī’, 1st ed., 1417 AH / 1997 CE); Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb al-Sa’dī al-Jūzajānī (d. 259 AH), Aḥwāl al-Rijāl (53), ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Bastawī (Faisalabad, Pakistan: Ḥadīth Academy, no edition, no year); Al-Dāraquṭnī, al-Ḍu‘afā’ wa-l-Matrūkūn (3/133) no. 524; Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl (8/73); Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Majrūḥīn (3/7).

¹¹² It has been established by induction (istiqrā’) that the narrators from among the Companions were truthful and accurate in retention.

lying spreads.¹¹³ The chronological point, then, is that the growth of deliberate fabrication is described as a development rather than as an equally distributed condition from the first day of transmission. That matters directly to Little's prior, because a later rise in lying does not justify projecting the same base rate backward into the Companion period without further evidence.

Ḥammād b. Zayd's report that the *zanādiqa* fabricated twelve thousand hadiths belongs to this later environment and shows the scale the problem could eventually reach. To be clear, this is part of the evidence and cannot simply be collapsed into the earlier period.¹¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya went further and argued that deliberate lying was not found among the Successors of Mecca, Medina, Syria, or Basra in the way he believed it was among some Shī'ī circles. Whether one accepts that broad judgment or not, it shows that early Muslim criticism itself attempted to localize fabrication rather than treating the entire transmitting population as one homogeneous risk.¹¹⁵ Even sectarian affiliation, however, did not automatically settle the narrator's status. Sunni critics continued to describe a number of Shī'ī transmitters as truthful, which is important because it shows that disagreement in doctrine was not simply converted into a charge of dishonesty. For example, Tha'laba b. Yazīd al-Ḥimmānī, one of the middle generation of Successors, of whom Ibn Ḥajar said, "truthful (ṣadūq), a Shī'ī".¹¹⁶ Likewise Sālim b. Abī Ḥafṣa al-Kūfī (d. 140 AH), one of the junior Successors, of whom Ibn Ḥajar said, "truthful in ḥadīth, except that he was an extreme Shī'ī".¹¹⁷ A further question concerns the hypocrites who lived in the Prophetic and Companion periods. One might argue that because hypocrisy concerns a concealed inward state, an unidentified hypocrite could have moved among the Muslims and invented reports without his dishonesty being known. From this, however, it does not follow that the hypocrites were an entirely invisible population or that any person later carrying hadith can therefore be assigned an unidentified hypocrite as an explanation without evidence.

A number of considerations reduce the force of that possibility, and the point is best understood cumulatively:

1. Some hypocrites publicly withdrew from the Muslim army at Uḥud, which made at least that group and its conduct visible to the wider community.
2. The leadership surrounding the hypocrites was also publicly known in important cases, which again means that concealment was not absolute.

¹¹³ Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī al-Qurashī (d. 204 AH), *al-Risāla* (465), ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Egypt: Maktabat al-Ḥalabī, 1st ed., 1358 AH / 1940 CE); it is related from him, though without endorsement, by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad b. Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, of Baghdad and later Damascus (d. 795), *Sharḥ 'Ilal al-Tirmidhī* (1/547), ed. Hammām b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Sa'īd (Zarqa: Maktabat al-Manār, 1st ed., 1407 AH / 1987 CE).

¹¹⁴ Al-'Uqaylī, *al-Ḍu'afā' al-Kabīr* (1/15).

¹¹⁵ Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH), *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (1/249), ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Medina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Noble Qur'ān, no edition, 1416 AH / 1995 CE).

¹¹⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (134) no. 847.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (226) no. 2171.

3. The episode of Masjid ʿDirār likewise involved identifiable people and a public project, giving the community another context in which hidden allegiance became connected to outward conduct.

4. More generally, a person who repeatedly invented reports that damaged Islam would create outward evidence capable of exposing what had previously been inward, especially in a community containing people who knew the Prophet and his public teaching directly.

5. The Qurʾanic statement ﴿وَلَتَعْرِفَنَّهُمْ فِي لَحْنِ الْقَوْلِ﴾ is used in the response paper for the same reason.¹¹⁸ The associated interpretation is that concealed hostility can become recognizable through patterns in speech even where the inner state itself is not directly observable.¹¹⁹ The broader historical point, then, is that concealed motives can become probabilistically knowable through repeated outward conduct. One need not claim certainty about another person's heart in order to become justified in treating a pattern of behavior as evidence about his reliability.

6. The same logic is attached to the verse ﴿قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ﴾, where hatred is described as becoming visible through what is said. As Ibn ʿĀshūr maintains: "Hatred has already shown itself from their mouths".¹²⁰ This does not conflict with the Qurʾanic statements that some hypocrites were not known from the outset, because ignorance of an inward state at one moment is compatible with later evidence making the person's condition increasingly probable.¹²¹ Ibn Kathīr's explanation works in the same way, since the characteristics of hypocrisy can be described and then recognized in particular people through distinguishing marks.¹²²

7. Allah Most High says,

﴿لَنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْمُرْجِفُونَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لَنُغْرِيَنَّكَ بِهِمْ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مَلْعُونِينَ أَيْنَمَا
تَقِفُوا أَخَذُوا وَقَتْلُوا تَقْتِيلًا﴾

The later verse cited here is likewise interpreted as promising that the Prophet would be given mastery over the people spreading corruption in Medina, which some exegetes understood to include their becoming known. As we read: "If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is sickness, and the rumour-mongers in the city do not desist, We shall assuredly set you upon them; then they will not remain your neighbours therein except a little: accursed, wherever they are found they are seized and utterly slain.",¹²³

¹¹⁸ The Noble Quran 47:30, Sūrat Muḥammad ﷺ.

¹¹⁹ al-Nasaʿī, Madārik al-Tanzīl (3/329); and Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr (26/122).

¹²⁰ The Noble Quran 3:118, Sūrat Āl ʿImrān; Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr (4/64).

¹²¹ The Noble Quran 9:101, Sūrat al-Tawba.

¹²² Abū al-Fidā Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm (1/180), ed. Sāmī Muḥammad Salāma (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2nd ed., 1420 AH / 1999 CE); Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Aṣfahānī (d. 502 AH), al-Mufradāt fī Gharrīb al-Qurʾān (872), ed. Ṣafwān ʿAdnān al-Dāwūdī (Beirut: al-Dār al-Shāmiyya, and Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1st ed., 1412 AH).

¹²³ The Noble Quran 33:60, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb; al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān (19/185); Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi-l-Maʾthūr (6/663), no editor named (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, no edition, no publication date).

8. Finally, the Companions who actually became prominent transmitters were not anonymous figures whose public lives are inaccessible. Their biographies were tied to visible service, teaching, worship, leadership, and participation in the community, which makes the hypothesis that the major transmitters were secretly hostile actors a historical claim requiring person-specific evidence rather than a possibility that can be inserted wherever needed.

Taken together, then, the evidence shows more than an abstract prohibition of lying. It shows that truthfulness was treated as a condition of transmission, that particular people were assessed in those terms, and that error could be attributed to a narrator without converting the mistake into a charge of fabrication. We see, then, a kind of differentiated criticism rather than a community that lacked the conceptual tools to distinguish truthful transmission from dishonesty.

This evidence, E_2 , is related to E_1 and should therefore receive a conditional rather than independent update. The earlier Qur'anic framework already makes some concern about lying more expected, so assigning the old standalone strength to this material would count part of the same anti fabrication norm twice. A conservative cumulative assignment may therefore use $P(E_2 \mid H_s, E_1, E_1, k) = 0.65$ and $P(E_2 \mid H_t, E_1, E_1, k) = 0.85$.

$$O_2 = 1.94 \times (0.65 / 0.85) \approx 1.48$$

The running probability now places H_s at roughly 59.7 percent and H_t at roughly 40.3 percent. The skeptical thesis still remains slightly favored, but its original 75 percent advantage has been reduced because the actual early culture of transmission is less expected on a model in which the earliest period was largely uncontrolled.

From the standpoint of justification, this stage increases both the scope and the power of the traditional explanation. H_t explains the normative rules and the social judgments about transmitters through one preservation oriented model, while H_s must allow that the community strongly condemned lying and assessed narrators in those terms while also maintaining that those practices failed to preserve a meaningful body of Prophetic material. That skeptical explanation remains possible, but it now carries more explanatory work than the initial prior suggested, and hence, becomes even less parsimonious than what it originally entailed.

Accuracy and the Detection of Error

Truthfulness, however, is only one part of reliable testimony. A person can be sincere and still misremember what he heard, which means that a meaningful critical method must also contain some way of identifying ordinary error. The early evidence is important here because it shows transmitters being tested and corrected without the critic needing to accuse them of dishonesty.

A useful place to begin is with cases in which a narrator's retention was tested by hearing the same report from him at different times and comparing the result.

Examples of this include the following.

1. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr said, ‘Ā’isha said to me: “O son of my sister, I have heard that ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr will pass by us on his way to the pilgrimage. Meet him and question him, for he has carried a great deal of knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ”. He said, So I met him and questioned him about things he related from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. ‘Urwa said, Among what he mentioned was that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah does not snatch knowledge away from people by force; rather, He takes the scholars, and knowledge is raised up with them, leaving among the people ignorant heads who issue rulings without knowledge, going astray themselves and leading others astray”. ‘Urwa said, When I related this to ‘Ā’isha, she found it grave and rejected it, saying: “Did he tell you that he heard the Prophet ﷺ say this?” ‘Urwa said, Then, when the following year came, she said to him: “Ibn ‘Amr has arrived; meet him, open the conversation with him, and then ask him about the hadith on knowledge that he related to you”. He said, So I met him and questioned him, and he related it to me much as he had related it the first time. ‘Urwa said, When I informed her of this, she said, “I can only think that he has told the truth; I see that he has neither added anything to it nor omitted anything”.¹²⁴ The dates make this an especially early example. ‘Ā’isha died in 57 AH, while ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr died in 63 AH, so the test necessarily took place before 57 AH.

What matters, then, is the method. ‘Ā’isha had ‘Urwa return to the same narrator after a full year and compare the report with what he had said before, and when the content remained stable she treated that stability as evidence that he had retained it accurately.

2. Another example concerns the report of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, who related from Abū al-Zu‘ayzi‘a, the scribe of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, that Marwān summoned Abū Hurayra and had his answers written down from behind the couch. A full year later, Marwān questioned him again from behind a screen, and Abū Hurayra neither added nor omitted anything, while the order of the material also remained unchanged.¹²⁵ Because Abū Hurayra died in 57 AH and Marwān died in 64 AH, this test also belongs to the early period rather than to the later mature hadith sciences.

Marwān’s procedure is again easy to understand in evidential terms. The first set of answers was written down without Abū Hurayra seeing the record, and a year later the same material was elicited again so that the two performances could be compared. Agreement across the interval becomes positive evidence of retention rather than a mere assumption about memory.

The same concern appears when a person who heard a report from one transmitter sought the living teacher behind that transmitter, since direct access to the earlier source supplied another opportunity to verify the report and the accuracy of the intermediary. One way this occurred was by moving past an intermediary and hearing the report from the living

¹²⁴ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/2059) no. 2673.

¹²⁵ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH), al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn (3/583), no. 6164, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭṭār (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1411 AH / 1990 CE).

Companion at the next level of the chain. This creates a direct comparison between what the intermediary transmitted and what the earlier source actually says.

One example is the report of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl, who heard Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh explain that a hadith had reached him from a man who heard it directly from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Jābir therefore purchased a camel and travelled for a month until he reached ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays in Syria, where he asked to hear the report before either of them died. ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays then related the hadith concerning retribution on the Day of Resurrection, including the statement that no person destined for the Fire or the Garden would enter his final abode while another person still held an unsettled claim against him.¹²⁶ Jābir died in 77 AH and ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays in 54 AH, so this journey necessarily occurred before 54 AH.

The report, then, shows Jābir refusing to remain satisfied with a report that had merely reached him when the source who heard it directly from the Prophet was still accessible. His journey to Syria gave him the opportunity to hear the material from ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays himself and in doing so reduce one layer of testimonial dependence.

The epistemic value here is obvious, to say the least. Hearing the earlier source supplies a second point of comparison and can confirm or weaken confidence in what the intermediary had transmitted.

A related form of checking appears when a hearer doubts a report carried through an intermediary and the parties then return to the earlier transmitter so that the claim can be tested at its source.

Abū Rāfi‘, the mawlā of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, narrated from ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “No prophet did Allah send to a community before me but that he had from his community disciples and companions who took hold of his sunna and followed his command. Then there succeed them successors who say what they do not do and do what they are not commanded. Whoever strives against them with his hand is a believer; whoever strives against them with his tongue is a believer; and whoever strives against them with his heart is a believer; beyond that there is not a mustard seed’s weight of faith.” Abū Rāfi‘ said, I related it to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, and he disputed it with me. Then Ibn Mas‘ūd arrived and lodged at Qanāt, and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar took me along to visit him. When we had sat down, I asked Ibn Mas‘ūd about this hadith, and he related it to me exactly as I had related it to Ibn ‘Umar.¹²⁷ The chronology is again early, since Ibn Mas‘ūd died in 32 AH and Abū Rāfi‘ died during ‘Alī’s caliphate. The comparison therefore took place no later than the first decades after the Prophet.

Here Ibn ‘Umar did not simply accept Abū Rāfi‘’s attribution. The report was carried back to Ibn Mas‘ūd, and the earlier source then related the same hadith, which gave Ibn ‘Umar a direct way to test whether Abū Rāfi‘ had transmitted it accurately.

¹²⁶ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), *al-Musnad* (25/431-432), no. 16042, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt et al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE). Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt graded its isnād ḥasan.

¹²⁷ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/69), no. 50.

More directly, the sources preserve Companions correcting one another when they believed a report had been remembered or understood incorrectly. These corrections matter because a community that publicly identifies error is behaving differently from a community in which attribution alone settles the question.

One example is the following. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr said, It was mentioned in ‘Ā’isha’s presence that Ibn ‘Umar attributed to the Prophet ﷺ the words. “The deceased is punished in his grave because of his family’s weeping over him.” She said, “He has erred. What the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said is: He is punished for his fault and his sin, while his family are weeping over him now.”

‘Ā’isha then said, “That is like his report that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood over the well containing the slain polytheists of Badr and said to them what he said, namely: They hear what I am saying. What he in fact said was: They now know that what I used to tell them is the truth.” She then recited, “Indeed, you cannot make the dead hear”¹²⁸ “and you cannot make those in the graves hear”,¹²⁹ saying: “that is, once they have taken their seats in the Fire”.¹³⁰ Since ‘Ā’isha died in 57 AH, this correction also belongs to the first generation of post Prophetic transmission.

The word *wahala* used in the report denotes error.¹³¹ The significance, then, is that ‘Ā’isha does not need to accuse Ibn ‘Umar of dishonesty in order to reject his version. She locates the problem at the level of memory or understanding and appeals to what she herself knew of the event.

Another example is when Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Muzanī said, I mentioned to Ibn ‘Umar that Anas had related to us that the Prophet ﷺ raised his voice in *talbiya* for an ‘umra and a *hajj* together. He said, “Anas has erred. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ raised the *talbiya* for *hajj*, and we did so with him; when he arrived he said: Whoever has no sacrificial animal with him, let him convert it into an ‘umra. The Prophet ﷺ had a sacrificial animal with him, so he did not exit *iḥrām*”.¹³² Ibn ‘Umar died in 73 AH, which places this disagreement within the first century while Companion witnesses to the Prophetic period were still alive. Here again, the correction is grounded in competing first hand recollection. Ibn ‘Umar weighs Anas’s version against what he remembers from the event and judges that Anas has erred.

Another example. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yazīd said, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (may Allah be pleased with him) led us in prayer at Minā with four rak‘as. When this was mentioned to ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd (may Allah be pleased with him), he uttered the *istirjā‘*,¹³³ then said, “I prayed two

¹²⁸ The Noble Qur’ān, 27:80, al-Naml.

¹²⁹ The Noble Qur’ān, 35:22, Fāṭir.

¹³⁰ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), al-Ṣaḥīḥ (5/77), no. 3978, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 1st ed., 1422 AH).

¹³¹ Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa‘ādāt al-Mubārak b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (d. 606 AH), al-Nihāya fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wa-l-Athar (5/233), ed. Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d., 1399 AH / 1979 CE).

¹³² Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), al-Musnad (9/45), no. 4996, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūṭ et al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE). Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūṭ graded its isnād ḥasan.

¹³³ That is, he said: «Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we return.»

rak‘as at Minā with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; I prayed two rak‘as at Minā with Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (may Allah be pleased with him); and I prayed two rak‘as at Minā with ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him)”.¹³⁴ Because ‘Uthmān became caliph in 23 AH and Ibn Mas‘ūd died in 32 AH, the reaction recorded here belongs to that same early window.

These cases, then, are not merely examples of people disagreeing. They show reports being subjected to comparison against other remembered evidence in order to locate where an error most likely entered. The same habit of correction continued among the Successors, where Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib, for example, rejected Ibn ‘Abbās’s report that the Prophet married Maymūna while in iḥrām and said that Ibn ‘Abbās was mistaken despite Maymūna being his maternal aunt.¹³⁵ At other times the criticism fell upon the person transmitting from a Companion rather than upon the Companion himself, which again shows that the early evaluation was capable of locating the suspected point of error instead of treating the chain as one undifferentiated unit. For example, Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH) rejected some of what was transmitted from Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH) of his judicial rulings. Ibn Abī Mulayka said, Ibn ‘Abbās called for the judgments of ‘Alī and began copying things from them, and he would come upon something and say. “By Allah, ‘Alī never ruled thus, unless he had gone astray”.¹³⁶ Clearly, Ibn ‘Abbās’s wording is intentionally strong. He regards the attributed judgment as so unlike ‘Alī that, short of ‘Alī himself having gone astray, the more reasonable explanation is that the ruling was transmitted incorrectly. The criticism, then, is directed toward the route carrying the judgment rather than toward ‘Alī’s integrity.¹³⁷ A further indication of caution is the restraint with which many Companions narrated, that is, some narrations describe people who did not spend every gathering continuously producing Prophetic reports, and when narration arose from a particular need or occasion, that context could itself help anchor the memory of what was being reported.

1. Mujāhid b. Jabr said, I accompanied Ibn ‘Umar to Medina, and I did not hear him relate anything from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ except a single hadith. He said, “We were with the Prophet ﷺ when he was brought a palm heart”, to the end of the hadith.¹³⁸ And ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī said, I sat in Ibn ‘Umar’s company for a year, and I did not hear him relate anything from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.¹³⁹ The point is not that Ibn ‘Umar never narrated Prophetic material, since his hadith are widely preserved. Rather, these reports describe a restraint in which narration was tied to need rather than to a constant production of material, which lowers the plausibility of a model where prestigious Companions casually generated attributions whenever a discussion called for one.

2. Al-Sā‘ib b. Yazīd said, I set out with Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ for Mecca, and I did not hear him

¹³⁴ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/43), no. 1084, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 1st ed., 1422 AH).

¹³⁵ Ibn ‘Adī, al-Kāmil (1/125).

¹³⁶ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/13).

¹³⁷ Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH), Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (1/83), no editor named (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2nd ed., 1392 AH).

¹³⁸ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/2165), no. 2811.

¹³⁹ Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī (d. 273 AH), al-Sunan (1/19), no. 26, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt et al. (Egypt: Dār al-Risāla al-‘Ālamiyya, 1st ed., 1430 AH / 2009 CE). Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt graded its isnād ṣaḥīḥ.

relate a single hadith from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ until we returned to Medina.¹⁴⁰ The same qualification applies to Sa'd. His surviving hadith show that he did narrate, but the report describes a long journey during which he did not fill the time with repeated Prophetic attribution, which again fits a culture of restraint rather than indiscriminate narration.¹⁴¹

3. 'Amr b. Maymūn said, A whole year would pass over 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd in which he would not relate anything from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. One day he related a hadith from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and dejection came over him, and the sweat began running down his brow, and he said, "Something like this, or close to this".¹⁴² Statements such as "or something like it" show an awareness of the difference between preserving the exact wording and preserving the meaning, while admissions of forgetfulness in old age show that a narrator could limit what he reported rather than treating his own memory as infallible.

The reports below make this kind of self limitation visible in several forms, especially where narrators qualify the exactness of their wording or openly acknowledge the limits imposed by age and memory.

Some Companions, after relating a hadith, would qualify the wording with expressions such as "or something like it", making clear that they were not claiming exact verbal reproduction where they were uncertain of the precise words.

The earlier report of Ibn Mas'ūd is one example of this practice, since he qualifies his wording after narrating rather than claiming verbal certainty where he does not possess it.

Likewise, Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said, Whenever Anas b. Mālīk related a hadith from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and finished it, he would say, "or as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said".¹⁴³ The same caution appears in reports where elderly Companions explicitly acknowledge that some of what they once retained had been forgotten, which gives the reader information about the condition under which their later narration should be evaluated. As such, Wāthila b. al-Asqa' said, "If we relate a hadith to you according to its meaning, that is sufficient for you".¹⁴⁴

(2) Some Companions, in old age, stated explicitly that they had forgotten part of what they used to retain from the Prophet ﷺ, and that thenceforth they would relate only what they were certain of retaining.

Yazīd b. Ḥayyān said, I went with Ḥuṣayn b. Sabra and 'Umar b. Muslim to Zayd b. Arqam. When we had sat down with him, Ḥuṣayn said to him: "You have met with great good, O

¹⁴⁰ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī (d. 255 AH), al-Sunan (1/328), no. 286, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1st ed., 1412 AH / 2000 CE); Ḥusayn Salīm Asad graded its isnād ṣaḥīḥ. And Ibn Mājah, al-Sunan (1/21), no. 29.

¹⁴¹ Al-Mu'allimī, al-Anwār al-Kāshifa (58-59).

¹⁴² Al-Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak (3/355), no. 5374; and Ibn Mājah, al-Sunan (1/17), no. 23, whose isnād Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ graded ṣaḥīḥ.

¹⁴³ Ibn Mājah, al-Sunan (1/18), no. 24. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ graded its isnād ṣaḥīḥ.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Dārimī, al-Sunan (1/347), no. 324, whose isnād Ḥusayn Salīm Asad graded ṣaḥīḥ; al-Tirmidhī, al-ʿIlal al-Ṣaghīr appended to al-Sunan (5/746); and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, al-Kifāya (203, 204).

Zayd: you saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, heard his speech, fought beside him, and prayed behind him. You have indeed met with great good, O Zayd. Relate to us, O Zayd, what you heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.” He said, “O son of my brother, by Allah, my age has advanced, my time is long past, and I have forgotten some of what I used to retain from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. So accept what I relate to you, and do not press me for what I do not.” Then he said, The Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood up among us one day to deliver a sermon, at a watering place called Khumm between Mecca and Medina. He praised Allah and extolled Him, and exhorted and reminded, to the end of the hadith.¹⁴⁵ The meaning of his words “do not press me for what I do not” is, whatever I do not relate to you, do not ask me to relate it, for I will not relate what I have forgotten.

The larger point, then, is that the early transmitters are not presented as people who assumed their own memories to be perfect. We can see from the reports that self qualification and explicit correction are often mentioned, which increases the explanatory burden on a skeptical model that treats later critical awareness as though it arrived only after an earlier period of unreflective transmission, hence declarations such as “We have grown old and we have forgotten, and relating from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is a grave matter”.¹⁴⁶ The evidence on accuracy, then, moves beyond moral character and into the actual performance of transmission. Early Muslims tested retention, corrected reports, distinguished exact wording from narration by meaning, and acknowledged the effects of age and forgetfulness. This is the kind of evidence that has greater discriminatory force than a general prohibition of lying, because it shows criticism operating upon the reports themselves.

Let E_3 represent these early practices of testing memory and correcting error. Unlike E_1 and E_2 , this evidence is less easily explained as a purely moral rule that may have existed without affecting transmission. If H_t is true, actual correction and repeated testing are strongly expected. If H_s is true in the stronger form relevant to Little’s claim, the evidence is still possible, but it is less expected that a supposedly uncontrolled early corpus would already display this degree of practical scrutiny. A conservative conditional assignment may therefore use $P(E_3 | H_s, E_2, E_1, E_l, k) = 0.35$ and $P(E_3 | H_t, E_2, E_1, E_l, k) = 0.85$.

$$O_3 = 1.48 \times (0.35 / 0.85) \approx 0.61$$

This is the first point at which the cumulative model reverses the direction of the original steelman. Odds of 0.61 to 1 for H_s over H_t correspond to roughly 37.9 percent for the skeptical thesis and 62.1 percent for the traditional thesis.

The reason for the stronger update is tied directly to explanatory power. A general motive to preserve truth can coexist with widespread failure, but actual practices that identify mistakes are more specifically predicted by a functioning preservation system. The

¹⁴⁵ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/1873), no. 2408.

¹⁴⁶ Ibn Mājah, al-Sunan (1/18), no. 25. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ graded its isnād ṣaḥīḥ.

skeptical model can still say that the criticism was insufficient, but that claim now requires historical evidence about the failure rate of the method rather than a repetition of the original possibility of fabrication.

Connectedness and Direct Hearing

The remaining part of the early critical picture concerns whether transmitters cared about the route by which a report reached them. The later technical distinction between connected and interrupted reports did not appear from nowhere, and the early sources preserve behavior that makes sense only if direct hearing and the identity of an intermediary already mattered. The language of transmission itself is one place where this awareness becomes visible. Companions sometimes used formulas that explicitly claimed direct hearing and at other times used wording that did not make the same claim.

The difference is epistemically relevant because “I heard the Messenger of Allah say” asserts a relationship to the source that the more general wording “the Messenger of Allah said” does not state by itself.

They very often narrated with nonexplicit formulae, those whose wording does not explicitly assert direct contact between the Companion and the Prophet ﷺ, such as the formula “the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said”.

At the same time, they very often narrated with the explicit formulae, those whose wording explicitly asserts direct contact between the Companion and the Prophet ﷺ, that is, direct audition from the Prophet ﷺ, such as “I heard”, “he related to us”, “he related to me”, “he said to us”, or “the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to me”.

The repeated use of explicit audition formulas, then, shows that direct contact was a meaningful feature of transmission rather than a distinction invented only after the first century.

Among the Companions whom we have found using formulae explicitly indicating direct audition from the Prophet ﷺ are: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13 AH); ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 AH); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf (d. 32 AH); ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32 AH); Abū al-Dardā’ ‘Uwaymir al-Anṣārī (d. 32 AH); Abū ‘Abs b. Jabr al-Anṣārī (d. 34 AH); ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 35 AH); ‘Abd Allāh b. Zam‘a (d. 35 AH); Umm Ḥarām bt. Miḥān al-Anṣāriyya (d. between 23 and 35 AH); Umm al-Faḍl Lubāba bt. Al-Ḥārith (d. between 32 and 35 AH); Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Uqba (d. between 35 and 40 AH); Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36 AH); Abū Mas‘ūd ‘Uqba b. ‘Amr al-Badrī (d. before 40 AH); ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 AH); Abū Burda b. Niyār al-Balawī (d. 41 AH); ‘Amr b. Taghlib (d. after 40 AH); ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 43 AH); Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45 AH); Umm Ḥabība Ramla bt. Abī Sufyān (d. 49 AH); Sa‘īd b. Zayd (d. 50 AH); al-Mughīra b. Shu‘ba (d. 50 AH); Abū Bakra Nufay‘ b. al-Ḥārith (d. 51 AH); Abū Qatāda al-Anṣārī (d. 54 AH); ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays (d. 54 AH); Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. 55 AH); ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr (d. 57 AH); Abū Hurayra (d. 57 AH); Jubayr b. Muṭ‘im (d. 58 AH); Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60 AH); Ya‘lā b. Umayya (d. in the last years of Mu‘āwiya’s caliphate); Ma‘qil b. Yasār (d. after 60 AH);

Umm Salama Hind bt. Abī Umayya (d. 62 AH); Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 63 AH); ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 63 AH); al-Miswar b. Makhrama (d. 64 AH); al-Nuʿmān b. Bashīr (d. 65 AH); Sulaymān b. Šurad (d. 65 AH); Jābir b. Samura (d. 66 AH); ʿAdī b. Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī (d. 68 AH); Zayd b. Khālīd al-Juhārī (d. 68 AH); ʿUrwa b. al-Jaʿd al-Bāriqī (d. between 61 and 70 AH); al-Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib (d. 72 AH); Rāfiʿ b. Khadīj (d. 73 AH); Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. 77 AH); and Umm Khālīd Ama bt. Khālīd b. Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. between 71 and 80 AH).¹⁴⁷ The breadth of this practice matters as well. The evidence below identifies roughly thirty five Companions who died before 64 AH or near it and who at times used explicit language of direct audition, which makes awareness of continuity an early and distributed feature rather than the habit of one isolated transmitter.

This distinction was also not merely grammatical. Companions and senior Successors often asked whether a person had actually heard the Prophet mention the matter being reported, which turns the question of direct contact into an explicit part of verification.

These questions show that the route of transmission itself could become evidence.

Examples of this include the following.

1. The number of early examples is relevant because explicit language of hearing is not confined to one Companion or one regional school. The repeated use of such formulas among transmitters who died before or around 64 AH shows that direct contact with the source was already something worth marking in the language of narration. Hence the following: Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68 AH) asked Ubayy b. Kaʿb, “Did you hear the Prophet ﷺ mention his affair, meaning the affair of al-Khiḍr?” Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 32 AH) said, “Yes, I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: ‘While Moses was among a company of the Children of Israel...’” to the end of the report.¹⁴⁸
2. This does not mean that every report using a less explicit formula is therefore disconnected. The point is that the community possessed linguistic resources for identifying direct audition, and those resources only make sense if the distinction itself mattered.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (8/149), no. 6726, and (5/90), no. 4035; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/6), no. 1; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (7/130), no. 5729; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/108), no. 1409; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (6/170), no. 4944; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/7), no. 907; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/97), no. 450; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/148), no. 3377; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/42), no. 2924; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (6/9), no. 4429; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (3/183), no. 2692; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (3/116), no. 2391; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/113), no. 3221; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/200), no. 3611; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (8/174), no. 6850; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/197), no. 3592; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (8/6), no. 5990; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/153), no. 764; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/78), no. 1281; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (3/130), no. 2452; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/124), no. 1477; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/15), no. 31; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (9/35), no. 7005; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (9/141); Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (7/138), no. 5769; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/166), no. 833; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/20), no. 52; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/81), no. 765; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/8), no. 914; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (6/130), no. 4819; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (9/64), no. 7150; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/69), no. 1233; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/121), no. 586; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/31), no. 100; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (7/37), no. 5230; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/81), no. 360; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (5/110), no. 4110; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (9/81), no. 7222; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/109), no. 1417; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (8/171), no. 6831; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/207), no. 3642; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/153), no. 769; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (4/121), 3262; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (6/57), no. 4633; Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (2/99), no. 1376.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/26), no. 74.

Seen in Bayesian terms, then, the existence of these formulas is more expected in a transmission culture that cares about who actually heard from whom than in one where chains are a later decorative addition with no earlier social basis.

3. Yusayr b. ‘Amr (d. 85 AH)¹⁴⁹ asked Sahl b. Ḥunayf (d. 38 AH), ‘Did you hear the Prophet ﷺ say anything about the Khawārij?’ He said, ‘I heard him say (gesturing with his hand toward Iraq). “There will come forth from it a people who recite the Qur’ān, but it will not pass beyond their collarbones; they will pass out of Islam as an arrow passes clean through its quarry”’.¹⁵⁰

4. Ḥassān b. Thābit, who died in 54 AH, asked Abū Hurayra, who died in 57 AH, whether he had heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, “O Ḥassān, respond on behalf of the Messenger of Allah. O Allah, support him with the Holy Spirit”, and Abū Hurayra replied that he had.¹⁵¹ What should be noted here, then, is that these questions were directed to Companions before the year 64 AH, which shows that the Successors too were conscious of the principle of continuity and of direct audition.

The sources also preserve cases in which a Companion distinguishes what he heard directly from the Prophet from what reached him through another Companion. That willingness to identify the missing intermediary is important because it shows awareness of an interrupted route even when the report was still accepted in the early Companion environment.

This shows their awareness of the difference between a connected (*muttaṣil*) report and a *mursal* one.

Examples of this include the following.

1. The case involving Abū Hurayra also shows why this distinction was not merely theoretical. Once ‘Ā’isha and Umm Salama supplied stronger first-hand evidence, Abū Hurayra identified al-Faḍl b. al-‘Abbās as the person from whom he had actually received the ruling rather than continuing to present it as something he heard directly from the Prophet. The source preserves the wording “Ribā lies only in deferment (*nasī’a*)”.¹⁵² The change in attribution matters because the route by which knowledge was received became part of the correction itself.

¹⁴⁹ Yusayr b. ‘Amr al-Baṣrī was born in the first year of the Hijra; he was ten years old at the death of the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* (2/1018).

¹⁵⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (9/17), no. 6934.

¹⁵¹ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (8/36), no. 6152.

¹⁵² Al-Nawawī notes that Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn ‘Umar used to permit selling usurious commodities at unequal amounts so long as it was hand to hand, relying on the hadith of Usāma b. Zayd, «Ribā lies only in deferment.» They later retracted this and held it forbidden to sell a commodity for more of its own kind, once the hadith of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī reached them, in which the Prophet ﷺ said: «Dinar for dinar, dirham for dirham, like for like; whoever gives more or takes more has dealt in ribā.» Muslim explicitly records their retraction. These reports cited by Muslim show that the hadith prohibiting unequal exchange in anything other than deferment had not reached them; when it did, they returned to it. As for Usāma’s hadith, «There is no ribā except in deferment,» it is either abrogated or to be understood of non-usurious commodities. Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH), *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (11/23-25), no editor named (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2nd ed., 1392 AH); Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (3/1217), no. 1596.

The episode, then, preserves exactly the kind of information a later critic needs, namely, that the narrator's earlier wording was too direct and that the actual source was another Companion.¹⁵³ In some cases early Muslims went further and sought the living teacher behind the person from whom they had first heard the report. This practice, later described as seeking a higher isnād, reduced the number of intermediaries and gave the hearer a direct opportunity to compare what the earlier source actually transmitted.

The later term *ṭalab 'uluww al-sanad* describes this effort to move closer to the source by hearing directly from the living teacher who stood behind one's immediate transmitter. The reason for doing so is evidential, specifically, shortening the chain reduces one intermediary and allows the hearer to compare the report with an earlier source, which can increase confidence when the versions agree and reveal a problem when they do not.

An example is what Muṭarrif b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Shikhkhīr narrated. A hadith from Abū Dharr reached me, and I longed to meet him. I met him and said, "O Abū Dharr, a hadith from you has reached me, and I have longed to meet you and ask you about it." He said, "You have met me, so ask." I said, It has reached me that you say. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. "Three does Allah love, and three does Allah abhor." He said, "Yes, and I do not reckon I would lie about my beloved friend Muḥammad ﷺ", saying it three times. I said, "Who are the three whom Allah, Mighty and Majestic, loves?" He said, "A man who goes forth to fight in the path of Allah and meets the enemy striving, seeking his reward, and fights until he is killed", to the end of the hadith.¹⁵⁴ Because Abū Dharr died in 32 AH and Muṭarrif died much later, the meeting described here must have occurred before 32 AH.

Muṭarrif had already heard a report attributed to Abū Dharr, but when he encountered Abū Dharr in person he asked him directly about it. The report therefore preserves an early example of a hearer returning to the named source rather than treating the second-hand attribution as the end of the inquiry.

Another example is the report of 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl, who heard Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh explain that a hadith had reached him from a man who heard it directly from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Jābir therefore purchased a camel and travelled for a month until he reached 'Abd Allāh b. Unays in Syria, where he asked to hear the report before either of them died. 'Abd Allāh b. Unays then related the hadith concerning retribution on the Day of Resurrection, including the statement that no person destined for the Fire or the Garden would enter his final abode while another person still held an unsettled claim against

¹⁵³ The reason Abū Hurayra withdrew what he had been saying is that the hadith of 'Ā'isha and Umm Salama was established for him in its plain sense, and it is worthier of reliance, for the two of them knew such matters better than anyone else, and because it accords with the Noble Qur'ān and with the practice of the Prophet ﷺ; whereas the hadith of al-Faḍl b. al-'Abbās is open to interpretation: either as guidance toward what is preferable, his own practice showing permissibility; or as abrogated, Abū Hurayra being unaware of its abrogation; or as applying to one whom dawn overtakes during intercourse and who knowingly continues, whose fast is invalid. Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (7/221).

¹⁵⁴ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (35/421), no. 21530.

him.¹⁵⁵ The Jābir example belongs to the same early period because ‘Abd Allāh b. Unays died in 54 AH, which means Jābir’s journey had to occur before that date.

The point here, then, is the decision to spend substantial effort reducing testimonial distance and checking a report at the source when that source was still alive. One might object that the Companions did not normally reject a mursal report merely because the intermediary was unnamed, and therefore that they did not understand the critical importance of continuity.

They understood, however, that even if an intermediary could be omitted the earliest Companion environment generally expected that said omitted person was likely to be another Companion and did not yet possess evidence that Companion transmitters were deliberately fabricating hadith. The treatment of the report therefore reflected the evidential state of that generation rather than ignorance of what a break in the chain meant.

The earliest treatment of mursal transmission also has to be read against the evidential environment of the Companions. They knew that an intermediary could be omitted, but where the missing person was expected to be another Companion and no evidence of deliberate Companion fabrication had emerged, the omission did not carry the same probability of corruption that it would carry in a later population containing known weak and dishonest transmitters.

1. Al-Barā’ b. Āzib (d. 72 AH) said, “Not everything we relate to you from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ did we hear from him directly. Some of it we heard from him, and some our companions related to us, and we do not lie”.¹⁵⁶

2. Likewise Anas b. Mālik (d. 92 AH), Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl narrated that Anas said, Anas also stated, “Not everything we relate to you did we hear from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, but none of us would lie to the others”.¹⁵⁷ Another narration expresses the same point by saying, “but we did not suspect one another”.¹⁵⁸ Qatāda narrated from Anas a hadith on the prohibition of wine, in which a man said to Anas: “Did you hear it from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?” He replied, “Yes, or it was related to me by one who does not lie. By Allah, we did not lie, and we did not even know what lying was”.¹⁵⁹ ‘Umar’s description of alternating attendance with his Anṣārī neighbor gives a concrete example of why one Companion could accurately report something another had not personally witnessed. The two men deliberately exchanged what they had learned on the days when only one of them had been present. “I and a neighbour of mine from the Anṣār, of Banū Umayya b. Zayd, one of the ‘Awālī districts of Medina, used to take turns going down to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: he would go down one day and I the next. When I went down, I would bring him the news of

¹⁵⁵ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal al-Baghdādī (d. 241 AH), *al-Musnad* (25/431-432), no. 16042, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ et al. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1421 AH / 2001 CE). Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ graded its isnād ḥasan.

¹⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil* (1/261).

¹⁵⁷ Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil* (1/261).

¹⁵⁸ Muḥammad b. Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (7/21).

¹⁵⁹ Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil* (1/263).

that day, of revelation and other matters, and when he went down he would do the same”.¹⁶⁰ A similar practice is reported of Ibn ‘Umar, who is said to have asked those who were present about the Prophet’s words and actions when he himself had been absent. The route for that particular statement is discontinuous, so its evidential weight should be kept proportionate to that weakness. The report itself preserves the following wording. “Ibn ‘Umar used to preserve what he heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and whenever he was absent he would ask those who had been present about what he had said and done”.¹⁶¹ The larger transmission record contains many explicit Companion from Companion chains, which confirms the basic point independently of that one report. A Companion could transmit Prophetic material he had not personally witnessed, and the chain could disclose the Companion through whom he received it.

An example is the narration of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, who said, I heard Abū Ṭalḥa (d. 34 AH) say. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. “The angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or an image of figures”.¹⁶² This is also historically unsurprising, since no Companion could have attended every event in the Prophet’s life. A functioning transmission system therefore required them to learn from one another, and the relevant epistemic question is whether that interpersonal route was identifiable and open to checking rather than whether every report was first hand at every stage.

What emerges, then, is an early concern with connectedness before the later terminology reached its mature form. Direct audition was marked in the language of narration, hearers asked whether a report had been heard from the Prophet, Companions disclosed when they were reporting through another Companion, and people sometimes travelled to the earlier source to hear the report directly. The later science of isnād criticism is therefore easier to explain as a formalization and expansion of an existing concern than as a completely new invention imposed upon an earlier period that had not cared about transmission routes.

Let E_4 represent this early concern for direct hearing and connected transmission. Because E_4 is related to the earlier evidence of practical criticism, its cumulative Bayes factor should again be conservative. Suppose $P(E_4 \mid H_s, E_3, E_2, E_1, E_l, k) = 0.45$ while $P(E_4 \mid H_t, E_3, E_2, E_1, E_l, k) = 0.80$.

$$O_4 = 0.61 \times (0.45 / 0.80) \approx 0.34$$

The running model now places H_t at roughly 74.4 percent and H_s at roughly 25.6 percent, which almost exactly reverses the 75 to 25 advantage Little was granted at the beginning. This reversal does not come from denying the existence of political motives. It comes from adding Muslim specific evidence that the original prior had not yet contained.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/29), no. 89.

¹⁶¹ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), al-Iṣāba fī Tamyiz al-Ṣaḥāba (4/160), ed. ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1415 AH); and it is cited without a full isnād by Abū al-Qāsim Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad al-Aṣbahānī (d. 535 AH), Siyar al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn (490), ed. Karam Ḥilmī Farḥāt Aḥmad (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, n.d., no publication date).

¹⁶² Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/114), no. 3225.

The parsimony question also changes at this stage. H_t can explain the early concern for truthfulness, accuracy, and connectedness as parts of one preservation oriented system. H_s can still accommodate all three, but if it maintains “unusual unreliability” it must now add the further claim that these practices existed while failing on a sufficiently large scale to make the corpus epistemically inferior. That extra claim may be true, but it is an additional historical burden rather than something established by the analogy itself.

The later language of isnād criticism can now be placed in its proper historical setting rather than treated as though it appeared without an earlier foundation. What emerged among the younger Successors and the generation after them was a more technical and systematic critical enterprise, but the evidence above gives us reason to see that development as building upon earlier religious rules and earlier practices rather than beginning from zero.

Once truthfulness and accuracy are conditions of acceptance, the practical need for an isnād follows naturally, because the critic cannot evaluate the people carrying a report if the route by which the report travelled has been erased.

The later consensus around this principle therefore has to be explained by any historical model of hadith criticism. The traditional model sees a continuous development from early verification into more formal narrator criticism, while the skeptical model must explain why the later discipline so consistently understood itself as applying religious rules that the earliest evidence already shows in less technical form.

1. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim summarizes the underlying rule with the statement, “This knowledge is religion, so consider carefully from whom you take it”.¹⁶³
2. Muḥammad b. Sīrīn expresses the same concern when he says, “Consider carefully from whom you take this hadith, for it is your religion”.¹⁶⁴
3. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak later gives the principle its famous formulation by saying that the isnād is part of religion, since without a chain a person could attribute whatever he wished to an earlier authority without being required to disclose how the report reached him.¹⁶⁵ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak also said, “Between us and the people stand the supporting legs”, meaning the isnād.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ibn Ḥibbān placed al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim among the Successors of the Successors and denied that he ever met Ibn ‘Abbās, whereas Ibn Ḥajar placed him in the youngest generation of the Successors, those who saw one or two of the Companions, direct hearing from the Companions not being established for some of them. Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354 AH), al-Thiqāt (6/480-481), no editor named (Hyderabad Deccan, India: Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1st ed., 1393 AH / 1973 CE); and Ibn Ḥajar, Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb (280) no. 2978; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327 AH), al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl (2/15), no editor named (Hyderabad, India: Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya edition, 1st ed., 1271 AH / 1952 CE).

¹⁶⁴ Muḥammad b. Sīrīn was a Successor. Ibn Ḥibbān said: «he saw thirty of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ»; and al-‘Ijlī and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī likewise counted him among the Successors. Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Thiqāt (5/348-349); Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Šāliḥ al-‘Ijlī (d. 261 AH), al-Thiqāt (405) no. 1464, no editor named (Mecca: Dār al-Bāz, 1st ed., 1405 AH / 1984 CE); and Ibn Ḥajar, Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb (483) no. 5947; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl (2/15); and Muslim, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/14).

¹⁶⁵ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak belongs to the middle generation of the Successors of the Successors. Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Thiqāt (7/7); and Ibn Ḥajar, Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb (320) no. 3570; Muslim, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/15).

¹⁶⁶ Muslim, al-Šaḥīḥ (1/15-16); Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl (14/211), ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1400 AH / 1980 CE);

4. Abū ‘Aqīl Yaḥyā b. al-Mutawakkil, who died in 167 AH, related that he was sitting with al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, who died between 127 and 132 AH,¹⁶⁷ and Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Anṣārī, who died in 144 AH. Yaḥyā told al-Qāsim that it was a disgrace for a person of his standing to be asked about religion and possess no knowledge of the matter, to which al-Qāsim replied by asking why. Yaḥyā answered that al-Qāsim descended from Abū Bakr and ‘Umar,¹⁶⁸ but al-Qāsim replied that it was more disgraceful for a person to speak without knowledge or to take religious knowledge from someone who was not reliable.¹⁶⁹

What the Early Evidence Does to Little’s Prior

The significance of the early evidence can now be stated without restarting the Bayesian calculation from the beginning. The initial 3 to 1 skeptical odds have already been updated through the normative framework of verification, the early concern for truthful narrators, the practical detection of error, and the awareness of direct hearing. After those conditional updates, the running odds stand at approximately 0.34 to 1 for H_s over H_t , which places the traditional thesis at roughly 74.4 percent.

This is intentionally more conservative than the standalone calculation used in the earlier draft, where the entire body of early criticism was assigned $P(E | H_t) = 0.90$ and $P(E | H_s) = 0.10$, producing a Bayes factor of 9 in favor of H_t . That standalone example is useful for showing how strongly the evidence might discriminate if treated as one independent block, but using it again here would double count the very evidence already introduced through E_1 to E_4 .

$$\text{Running odds after } E_1 \text{ through } E_4, \quad H_s / H_t \approx 0.34 / 1$$

The point, then, is not that one particular set of decimals has proven the traditional thesis. The point is that a prior is rational only if it remains open to evidence, and the early Muslim data cannot be added to the historical discussion while the original skeptical 75 percent is left untouched. A justified conclusion must update as the explanatory balance changes.

and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH), *Fath al-Mughīth bi-Sharḥ Alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth* (3/331), ed. ‘Alī Ḥusayn ‘Alī (Egypt: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1st ed., 1424 AH / 2003 CE).

¹⁶⁷ al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb; Ibn Ḥibbān counted him among the Successors and said: «he narrates from his grandfather ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar». Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd said: «he died during the caliphate of Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam»; and al-Dhahabī relates that Marwān b. Muḥammad received the pledge of allegiance as caliph in 127 AH and died in 132 AH. Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd al-Baghdādī (d. 230 AH), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (5/370), ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭṭār (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1410 AH / 1990 CE); Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt* (5/302); and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān b. Qāymāz al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), *Ta’rīkh al-Islām* (3/733-734), ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 2003 CE).

¹⁶⁸ That is because his father was ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb b. Nufayl, and his mother was Umm ‘Abd Allāh bint al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (5/370).

¹⁶⁹ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/16).

How Altered and Forged Reports Were Detected

Little's first objection gains much of its force from the thought that once fabrication becomes possible the tradition becomes difficult to trust, but that inference depends upon what methods existed for detecting alteration. A changed wording can be identified only by comparing one route with other routes and then asking which transmitters had the stronger relationship to the teacher, which version was more widely preserved, and whether the apparent disagreement can be explained as ordinary error rather than deliberate invention.

The same logic applies when a report conflicts with stronger evidence. The critic may compare the narration with the Qur'an or with better attested hadith, and a conflict can lower the probability of the isolated version without requiring the critic to call the narrator a liar. This matters because a method with explanatory power should distinguish deliberate fabrication from memory failure when the evidence supports different causes.

This creates a filter between the base rate of fabrication in the pool of circulating reports and the reliability of the material that survives criticism. A high number of attempted forgeries can lower confidence in unfiltered material while successful identification of weak routes can raise confidence in what remains. Little, then, cannot move directly from "fabrications existed" to "the selected corpus is unusually unreliable" without showing that the filters had an unacceptably high false positive rate.

The earlier version of this paper illustrated the evidential force of these detection methods by assigning $P(E_5 | H_t, k) = 0.85$ and $P(E_5 | H_s, k) = 0.25$, which would be a standalone Bayes factor of 3.4 in favor of the traditional thesis. For the cumulative calculation, however, those values are too strong because route comparison and narrator evaluation partly overlap with the earlier evidence about accuracy and connectedness. I will therefore use the more conservative conditional values $P(E_5 | H_s, E_{<5}, k) = 0.50$ and $P(E_5 | H_t, E_{<5}, k) = 0.85$.

$$O_5 = 0.34 \times (0.50 / 0.85) \approx 0.20$$

The running probability now places H_t at roughly 83.2 percent and H_s at roughly 16.8 percent. The adjustment is still substantial, but it is smaller than the raw standalone factor because the model is deliberately refusing to count the same critical culture twice.

This stage is also where the criterion of total evidence becomes clearer. Evidence that some fabrications were detected has two effects at once. It confirms that fabrication existed, which the skeptic is entitled to use, but it also confirms that the tradition possessed means of identifying fabrication, which the traditionalist is entitled to use. A justified model must explain both sides of that fact rather than selecting only the part that lowers confidence.

Premodern Rigor Without Modern Institutions

Little's appeal to the absence of rigorous scholarship or institutions also needs to be defined historically rather than measured by the standards set by a modern university. By this, we mean to say that a premodern scholarly network can still be highly organized even when it does not possess centralized research centers, and the relevant question is what its practices allowed scholars and students to verify.

Hence, later Islamic scholarship makes the networked character of this tradition easier to see, because commentaries and recensions were repeatedly compared across regions and generations. As has been clarified before, that later activity does not prove the authenticity of a first century hadith by itself, but it shows why describing premodern scholarship as noninstitutional can obscure the actual mechanisms through which claims were preserved and criticized.

The burden, then, is not met by observing that the early Muslims lacked a modern academic institution. Little must identify a particular defect in the historical procedures and show that the defect made the hadith corpus unusually unreliable, especially since ancient history generally depends upon material produced outside modern universities.

Historical Features That Weaken Little's Prior

Little's analogy also assumes that the pressures found in other religious communities should create a similar expectation of successful corruption in Islam. The next body of evidence tests that assumption by looking at features of the Muslim transmission environment that are not captured by the generic description "religious community under political pressure".

Put another way, the question is no longer whether similar motives existed, but whether the systems through which religious material was preserved were sufficiently similar for the same outcome to remain equally probable.

This is where the prior must give way to a system specific likelihood comparison.

The evidence falls into two connected areas. The first concerns what the transmission of the Qur'an tells us about the preservational capacity of the early community. The second concerns features of hadith transmission itself, especially its breadth and its written and interpersonal controls.

The Qur'an and the Community's Preservational Capacity

The Qur'an does not prove that hadith was preserved through the same mechanism or to the same degree, and the paper will not use it that way. However, if the early Muslim community demonstrably preserved its central scripture across political and sectarian conflict, that fact becomes part of the background knowledge by which we judge Little's claim that similar pressures should make authoritative corruption the expected Muslim outcome.

Several connected features matter here, and they are best read as one historical pattern rather than as six isolated “events” whose force is simply added together.

The most obvious place to begin is the stability of the Qur’anic text across the major Muslim communities, since the social pressures Little emphasizes did not produce rival sectarian Qur’ans that displaced the text recognized by the wider community.

Little’s comparison becomes more informative once an actual counter case from the same Muslim society is considered. Other religious traditions may contain rival textual histories, but the Muslim sectarian divisions he invokes did not result in each major faction adopting a different Qur’an as its foundational scripture.

The Sunni, Shī‘ī, Ibāḍī, and Zaydī communities may disagree over many theological and legal questions, yet the muṣḥaf printed and recited across those communities is not a set of mutually exclusive sectarian scriptures. The point is not that every detail of Qur’anic transmission can be settled by this observation, but that intense disagreement did not mechanically produce rival authoritative texts.

No major Muslim sect, then, built its religious life upon a private Qur’an that it presented as the authentic scripture in place of the text shared by the broader community. That result matters because it is a direct counterexample to the idea that similar political or theological pressures must produce similar textual behavior. The pressures existed, yet the expected corruption did not follow.¹⁷⁰ This does not prove that hadith must therefore be preserved, but it shows that incentive cannot be treated as a sufficient explanation of successful corruption in the Muslim case.

The Qur’an available to the later Muslim community is historically continuous with the text recited and written in the Prophetic period, while comparable continuity cannot simply be assumed for every earlier scriptural tradition. The relevance of that comparison, then, lies in challenging Little’s claim that the Muslim case should receive the same expectation of corruption merely because the communities all belong to the category of religion.

The inference to hadith can therefore remain modest. Qur’anic preservation raises the probability that early Muslims possessed a real preservation culture, but hadith still requires its own evidence because the two corpora differ in form and scale. The greater point, however, is that the Qur’anic stability did not arise in a vacuum. Revelation was written during the Prophetic period, and the same society used writing for a broader range of religious and administrative purposes, which weakens any picture of an early community lacking practical tools for textual preservation.

The writing evidence is not dependent upon one anonymous claim. The sources preserve the names and activities of multiple people involved in writing revelation, and the

¹⁷⁰ By the old factors I mean, for example, the prohibition of lying, which exists in all religions, old and new alike, though the Muslim scholars appear to have been more committed to observing this prohibition. By the new factors I mean, for example, the existence of a state fostering Islam from the era of prophethood onward; the wide spread of the religion; the care taken to distribute copies of the Qur’ān throughout all lands; and the spread of the writing down of the Messenger’s hadiths from the prophetic era onward.

examples below show that writing was already integrated into the community's handling of its central text.

‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān, for example, referred to his own hand as “the first hand to write out the mufaṣṣal”, meaning the final seventh of the Qur’an.¹⁷¹ Zayd b. Thābit likewise describes being summoned whenever revelation came down so that he could write it for the Prophet ﷺ.¹⁷² Al-Barā’ b. ‘Azib said, when the verse

﴿لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ﴾

was revealed, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Call Zayd for me, and let him bring the tablet, the inkwell, and the shoulder-blade”, then he said, “Write, ﴿لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ﴾”, to the end of the ḥadīth.¹⁷³ The later collection under Abū Bakr also relies upon Zayd’s known role as a scribe, since Abū Bakr tells him, “you used to write down the revelation for the Messenger of Allah” before assigning him the task of gathering the text. The report itself preserves the following wording. “You are a young, intelligent man whom we hold above suspicion, and you used to write down the revelation for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; so seek out the Qur’ān and gather it together”.¹⁷⁴ The Qur’an, then, was preserved through writing alongside memorization rather than through one channel alone.

Zayd’s own description of that collection refers to written pieces and memorized material together, saying that he gathered the Qur’an from palm stalks, thin stones, and the memories of people.¹⁷⁵ The same written continuity appears when ‘Uthmān asks Ḥafṣa to send the earlier sheets so that the standardized codices could be copied from them and then returned.¹⁷⁶ Later historians also attempted to identify the broader group of scribes associated with revelation. The names were traced by authors from ‘Umar b. Shabba and al-Mas‘ūdī through Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Ḥudayda, al-‘Irāqī, al-Maqrīzī, and modern researchers such as Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A‘zamī.¹⁷⁷ The point here is not the authority of any one

¹⁷¹ Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Uthmān Ibn Abī Shayba al-‘Absī (d. 235 AH), al-Muṣannaf (7/520-521) no. 37690, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1st ed., 1409 AH).

¹⁷² Abū ‘Isā Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), al-Shamā’il (195) no. 326, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḥallāq (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, no edition, no year); and Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Haythamī (d. 708 AH), Bughyat al-Bāḥith ‘an Zawā’id Musnad al-Ḥārith (2/882) no. 951, ed. Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ al-Bākīrī (Medina: Markaz Khidmat al-Sunna wa-l-Sīra al-Nabawiyya, 1st ed., 1413 AH / 1992 CE).

¹⁷³ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/184) no. 4990.

¹⁷⁴ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/71) no. 4679, (6/183) no. 4986, (6/184) no. 4989, and (9/74) no. 7191.

¹⁷⁵ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (6/71) no. 4679, (6/183) no. 4986, and (9/74) no. 7191.

¹⁷⁶ al-Bukhārī, (6/183-184) no. 4987.

¹⁷⁷ Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Baghawī (d. 317 AH), Mu’jam al-Ṣaḥāba (3/527-528) no. 1519, ed. Muḥammad al-Amīn b. Muḥammad al-Jaknī (Kuwait: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 1st ed., 1421 AH, 2000 CE); Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360 AH), al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr (5/108) no. 4748, ed. Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 2nd ed., no publication year); and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH), al-Sunan al-Kubrā (10/214) no. 20405, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 3rd ed., 1424 AH, 2003 CE); Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Suhaylī (d. 581 AH), al-Rawḍ al-Unuf fī Sharḥ al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya (6/487), ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Wakīl (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1st ed., 1412 AH); Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 346 AH), al-Tanbīh wa-l-Ishrāf (1/245-246), ed. ‘Abd Allāh Ismā’īl al-Anṣārī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣāwī, no edition, no publication year); Taqī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanī b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 600 AH), Mukhtaṣar Sīrat al-Nabī ﷺ wa-Sīrat Aṣḥābīh al-‘Ashara (87), ed. Khālīd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāyī

later list, but the existence of a historical inquiry into a writing practice whose roots are placed in the Prophetic period itself.

The evidential point is not that earlier religions had no writing whatsoever, but that the Muslim case presents a detailed and early writing practice tied directly to the central religious text, which is a relevant difference in Little's comparison.

Writing was only one channel. A large number of Companions also memorized the Qur'an, or substantial portions of it, during the Prophet's lifetime, which created another form of redundancy in the preservation system.

The reports concerning the "qurrā" provide another indication of distributed Qur'anic knowledge. Four months after Uḥud, the Prophet is reported to have sent a large group of "qurrā" to Banū 'Āmir, with the sources giving seventy in one report and forty in another. In this early usage the term refers to devout people learned in Qur'an and Sunna rather than to the later technical specialists in variant readings.¹⁷⁸ If dozens of such reciters could be dispatched on a single occasion, the report at minimum points toward a community in which Qur'anic knowledge was already distributed among many persons rather than concentrated in one fragile line of custody.

The text then spread rapidly as the Muslim polity expanded, which matters because geographical diffusion makes a later centralized alteration harder to explain without leaving traces in the already separated communities. That distributed knowledge expanded with the political spread of Islam after the Prophet's death, when new Muslim communities were established outside Arabia and Qur'anic teaching became part of those communities from an early stage.

As the Muslim polity expanded, mosques and teaching communities carried the Qur'an into regions that were increasingly separated by distance and local history. This geographic spread matters probabilistically because a successful later alteration becomes harder to

(Riyadh: Mu'assasat Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Rājīhī al-Khayriyya, no edition, 1424 AH); Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya (5/361-377), ed. 'Alī Shīrī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1st ed., 1408 AH, 1988 CE); Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Ḥudayda al-Anṣārī (d. 783 AH), al-Miṣbāḥ al-Muḍī fī Kitāb al-Nabī al-Ummī wa-Rasūlih ilā Mulūk al-Arḍ min 'Arabī wa-'Ajamī, ed. Muḥammad 'Aẓīm al-Dīn (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2nd ed., 1405 AH, 1985 CE); Zayn al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-'Irāqī (d. 806 AH), al-Durar al-Saniyya al-Zakiyya Naẓm al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya (123-125), no editor named (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 1st ed., 1426 AH); Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī al-Ḥusaynī al-'Ubaydī (d. 845 AH), Imtā' al-Asmā' bimā li-l-Nabī min al-Aḥwāl wa-l-Amwāl wa-l-Ḥafada wa-l-Matā' (9/334), ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Numaysī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1420 AH / 1999 CE); Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī (d. 1439 AH / 2017 CE), Kuttāb al-Nabī ﷺ (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, n.d., 1398 AH / 1978 CE).

¹⁷⁸ Al-Bukhārī placed the expedition of Bī'r Ma'ūna, among others, between the Battle of Uḥud and the Battle of al-Khandaq (that is, al-Aḥzāb), and he transmitted from Ibn Ishāq, from 'Āṣim b. 'Umar, that it took place after Uḥud. al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (5/103) no. 1002; and 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām al-Ḥimyarī (d. 213 AH), al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya (2/183), ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and 'Abd al-Ḥafīz al-Shalabī (Egypt: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2nd ed., 1375 AH / 1955 CE); al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/26) no. 1002, (4/18) no. 2801, (4/21) no. 2814, (4/73) no. 3064, (4/100) no. 3170, (5/102) no. 4078, (5/104) no. 4088, (5/105) nos. 4090 and 4091, and (5/107) no. 4096; 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām al-Ḥimyarī (d. 213 AH), al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya (2/184), ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and 'Abd al-Ḥafīz al-Shalabī (Egypt: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2nd ed., 1375 AH / 1955 CE); Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), Faṭḥ al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (13/257), ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d., 1379 AH).

coordinate once the same material is already present in many communities, especially where written copies and memorized recitation coexist.

The result is a transmission environment that differs materially from the simple analogy Little begins with, and that difference belongs in the background knowledge of the hadith question even though it does not settle the hadith question by itself. Likewise, the early exegetical activity of the Companions supplies another form of control because explanations attributed to early authorities can be compared with the Qur'anic text whose wording is independently stable.

The activity of major Companion exegetes provides another form of continuity. Figures such as 'Umar, 'Alī, Ibn 'Abbās, 'Ā'isha, and Ibn Mas'ūd are remembered as explaining the Qur'an after the Prophet's death.¹⁷⁹ The evidential relevance is that exegetical reports attributed to these early figures can be compared with a scriptural text whose wording is independently transmitted, giving the historian an additional point of control rather than a corpus floating free of its primary text. Where exegetical reports carried through strong routes consistently correspond to the preserved verses, that agreement becomes part of the evidence for continuity between the early community and the text available to later scholars.

Taken together, these features culminate in the mass transmission of the Qur'an, where memorization and written copies expanded across generations rather than narrowing to a single late source. The traditional account of Qur'anic "tawātur", then, is not simply that one person copied a text and everyone later inherited it. Large numbers of Companions heard and memorized the Qur'an, and the text then passed to still larger populations of Successors through both recitation and writing. The network expands rather than contracts as the generations proceed, which changes the probability of a late alteration becoming universally authoritative without leaving competing traces.

It is argued, therefore, that this kind of early mass transmission is not matched in the same way by the earliest transmission histories of the Torah or Gospels. Whether every detail of that comparison is accepted or not, it identifies a potentially relevant system breaker that Little has to evaluate rather than erase through the broad category of 'religious texts'.

Two features of that mass transmission are especially relevant to the probability of successful alteration. The first is the large number of people who memorized the Qur'an across different regions and ethnic communities.

The second is the multiplication of written copies during the same expanding period, which gave the community two overlapping forms of preservation rather than one.

The Shape of Hadith Transmission

Hadith transmission itself adds another set of differences that must be included in the likelihood comparison. The point is not that every report was multiply attested, because

¹⁷⁹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ādil 'Abd al-'Āl al-Mishadd, *al-Mufasssirūn min al-Ṣaḥāba Jam'an wa-Dirāsa Waṣfiyya* (1163-1188) (Riyadh: Markaz Tafsīr lil-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya, 1st ed., 1437 AH, 2016 CE).

many reports were not, but that a substantial portion of important Prophetic and early historical material circulated through more than one route and that the network expanded rapidly after the first generation.

The comparative claim, then, is that this kind of broad and traceable transmission is more developed in the Muslim material under discussion than the generic analogy to earlier religious texts would suggest. The same network is also marked by attention to continuity, where the first generation reports from personal presence or direct hearing and later generations identify the people through whom the material reached them.

For the first generation, this can involve direct participation in the event or direct hearing of the statement being reported, whereas for the Successors, it often involved prolonged study with the Companion from whom the report was taken, which supplied repeated opportunities for comparison. The same basic structure then continues into the later generations. Hence, what this shows us is that a chain with identifiable relationships creates more opportunities for historical testing than a report whose route has disappeared entirely. In light of this, then, the numerical claims below should not be treated as though raw quantity automatically proves authenticity, but they do show the scale of the network that a theory of widespread coordinated back projection would have to explain.

First, the abundance of Companions who narrated hadiths from the Prophet ﷺ, they number 904 Companions in the Musnad of Aḥmad, and 1013 Companions in the Musnad of Baqī b. Makhḥad.¹⁸⁰ Some narrated thousands, some hundreds, some dozens, and some only a few hadiths.

The network becomes broader again in the generation of the Successors, where many students can transmit from a single Companion and where the same Companion's material becomes available for comparison through numerous people.

From Anas b. Mālik alone more than 200 narrators transmitted.¹⁸¹ Al-Dhahabī said, "His trustworthy companions survived until after 150, and his weak companions survived until after 190".¹⁸² From Abū Hurayra alone more than 800 narrators transmitted, some of them Companions, most of them Successors.¹⁸³ All of this belongs to the first century and the beginning of the second, which is important because it places the expansion of the network earlier than a model in which meaningful transmission only emerges with the later canonical collections.

The number of transmitters grows again among the followers of the Successors, which further increases the number of comparison points available to later critics. Again, quantity alone is not enough, but quantity combined with identifiable routes changes the historical

¹⁸⁰ Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (d. 456 AH), 'Adad mā li-kull Wāḥid min al-Ṣaḥāba min al-Ḥadīth (20), ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī (no publisher named, 1st ed., 1404 AH / 1984 CE).

¹⁸¹ Al-Mizzī, Tahdhīb al-Kamāl (3/354-363); and al-Dhahabī, Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā' (3/397).

¹⁸² Al-Dhahabī, Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā' (3/396).

¹⁸³ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl b. Kaykaldī al-'Alā'ī al-Dimashqī (d. 671 AH), Taḥqīq Munīf al-Rutba li-man Thabata lahu Sharīf al-Ṣuḥba (100), ed. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Qashqarī (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āṣima, 1st ed., 1410 AH).

problem because a successful fabrication must now account for how the same material moved through that wider network.

Moreover, the diversity of the narrators also matters because the network spread across tribes and regions rather than remaining socially homogeneous. Here too, this does not make collusion impossible, but it raises the number of assumptions required by any model that explains widespread convergence through coordinated invention rather than transmission. The diversity becomes still greater in the Successor generation as Islam expands beyond Arabia.

The system being compared with earlier religious traditions, then, is not merely “a religious community”. It is a geographically widening network in which the routes of transmission were increasingly attached to identifiable persons. This geographical spread of the Companions after the Prophet’s death made that network still harder to treat as one centralized transmission environment. Companions settled in regions stretching far beyond the Hijaz, and Prophetic reports travelled with them during the first century.¹⁸⁴ One example is the Successor ‘Ikrima, the mawlā of Ibn ‘Abbās, who was of Berber origin.¹⁸⁵ ‘Ikrima had been enslaved and belonged to Ḥuṣayn b. Abī al-Ḥurr al-‘Anbarī, who gave him to Ibn ‘Abbās when the latter became governor of Basra.¹⁸⁶ ‘Alī had appointed Ibn ‘Abbās after the Battle of the Camel in 36 AH,¹⁸⁷ and Ibn ‘Abbās remained governor until 40 AH.¹⁸⁸ Ibn Ma‘īn relates that ‘Ikrima remained an unmanumitted slave until the death of Ibn ‘Abbās in 68 AH,¹⁸⁹ which means that their companionship may have lasted close to thirty years. Since ‘Ikrima died in 104 AH at the age of eighty,¹⁹⁰ he would have been approximately fourteen when he was given to Ibn ‘Abbās and approximately forty four when Ibn ‘Abbās died, after which he lived for another thirty six years and continued transmitting hadith and exegetical material.

This broad distribution highlights that it creates the possibility of regional comparison and makes the skeptical hypothesis of a single late point of invention less parsimonious where genuinely separate lines can be established.

Another feature is the amount of biographical information preserved about many major transmitters, since a chain is only useful for criticism if the people named in it can be investigated against some broader historical record. The biography of the Prophet itself is richly represented in the early historical tradition.

The same is true, to varying degrees, of the Companions upon whom large amounts of hadith transmission depend. Some transmitters remain obscure, and that obscurity can lower confidence, but the major prolific narrators are not historical names about whom nothing else is known.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Abd al-Rahmān ‘Alī al-Ḥajjī, *al-Tārīkh al-Andalusī min al-Faṭḥ al-Islāmī ḥattā Suqūṭ Gharnāṭa* (69) (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2nd ed., 1402 AH / 1981 CE).

¹⁸⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* (3/106).

¹⁸⁶ Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil fī Ḍu‘afā’ al-Rijāl* (6/469).

¹⁸⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* (3/353); and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya* (7/274, 343).

¹⁸⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya* (7/357).

¹⁸⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* (5/15).

¹⁹⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’* (5/34).

Substantial information is also preserved about the Successors who studied with those Companions and then transmitted to the following generation. Hence, the existence of that information does not guarantee that every biography is accurate, but it gives the critical system a body of evidence against which claims of meeting and transmission can be tested.

Connected with this phenomenon is the survival of some material relics of the Companions down to our own day. Writing also appears within hadith transmission earlier than the image of a purely oral and undocumented first century suggests, as in the case of the Qur'an. That is, some Companions and Successors wrote reports in letters and on personal sheets, which supplied another channel through which material could be preserved and compared.

The documentary evidence, then, is especially important against any picture in which Prophetic material remained purely oral until the great canonical collections. The first century already contains letters, notebooks, and written collections associated with Companions and their students, which means that oral transmission operated alongside writing rather than in the complete absence of it.

The point here, then, is that a fixed text can be compared across time, can be checked against what a teacher later says, and can preserve material independently of one person's unaided memory.¹⁹¹ For that reason, the presence of early writing changes the likelihood comparison even where the surviving manuscript itself is later. The skeptical model must account for a transmission culture that possessed documentary controls earlier than a narrative of purely fluid oral tradition would lead us to expect.¹⁹² To be more explicit then, the point here is that the existence of such writings changes the model by making it less plausible to describe the earliest hadith environment as one in which nothing could be fixed or checked before the later compilations.

The examples below illustrate the kind of first century material being discussed.

1. Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13 AH). Thumāma b. 'Abd Allāh b. Anas reported that Anas b. Mālīk related to him that Abū Bakr wrote him this document when he dispatched him to Bahrain. "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. This is the obligation of ṣadaqa which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ imposed upon the Muslims", to the end of the document.¹⁹³ And 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ said, Abū Bakr wrote to 'Amr b. al-Āṣ. "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to take counsel in matters of war; so hold to that".¹⁹⁴
2. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Sufyān wrote to 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb concerning a legal report which corrected the ruling 'Umar had previously followed. Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib relates that 'Umar had maintained that the wife received nothing from her husband's blood money until al-

¹⁹¹ Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī (d. 1439 AH / 2017 CE), *Dirāsāt fī al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī wa-Tārīkh Tadwīnih* (1/92-142) (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, n.d., 1400 AH / 1980 CE).

¹⁹² Al-A'zamī, *Dirāsāt fī al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī* (1/143-167).

¹⁹³ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (2/118), no. 1454.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr* (1/63), no. 46. Al-Haythamī said: «Al-Ṭabarānī narrated it, and its men have been declared trustworthy.» Nūr al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Haythamī (d. 807 AH), *Majma' al-Zawā'id wa-Manba' al-Fawā'id* (5/319), no. 9623, ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Qudṣī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudṣī, n.d., 1414 AH / 1994 CE).

Ḍaḥḥāk informed him that the Prophet ﷺ had granted the wife of Ashyam al-Ḍibābī a share from her husband's blood money, after which 'Umar accepted the report.¹⁹⁵

3. Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Khālīd b. Zayd (d. 50 AH). Yaḥyā b. Jābir said, The son of Abū Ayyūb's brother related to me that Abū Ayyūb wrote to him informing him that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Syria will be conquered for you", the hadith.¹⁹⁶

4. Abū Bakra al-Thaqafī, Nufay' b. al-Ḥārith (d. 51 AH). 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakra narrated from his father that he wrote, The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "A judge is not to decide between two parties while he is angry".¹⁹⁷

5. Jābir b. Samura (d. 66 AH) wrote to 'Āmir b. Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. 104 AH). 'Āmir b. Sa'd said, I wrote to Jābir b. Samura, sending the letter with my servant Nāfi', asking him to inform me of something he had heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He wrote back to me. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, on a Friday, the evening al-Aslamī was stoned. "The religion will remain standing until the Hour comes", the hadith.¹⁹⁸

6. Samura b. Jundub, who died in 58 AH, also preserved material in writing. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī stated that he had read the material in Samura's book, except for a single hadith,¹⁹⁹ while 'Abd Allāh b. 'Awn likewise reported that al-Ḥasan brought out a book from Samura for them to examine.²⁰⁰

7. Bashīr b. Nahīk al-Baṣrī (d. between 91 and 100 AH) said, "I wrote a book from Abū Hurayra".²⁰¹

8. The students of al-Barā' b. 'Azīb (d. 72 AH). 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥanash (d. between 111 and 120 AH) said, "I saw them writing on their palms with reed pens in al-Barā's presence".²⁰²

9. Sulaymān b. Qays al-Yashkurī (d. before 80 AH) wrote down a ṣaḥīfa from Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 78 AH). Sulaymān b. Ḥarb said, Sulaymān al-Yashkurī sojourned in Mecca for a year as Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh's neighbour and wrote down a ṣaḥīfa from him. He died early, and the ṣaḥīfa remained with his mother. The people of Basra asked her to lend it to them, and she would not. So they said, "Then give us access to it so that we may read it." She said, "That, yes." So Qatāda and others attended and read it, and this is what our colleagues

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Mājah, al-Sunan (3/660), no. 2642. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ said: «A ṣaḥīḥ hadith; Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib's narration from 'Umar is taken as connected.»

¹⁹⁶ Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī al-Shāmī (d. 360 AH), Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn (2/299), no. 1380, ed. Ḥamdī 'Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1405 AH / 1984 CE); and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (38/488), no. 23501. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ said: «Its isnād is weak, owing to the weakness of the son of Abū Ayyūb's brother.»

¹⁹⁷ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad (34/14), no. 20379. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ said: «Its isnād is ṣaḥīḥ on the criterion of the two Shaykhs.»

¹⁹⁸ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (3/1453), no. 1822.

¹⁹⁹ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Madīnī (d. 234 AH), al-'Ilal (53), no. 56, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2nd ed., 1980 CE).

²⁰⁰ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-'Ilal wa-Ma'rifat al-Rijāl, the recension of his son 'Abd Allāh (2/260), no. 2187; its isnād is ṣaḥīḥ, as stated by 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf al-Juday', Taḥrīr 'Ulūm al-Hadīth (1/158) (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1st ed., 1424 AH / 2003 CE).

²⁰¹ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH), Taqyīd al-'Ilm (101), ed. Yūsuf al-'Ishsh (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya, n.d., 1974 CE); and Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khallād al-Rāmahurmuzī (d. 360 AH), al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil bayn al-Rāwī wa-l-Wā'ī (538), no. 702, ed. Muḥammad 'Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 3rd ed., 1404 AH).

²⁰² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-'Ilal wa-Ma'rifat al-Rijāl, the recension of his son 'Abd Allāh (1/213), no. 231.

mean when they say “Sulaymān al-Yashkurī related”, or words to that effect.²⁰³

10. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam al-Umawī (d. 85 AH) asked Kathīr b. Murra al-Ḥaḍramī al-Ḥimṣī (d. between 81 and 90 AH) to write down for him the hadiths he had heard, except the hadith of Abū Hurayra. Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb narrated that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān wrote to Kathīr b. Murra al-Ḥaḍramī, who had met at Homs seventy veterans of Badr from among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, asking him to write to him the hadiths he had heard from the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, “except the hadith of Abū Hurayra, for it is with us”.²⁰⁴ Long teacher student relationships add another layer to the same network. A person who studies with one teacher across years hears material repeatedly and in different contexts, which creates more opportunities for discrepancies to be noticed than a model built around one brief encounter with an unknown source.

The Companions’ own relationships with the Prophet are often historically described in this way, since the sources preserve information about who remained close to him and the circumstances under which they learned from him.

The same is true of many Successors and the Companions from whom they learned. The relationship between transmitter and teacher is therefore not always an abstract line on a later isnād, but can be part of a broader biographical record against which the claimed transmission is assessed.

Hence, one ought to treat this as another relevant contrast with earlier religious transmission histories, where comparable detail concerning the relationship between successive generations of transmitters is often unavailable. The comparison may be debated in particular cases, but it identifies exactly the sort of system specific evidence that a prior analogy has to take into account.

The connection between hadith and the occasions on which reports were uttered or later cited is also relevant, because many reports were transmitted together with events that locate them within the life of the Prophet or the first generation.²⁰⁵ Many hadith are also preserved together with the historical event that prompted the Prophet to speak, a relationship later discussed under *sabab wurūd al-ḥadīth*. The value of this material is not the technical label itself, but the way a report can become anchored to a particular episode in the Prophetic period.

Other reports are transmitted because an event in the Companion period gives a narrator reason to cite a Prophetic statement, which later scholars describe as the occasion of citation. Here too, the surrounding story can provide information about why the hadith entered the discussion and who was present when it was used. Hence, hadith books and their commentaries often gather both kinds of context under the broader language of the

²⁰³ Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān, *al-Ma‘rifā wa-l-Tārīkh* (2/279).

²⁰⁴ Muḥammad b. Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (7/448).

²⁰⁵ Some of the information on this phenomenon is drawn from: Bekir Kuzudişli, *Asbāb Īrād al-Ḥadīth: Siyāq Riwayāt al-Ḥadīth fī al-Qarn al-Awwal al-Hijrī, Dirāsa Istiqrā’iyya Taḥlīliyya*, translated from Turkish into Arabic by Naṣr Allāh ‘Abduh, ed. Aḥmad Ṣanawbar (Amman, Jordan: Dār al-Fatḥ li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Naṣhr, 1st ed., 1443 AH / 2022 CE).

report's story.²⁰⁶ Several observations matter here because the evidential value of these occasions depends upon whether they genuinely connect the report to first century life rather than simply adding a later literary setting.

A striking feature of these contextual reports is their concentration in the first century. Kuzudişli notes that occasions of citation become much less common later, which shows us that the stories are not distributed evenly across the centuries as though later transmitters simply kept inventing new settings for old material.²⁰⁷ Put another way, a reader finds many reports tied to first century events but comparatively few whose narrative setting is an event from a later century. Likewise, Kuzudişli explains this shift by arguing that first century narration was more closely interwoven with lived needs, whereas later hadith transmission became increasingly methodical and academic in form.²⁰⁸ Whatever one thinks of the full thesis, the chronological pattern is relevant evidence that has to be explained by both preservation and construction models.

The historical value of an occasion of utterance is especially strong where the event and the *matn* illuminate one another, since the surrounding episode can help explain what the Prophetic statement meant and why that particular wording was remembered. Moreover, an occasion of citation from the Companion period can serve a different purpose. Sometimes it directly bears upon the subject of the hadith, while at other times it mainly tells us about the circumstances of transmission and the people involved. The evidence, then, should be used according to what the context actually supports rather than treated as equally probative in every case.

Later narrative settings, where they occur, tend to have much less connection to the subject of the hadith itself, which is one reason the first century contexts deserve separate attention in the historical analysis.

Where some routes preserve the event and others preserve an abbreviated *matn*, gathering the routes becomes necessary before the historical context can be reconstructed, which once again gives route comparison an evidential role.

The broader point, then, is that first century hadith transmission is repeatedly tied to identifiable people and lived occasions rather than appearing only as detached sentences in late books. That does not prove every story or every report authentic, but it increases the amount of historical structure that the skeptical thesis must explain.

Finally, the early critical practices already discussed belong to this same historical pattern and should not be treated as an unrelated later development.

The comparison with earlier religious traditions therefore has to include the presence or absence of these kinds of transmission controls rather than relying upon the shared fact that the communities were religious. Taken as a whole, the first century historical pattern is much harder to reduce to the original prior analogy than Little's objection suggests.

²⁰⁶ For the word «*qiṣṣa*» («story»): Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (1/142), no. 80; (3/154), no. 1598; (7/84), no. 3977; (16/506), no. 10872; and (26/147), no. 16210. See also Kuzudişli, *Asbāb Īrād al-Ḥadīth* (45).

²⁰⁷ Bekir Kuzudişli, *Asbāb Īrād al-Ḥadīth* (58).

²⁰⁸ Bekir Kuzudişli, *Asbāb Īrād al-Ḥadīth* (59); Bekir Kuzudişli, *Asbāb Īrād al-Ḥadīth* (51-286).

The point is that a hypothesis of unusually widespread successful fabrication must explain a large and geographically distributed narrator network, early writing, long teacher/student relationships, contextualized reports, and the already discussed practices of criticism. As those assumptions accumulate, the traditional hypothesis may become more parsimonious even while it continues to allow ordinary error and some fabrication.

Let E_6 represent this broader transmission structure together with the premodern institutional practices discussed immediately before it. Because many of its components are related to the earlier evidence of criticism, the cumulative model should again avoid an aggressive Bayes factor. Suppose $P(E_6 \mid H_s, E_{<6}, k) = 0.55$ and $P(E_6 \mid H_t, E_{<6}, k) = 0.80$.

$$O_6 = 0.20 \times (0.55 / 0.80) \approx 0.14$$

The running probability therefore moves to roughly 87.8 percent for H_t and 12.2 percent for H_s . The update is meaningful because the evidence now concerns the shape of the transmission network itself rather than only the moral intentions of the transmitters.

This issue, then, is where explanatory scope and parsimony interact most clearly. A skeptical model can propose a separate auxiliary explanation for early writing, another for regional spread, another for the abundance of students, and another for the contextual stories attached to reports. The mere availability of those auxiliary stories does not make the model superior however. The question is whether one skeptical mechanism explains the total pattern with fewer unsupported assumptions than a preservation model in which genuine transmission exists alongside error and fabrication.

The Qur'an as Background Knowledge Rather Than a Hadith Proof

The Qur'an should therefore be used as background knowledge when computing our Bayesian analysis regarding hadith authenticity. Hadith and Qur'anic transmission differ in important ways, and the paper would lose explanatory precision if it treated them as though they were the same. The more important point is that the early Muslim community already provides a counter case to the deterministic version of Little's analogy, because intense political and sectarian pressures did not produce competing authoritative Qur'ans that displaced the communal text.

An incentive, then, does not establish its own success. A political or theological faction might have benefited from an altered verse, but the possible usefulness of that alteration did not by itself generate an accepted sectarian scripture.

Qur'anic preservation also tells us something about the community's practical capacity for preservation. It shows that early Muslims could maintain foundational religious material across regions and generations, which means that the hadith question begins in a historical environment where preservation has already been demonstrated in at least one central domain.

Because this evidence is indirect, it should receive only a modest cumulative update. Let E_7 represent the Qur'anic counter case and the preservation culture it reveals. A cautious assignment may use $P(E_7 \mid H_s, E_{<7}, k) = 0.70$ and $P(E_7 \mid H_t, E_{<7}, k) = 0.85$, since even a skeptical hadith model can easily accept Qur'anic preservation while denying the same level of reliability to hadith.

$$O_7 = 0.14 \times (0.70 / 0.85) \approx 0.11$$

The result is roughly 89.7 percent for H_t and 10.3 percent for H_s .

Moving from General Analogy to the Muslim Case

The evidence considered so far shows why a generic religious analogy has to give way to a system specific analysis. The Muslim case contains a broad narrator network and early written material, while the reports also preserve long relationships between teachers and students. Those features do not prove authenticity on their own, but they change what each hypothesis should lead us to expect.

The skeptical model can accommodate each feature by proposing an additional explanation, but compatibility is weaker than justification. It may argue that apparently early writing is misleading or that routes which look independent ultimately depend upon a common source. Each of those claims is possible, but each also requires evidence, and parsimony is lost when auxiliary explanations are added simply to protect the conclusion from every new piece of contrary data.

The traditional thesis defended here is also deliberately limited. It does not require exact wording in every report and it does not require every chain to be independent. It requires only that the historical system preserve a meaningful body of Prophetic material. Little's stronger conclusion, then, cannot be reached by finding some defective reports, because the skeptical thesis must show that the defects are so extensive that the positive mechanisms described above fail to raise the evidential status of the corpus in any meaningful way.

Why Incentives to Fabricate Did Not Operate Alone

Little is right to include incentives for fabrication in the historical model, but a model that contains only the incentives pointing toward falsehood is incomplete. The same society also contained reasons to tell the truth and mechanisms that increased the cost of being exposed, and those counter forces must be included before one can claim that political pressure made fabrication the expected outcome.

The evidence below therefore concerns the forces operating against fabrication, and the important question is not whether they made lying impossible, since known fabricators

show that they did not, but whether they changed the probability that an available incentive would actually produce a successful forged report.

Religious and Moral Counter Incentives

The Qur'anic and Prophetic condemnations of lying already discussed did more than provide abstract doctrines. Repeated religious norms can shape conduct by changing what a person believes he stands to lose through deception, especially when the deception is understood as a lie about Allah or His Messenger rather than as an ordinary social falsehood.

Statements from the Companions and senior Successors reinforce the same moral expectation, and their evidential value lies in showing that the prohibition was not confined to a text that later transmitters could ignore in practice.

It would therefore be methodologically incomplete to model only the pressures that encouraged fabrication while excluding the repeated religious pressure toward truthfulness. The Qur'an itself demands testimony for Allah even when the truth works against the witness, as in the words "...witnesses for Allah, even against yourselves or your parents and close relatives". The point is not that every Muslim obeyed this command perfectly. The point is that a historical model of Muslim conduct has to include a moral system that repeatedly made truthfulness a religious obligation, because that system changes the expected response to the incentives Little emphasizes.²⁰⁹ The same point applies to the broader moral cultivation of the community. A person raised to treat truthfulness as obedience to Allah will not respond to an opportunity for fabrication in exactly the same way as a model that treats the opportunity itself as the only causal force.

Later Muslim scholarship developed an explicit literature concerning the cultivation of the soul, but the underlying concern with taqwā and moral discipline appears much earlier and belongs to the social background of the first generations. That cultivation functions as background evidence that can raise or lower what we expect from a population, after which the conduct of individual narrators still has to be investigated.

The lives of early transmitters are therefore relevant not because piety should be accepted as a substitute for evidence, but because a demonstrated record of conduct changes the probability that a person will act upon an available motive to lie.

Put another way, two people can face the same temptation while having very different probabilities of acting upon it, because one person's established conduct may show that he repeatedly resists the same kind of pressure. The same logic applies when Little moves from a social incentive to a prediction about an entire transmitting community.

A genuine difference in moral restraints therefore weakens an analogy that relies upon external circumstances alone, especially where later evidence shows that those restraints sometimes held even under extreme pressure.

²⁰⁹ The Noble Qur'ān, 4:135, al-Nisā'.

The case of al-Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī is especially useful because it gives us both sides of Little’s model in the same historical setting. Al-Mukhtār reportedly offered one thousand dinars for a hadith that would support his cause, which confirms that political actors could create real incentives for fabrication. The same incident, however, also gives us an opportunity to observe whether transmitters always yielded to those incentives.²¹⁰ Muḥammad b. ‘Ammār b. Yāsir is reported to have refused al-Mukhtār’s request that he fabricate a hadith on the authority of his father, and the account says that al-Mukhtār killed him for that refusal.²¹¹ If the report is accepted, the evidential point is unusually direct, because a political incentive and a severe threat are both present while the requested fabrication still does not occur.

A similar example is reported of Ibn al-Rab‘a al-Khuzā‘ī. Al-Mukhtār is said to have offered him seven hundred dinars for a Prophetic report that would support his cause, yet Ibn al-Rab‘a refused and appealed directly to the punishment for lying upon the Prophet.²¹² The value of the report, then, lies in the way the incentive and the counter incentive appear in the same case, because the possibility of worldly gain does not explain the outcome unless one also asks what other commitments were operating upon the transmitter.

The earlier standalone analysis assigned this resistance evidence $P(E_8 | H_t, k) = 0.80$ and $P(E_8 | H_s, k) = 0.25$, which gives a Bayes factor of 3.2 in favor of the traditional thesis. That remains useful for showing the raw direction of the evidence, but it would be too aggressive to multiply that full factor into the running model because the willingness to resist fabrication is partly explained by the religious norms already counted earlier. Given this dependence, then, a more cautious conditional assignment is $P(E_8 | H_s, E_{<8}, k) = 0.50$ and $P(E_8 | H_t, E_{<8}, k) = 0.70$, so that this issue still updates the case while avoiding the mistake of counting the same moral evidence twice.

$$O_8 = 0.11 \times (0.50 / 0.70) \approx 0.082$$

The running probability becomes approximately 92.4 percent for H_t and 7.6 percent for H_s . The point is not that two refusal stories statistically represent every narrator. Rather, they show that the same first century environment that created incentives to fabricate also produced people who treated the religious cost of fabrication as greater than a substantial worldly benefit, which has to be included when the causal pressures are modeled.

²¹⁰ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb al-Sa‘dī al-Jūzajānī (d. 259 AH), *Aḥwāl al-Rijāl* (25), ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Bastawī (Faisalabad, Pakistan: Ḥadīth Academy, n.d.).

²¹¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327 AH), *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta’dīl* (8/43), no editor named (Hyderabad, India: Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1st ed., 1271 AH / 1952 CE); Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), *al-Iṣāba fī Tamayiz al-Ṣaḥāba* (6/276), ed. ‘Adil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1415 AH); and Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā’ al-Rijāl* (26/167), ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1400 AH / 1980 CE).

²¹² Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), *al-Tārīkh al-Awsaṭ*, printed erroneously under the title *al-Tārīkh al-Ṣaghīr* (1/147), no. 656, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa‘y, and Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1st ed., 1397 AH / 1977 CE); and Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr* (8/435), supervised by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mu‘īn Khān (Hyderabad, Deccan: Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, n.d.).

PreIslamic Arab culture also contained a strong social condemnation of lying, as the poetry and proverbs below illustrate. I will not assign this material another numerical update, since it overlaps heavily with the broader moral background already represented in E₈ and would add little independent discriminatory force.

Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd, one of the pre-Islamic poets, expressed this social contrast in the following way.

“Truthfulness is the companion of the noble man in whom hopes are placed; lying is the companion of the base and luckless”.²¹³ The same moral judgment appears in Arab proverbial speech.

The proverb praises truthfulness and condemns lying,²¹⁴ since truthfulness raises the standing of the person who speaks it, while lying lowers its speaker and leaves him despised among the people.

Public Oversight and the Cost of Lying

Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, who died in 154 AH, said, “A man remains at ease in his mind and safe from people’s tongues so long as he has not composed a book²¹⁵ or uttered poetry”.²¹⁶ And al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463 AH) said, “Whoever writes a book has placed his mind on a platter and offered it to the people”.²¹⁷ These sayings show, one way or another, that once a person places a claim into public circulation, the claim becomes available to people who may possess the information needed to expose it. Hadith transmission intensified this problem for a dishonest narrator because other people could have heard from the same teacher or could later ask the teacher directly.

A narrator, then, was not evaluated once and permanently released from scrutiny. As long as he continued to narrate, new reports could be compared with earlier reports and with what other students preserved from the same source.

The general religious duty to correct falsehood adds another layer to this oversight. The Qur’anic command to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong gave ordinary Muslims a reason to object to a religious lie, while specialists possessed the additional knowledge needed to compare the transmission itself.²¹⁸ No scholar therefore possessed an unconditional right to have a report accepted merely because of his rank. A claim could be traced to the teacher from whom he said he heard it and compared with what fellow

²¹³ ʿAbd al-Qādir b. ʿUmar al-Baghdādī (d. 1093 AH), *Khizānat al-Adab wa-Lubb Lubāb Lisān al-ʿArab* (2/424), ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 4th ed., 1418 AH / 1997 CE).

²¹⁴ Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī (d. 518 AH), *Majmaʿ al-Amthāl* (1/408), ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.).

²¹⁵ The expression «yaḍaʿ kitāban» in this context means «composes a book»; «yaḍaʿ» here does not carry the sense of fabrication but of authorship.

²¹⁶ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-Akhlāq al-Rāwī wa-Ādāb al-Sāmiʿ* (2/283), no. 1864.

²¹⁷ ʿAlī b. al-Mufaḍḍal al-Maḥdī (d. 611 AH), *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn al-Murattaba ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Arbaʿīn* (505), ed. Muḥammad Sālim b. Muḥammad b. Jumʿān al-ʿAbbādī (Riyadh: Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf, 1st ed., n.d.).

²¹⁸ The Noble Qurʾān, 3:104, Āl ʿImrān.

students had preserved, which makes the institutional structure decentralized rather than dependent upon the honesty of one central authority.

The reports, below, therefore, show this public checking in practice rather than merely describing it as an ideal. They should not be counted as separate and independent Bayes factors, since each report instantiates the same broader practice of comparison and renewed questioning, but taken together they help establish that corroboration and rechecking belonged to the actual epistemic environment in which hadith circulated.

(1) What Nāfi' narrated. It was said to Ibn 'Umar that Abū Hurayra says, I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. "Whoever follows a funeral procession has a qīrāṭ of reward." Ibn 'Umar said, "Abū Hurayra is prolific upon us", and he sent to 'Ā'isha and asked her, and she confirmed Abū Hurayra. Ibn 'Umar then said, "We have neglected many qīrāṭs".²¹⁹ The point of Ibn 'Umar's response is that a prolific narrator could still be checked against another person who possessed access to the same Prophetic material. Once 'Ā'isha confirms the report, the corroboration gives Ibn 'Umar a further reason to accept it, which shows how additional testimony could raise justification without requiring the original witness to be treated as a liar.

(2) There is also the narration of Abū Rāfi', the client of the Prophet ﷺ, from 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "No prophet whom Allah sent to a nation before me but had, from among his nation, disciples and companions who held to his sunna and followed his command. Then there came after them successors who say what they do not do and do what they are not commanded. Whoever strives against them with his hand is a believer; whoever strives against them with his tongue is a believer; and whoever strives against them with his heart is a believer; beyond that there is not a mustard seed's weight of faith." Abū Rāfi' said, I related it to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar and he rejected it from me. Then Ibn Mas'ūd arrived and lodged at Qanāt, and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar had me accompany him to visit him. I went along with him, and when we had sat down I asked Ibn Mas'ūd about this hadith, and he related it to me exactly as I had related it to Ibn 'Umar.²²⁰ The Abū Rāfi' episode, for example, shows a report from Ibn Mas'ūd being challenged by Ibn 'Umar and then checked directly with Ibn Mas'ūd when the men later meet. The agreement between the original source and Abū Rāfi's earlier wording gives the latter's transmission independent support within the story.

(3) Similarly, 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr narrated. I heard 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ say. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. "Allah does not take away knowledge by wresting it from people; rather, He takes away knowledge by taking away the scholars, until, when He has left no scholar, the people take ignorant men as their heads. These are consulted and give rulings without knowledge, going astray themselves and leading others astray." Then I met 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr at the turn of the year and asked him, and he repeated the hadith to us exactly as he had related it before, saying. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say.²²¹ The

²¹⁹ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/653), no. 954.

²²⁰ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (1/69), no. 50.

²²¹ Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/2058), no. 2673.

report of 'Urwa and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr uses a different form of the same method. The narrator is asked for the report again after a year, and his repetition is compared with what he said before, a test that 'Ā'isha is also reported to have requested.²²²

(4) Another instance. Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik asked al-Zuhrī to dictate to one of his sons. He called for a scribe, and al-Zuhrī dictated four hundred hadiths. Al-Zuhrī then left Hishām's presence and said, "Where are you, people of hadith?", and related to them those same four hundred hadiths. Hishām waited a month or thereabouts, then said to al-Zuhrī. "The book you dictated to us has been lost." He said, "No matter; call for a scribe." A scribe was summoned, and he dictated the four hundred hadiths again. Hishām then collated it with the first copy, and it did not depart from it by a single letter.²²³ Hishām's test of al-Zuhrī likewise uses a written control. After the first four hundred hadiths were dictated and preserved, al-Zuhrī was asked to dictate them again after a period had passed, and the two records were then compared. The importance of the episode lies in the possibility of checking memory against an earlier fixed record rather than relying upon reputation alone.

(5) Likewise, al-Zuhrī narrated from 'Urwa, from 'Ā'isha, that the sun was eclipsed in the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and he sent out a caller announcing congregational prayer. He then went forward and prayed four bowings within two rak'as, with four prostrations. Al-Zuhrī said to 'Urwa: "What is this your brother 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr has done? He prayed only two rak'as, like the dawn prayer, when he prayed in Medina." 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr replied, "Indeed; he missed the sunna".²²⁴ The eclipse report adds another dimension, since 'Urwa tells al-Zuhrī that 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr "missed the sunna" in the way he performed the prayer. The transmission network, then, did not only preserve reports, but could also be used to evaluate whether later conduct corresponded to the remembered Prophetic practice.

(6) Similarly, 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr narrated. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī sought leave to enter upon 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and leave was not given, 'Umar apparently being occupied. Abū Mūsā turned back. When 'Umar had finished, he said, "Did I not hear the voice of 'Abd Allāh b. Qays? Grant him leave." He was told. "He has turned back." So 'Umar summoned him, and Abū Mūsā said, "We were commanded to do so." 'Umar said, "Bring me proof of it." So he went off to the assembly of the Anṣār and asked them, and they said, "None will testify to this for you but the youngest of us, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī." So he took Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, and 'Umar said, "Did this command of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ escape me? The striking of bargains in the markets distracted me", meaning going out to trade.²²⁵ 'Umar's request that Abū Mūsā produce someone else who knew the same instruction is perhaps the clearest example of corroboration. Abū Mūsā then brings Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, who confirms the Prophetic command, so the report gains support from another witness rather than from a presumption that Abū Mūsā must be right.

²²² Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (4/2059), no. 2673.

²²³ Ya'qūb b. Sufyān, al-Ma'rifa wa-l-Tārīkh (1/640); and al-Rāmahurmuzī, al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil (397), no. 406.

²²⁴ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (2/40), no. 1066.

²²⁵ Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (3/55), no. 2062.

These cases show that even a narrator whose general truthfulness was not being denied could be asked for further confirmation when the circumstances called for it. Corroboration, then, functioned as additional evidence rather than as an insult to the narrator's character.

The same demand for communal confirmation appears when 'Umar asks a group of senior Companions whether they know the Prophet's statement concerning inheritance, after which he separately asks 'Alī and al-'Abbās to confirm the same wording. The report mentions: "I adjure you by Allah, by whom the heaven and the earth stand: do you know that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: We are not inherited from; whatever we leave behind is charity?" He continues: "I adjure you both by Allah: do you know that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said that?" To which it was replied "He did say that".²²⁶ Abū Ḥumayd al-Sā'idī makes the logic explicit when, after relating a report, he directs the hearer to "Ask Zayd b. Thābit, for he was present with me".²²⁷ The hearer, then, is invited to verify the account rather than to accept the narrator's prestige as sufficient by itself.

Incentives, Counter Incentives, and the Direction of the Evidence

Little gives substantial weight to the incentives that may have encouraged fabrication, but the evidence now shows why those incentives cannot be entered into the prior alone. The same historical environment contained strong counter incentives and a public structure in which a false report could be challenged by people with access to the source. A justified historical explanation must therefore model both directions of pressure.

²²⁶ al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ (7/63), no. 5358.

²²⁷ Abū Bakr 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī al-Makkī (d. 219 AH), al-Musnad (2/88-89), no. 863, ed. Ḥasan Salīm Asad (Damascus: Dār al-Saqā, 1st ed., 1996 CE).

These cases cannot establish the character of every narrator, but they remove any justification for treating political benefit as though it mechanically produced compliance.²²⁸ The remaining public oversight evidence, E_9 , is partly dependent upon the earlier evidence of accuracy and route comparison, so it should again receive a modest conditional update. Suppose $P(E_9 \mid H_s, E_{<9}, k) = 0.65$ and $P(E_9 \mid H_t, E_{<9}, k) = 0.85$. The traditional thesis expects a preservation system to expose transmitters to repeated comparison, while the skeptical thesis can allow the same practice but must maintain that it was insufficient to prevent unusual unreliability.

$$O_9 = 0.082 \times (0.65 / 0.85) \approx 0.063$$

The final running odds are therefore about 0.063 to 1 for H_s over H_t , which corresponds to roughly 5.9 percent for the skeptical thesis and 94.1 percent for the traditional thesis within this illustrative model. Again, the paper is not claiming that history has produced a measured 94.1 percent probability. The calculation shows what happens when the same skeptical starting advantage is repeatedly required to update in response to Muslim specific evidence rather than being restated at every stage as though nothing had changed.

Public oversight is also directly relevant to Little's use of the word "institution". No centralized institution was required for a narrator to face accountability, because the verification was distributed across teachers and students who had access to overlapping material. This kind of structure can fail in particular cases, but its existence is evidence that the early system was not simply an unregulated market of anonymous religious claims.

We argue, then, that these forces belong inside the probability model. A skeptical explanation that counts each motive for fabrication while assigning no evidential weight to the motives for truthfulness, the cost of exposure, and the actual practices of verification is not neutral. It is simply a skeptical prior whose assumptions have been hidden inside the selection of evidence.

²²⁸ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya'qūb al-Sa'dī al-Jūzajānī (d. 259 AH), *Aḥwāl al-Rijāl* (25), ed. 'Abd al-'Alīm 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Bastawī (Faisalabad, Pakistan: Ḥadīth Academy, n.d.); 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 327 AH), *al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta'dīl* (8/43), no editor named (Hyderabad, India: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1st ed., 1271 AH / 1952 CE); Aḥmad b. 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), *al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba* (6/276), ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1415 AH); and Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī (d. 742 AH), *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl* (26/167), ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1st ed., 1400 AH / 1980 CE); Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), *al-Tārīkh al-Awsaṭ*, printed erroneously under the title *al-Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/147), no. 656, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'y, and Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1st ed., 1397 AH / 1977 CE); and Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr* (8/435), supervised by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'īn Khān (Hyderabad, Deccan: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, n.d.).

Final Bayesian and Epistemological Assessment

Little's Burden of Justification

The first objection can now be assessed against the stronger claim Little actually makes. He does not merely need to show that fabrication occurred, because that proposition is already granted. He needs to justify the conclusion that fabrication and later development were so successful that the hadith corpus became epistemically inferior to comparable historical traditions despite the Muslim specific evidence surveyed above.

That burden is heavier because “unusually unreliable” is a comparative claim. It requires some criterion by which the hadith corpus is shown to perform worse than other bodies of ancient testimony, and the ordinary facts that witnesses can lie or that communities experience political conflict cannot establish that comparison without a system breaker that is specific to hadith.

Put another way, the conclusion needs more than a list of possible failure mechanisms. It needs evidence that those mechanisms defeated the actual preservational controls often enough to make the skeptical model the better historical explanation.

1. A claim of unusual unreliability is justified only when the evidence shows that the relevant corpus is epistemically inferior to the comparison class rather than merely subject to ordinary historical error.
2. Little maintains that the hadith corpus meets that stronger description.
3. He must therefore show that the mechanisms of transmission and criticism failed at the scale required by that conclusion.

The evidence considered in this paper does not prove that every mechanism succeeded in every case, but it makes the skeptical burden harder than the first objection initially suggests. The early community possessed rules of verification and then applied practical tests to memory and transmission. The later network also contained written material and geographically dispersed transmitters, while public oversight created additional opportunities to expose defects. These are different classes of evidence, and a model of unusual unreliability must explain why their cumulative effect remains too weak to preserve meaningful Prophetic material.

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for the Skeptical Conclusion

The problem can also be stated through the conceptual analysis of justification developed in the introductory paper. Little must tell us what conditions are necessary and sufficient for classifying a historical corpus as unusually unreliable, because the presence of some known fabrications cannot be sufficient unless we are prepared to apply the same conclusion to nearly every ancient historical tradition in which false reports existed.

Compatibility with unreliability is therefore not enough. A feature becomes a strong skeptical defeater only when it is substantially more expected on the skeptical hypothesis than on meaningful preservation, and the hypothesis as a whole is justified only when it explains the total evidence with greater scope and power while remaining sufficiently parsimonious.

The inferential problem may therefore be stated without reducing it to a formal syllogism.

1. A skeptical objection is historically justified when it supplies sufficient grounds for rejection or when the skeptical model makes the relevant evidence more expected than the preservation model.
2. Little's first objection establishes that fabrication was possible and that early Muslims lived under conditions capable of creating motives for it.
3. Those propositions do not establish that the hadith tradition satisfies the stronger conditions of unusual unreliability, especially once the Muslim-specific evidence is incorporated into the comparison.
4. The conclusion of unusual unreliability therefore does not follow from the first objection alone.

Parsimony and the Total Evidence

Parsimony becomes especially important once the total evidence is on the table. A theory in which some reports were fabricated is easy to maintain and is already accepted within the Muslim tradition. A theory in which the corpus is unusually unreliable must explain why the early concern for truthfulness developed alongside practical correction of error, why the routes of transmission were preserved, and why the broader network of writing and public comparison still failed so comprehensively that meaningful Prophetic material became historically inaccessible.

Put another way, Little cannot lower the standard for hadith by appealing to limitations that are ordinary features of ancient testimony while continuing to use other ancient sources. This is not a *tu quoque* argument. It is a demand for a relevant system breaker that explains why the hadith case should receive a substantially lower epistemic status.

The skeptical thesis may ultimately provide such evidence in a particular report or category, and later objections must therefore be assessed on their own merits. The first objection, however, does not yet provide enough explanatory power to overcome the Muslim specific evidence, and the running Bayesian model makes that imbalance visible rather than allowing the initial prior to do the work of the entire argument.

Conclusion

The central epistemic problem with Little's first objection is therefore the movement from possibility to probability before the Muslim specific evidence has been allowed to update the comparison. Fabrication occurred and human memory was fallible, but those facts do not by themselves establish that the hadith tradition is probably unreliable, much less that it is unusually unreliable when placed beside other bodies of ancient testimony.

Once the debate is framed as a comparison between H_s and H_t , the historical task becomes clearer. The question, then, is which model makes the actual evidence more expected after the prior is updated by early verification, practical error correction, concern for connectedness, the structure of transmission, and the counter incentives that operated against lying.

We do not claim that every report is authentic, and we do not require the critics to have been infallible. A realistic traditional hypothesis should predict some error and some fabrication. What it maintains is that the system preserved a meaningful body of Prophetic material, and the evidence discussed throughout this response is more naturally explained by that limited thesis than by the stronger claim that the corpus became unusually unreliable before meaningful criticism could protect it.

Under the illustrative cumulative assignments used in this paper, Little's initial 75 to 25 advantage is gradually reversed and the final running model reaches roughly 94 percent for H_t . The exact number is not the conclusion. The conclusion is that the skeptical prior cannot remain fixed once evidence that is more expected under preservation is introduced.

A sensitivity check makes the same point in a more cautious way. If each of the conditional Bayes factors used above were moved halfway back toward a neutral value of 1, thereby cutting much of their discriminatory force, the cumulative model would still place the traditional thesis at roughly 65 percent rather than the 25 percent with which it began. The result is therefore not dependent upon one dramatic update. It depends upon the repeated direction of several different classes of evidence. Little's first objection, then, gives us a reason to investigate hadith critically, but it does not justify the stronger conclusion that the hadith tradition is unusually unreliable.