

Enhancing Hadith Education Through Al-Dhahabī's Methodology: A Critical Reassessment of His Alleged Reluctance to Classify Fabricated Hadith

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ABSTRACT:

The interpretation of classical Hadith methodological texts plays a fundamental role in both Hadith scholarship and contemporary Hadith education. One of the recurring claims in modern discussions is that al-Dhahabī refrained from classifying disputed narrations as *mawḍūʿ* (fabricated) whenever disagreement existed among Hadith scholars regarding their authenticity. This study critically reassesses that claim by examining whether it accurately reflects al-Dhahabī's methodological approach. Employing a qualitative textual research design, the study adopts a three-layer analytical framework integrating contextual and linguistic analysis of the disputed passage in al-Mūqīẓah, comparative analysis of the classical commentary tradition, and empirical analysis of selected representative cases from al-Dhahabī's Hadith-critical works. The findings demonstrate that the frequently cited expression, "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated," does not represent al-Dhahabī's own methodological position but rather reports the cautious terminology adopted by a particular group of Hadith scholars. This interpretation is consistently supported by the principal commentators on al-Mūqīẓah, who distinguish between al-Dhahabī's authorial voice and the opinions he records. Furthermore, the analysis of representative case studies reveals that al-Dhahabī repeatedly classified narrations as *mawḍūʿ* despite the existence of differing scholarly evaluations, indicating that his judgments were based on the cumulative strength of evidential indicators (*qarāʾin*) rather than on the presence or absence of scholarly consensus. The study contributes to the field by proposing a three-layer analytical framework that integrates textual, interpretive, and empirical evidence for reassessing disputed methodological claims in classical Hadith scholarship. Beyond clarifying al-Dhahabī's methodology, the findings offer important implications for Hadith education by

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highlighting the importance of contextual reading, critical engagement with the commentary tradition, and the integration of theoretical and practical analyses in teaching classical Hadith methodology.

Keywords: al-Dhahabī; Hadith methodology; Hadith education; fabricated Hadith; textual analysis

1. Introduction

The Al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH/1348 CE) is widely recognised as one of the foremost authorities in the Islamic tradition of Hadith criticism. His scholarly contributions span the disciplines of *rijāl*, *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, historical writing, and the critical evaluation of both the chain of transmission (*isnād*) and textual content (*matn*). His works demonstrate not only an extensive command of earlier Hadith scholarship but also an exceptional capacity for independent critical judgment. Rather than merely transmitting the opinions of earlier authorities, al-Dhahabī consistently subjected narrations to rigorous scrutiny, frequently commenting on the reliability of narrators, the integrity of transmission chains, textual inconsistencies, and methodological weaknesses. This analytical approach distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries and has firmly established his reputation as one of the most influential authorities in the science of Hadith criticism (al-Dhahabī, 2004).

Born in Damascus in 673 AH, al-Dhahabī devoted his scholarly career to the study of Hadith after initially specialising in the science of *qirā'āt*. His extensive scholarly journeys across major centres of Islamic learning, including Damascus, Makkah, Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Aleppo, Tripoli, and the Hijaz, enabled him to study under numerous distinguished scholars and to acquire a vast corpus of transmitted knowledge (al-Dhahabī, 1997).

His expertise subsequently expanded beyond Hadith to include Islamic history, *rijāl*, jurisprudence, and Arabic linguistic studies, allowing him to develop a comprehensive critical methodology that integrated historical evidence, biographical criticism, and legal reasoning.

Al-Dhahabī's intellectual authority was further reinforced through his appointments as a leading Hadith teacher in several prominent institutions in Damascus, including Dār al-Ḥadīth Turbat Umm al-Ṣāliḥ and Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Zāhiriyyah. His scholarly legacy rests upon two complementary pillars: prolific academic writing and systematic Hadith instruction, both of which profoundly influenced subsequent generations of Hadith scholars (al-Dhahabī, 1985). His close intellectual association with eminent scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Mizzī, and al-Barzālī also shaped his methodological orientation, particularly his strong commitment to the Salafī intellectual tradition and classical Hadith scholarship (al-Dhahabī, 1985).

Beyond Hadith criticism, al-Dhahabī was also recognised for his competence in Islamic jurisprudence. Although he did not devote independent works exclusively to legal theory, juristic reasoning is evident throughout his writings, reflecting methodological balance, analytical precision, and a commitment to the Qur'an and the Sunnah while avoiding excessive adherence to any particular legal school (Faqīh, 2023). His student and close companion, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī, described him as a scholar whose intellectual depth surpassed that of many traditional muḥaddithūn, highlighting his ability to identify textual weaknesses, evaluate problematic transmission chains, and critically assess narrators whenever discussing individual Hadith reports (Faqīh, 2023).

The breadth of al-Dhahabī's scholarship is reflected in his numerous influential works, including *Tārīkh al-Islām*, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz*, *Talkhīṣ al-Mustadrak*, *al-Mūqīzah*, and *al-Kabā'ir*. These works collectively illustrate a sophisticated methodology that combines historical

documentation, narrator criticism, and Hadith evaluation within a coherent analytical framework (Faqīh, 2023). Consequently, both classical and contemporary scholars have consistently acknowledged al-Dhahabī as one of the foremost authorities in the sciences of Hadith and *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, whose critical judgments continue to shape contemporary Hadith scholarship (al-Dhahabī, 1985; al-Dhahabī, 1997).

Despite this well-established scholarly authority, a contemporary methodological debate has emerged concerning al-Dhahabī's approach to classifying fabricated Hadith. Some contemporary researchers have argued that al-Dhahabī was reluctant to classify a narration as fabricated whenever earlier Hadith authorities differed regarding its authenticity. This interpretation is primarily derived from a particular reading of his statement in *al-Mūqīḏah*, which has been understood as suggesting that he intentionally refrained from declaring disputed narrations fabricated unless a clear scholarly consensus already existed (Iqbal Zain al-Jauhari, 2026). Such an interpretation raises important epistemological questions concerning the distinction between al-Dhahabī's personal methodological position and his citation of earlier scholarly opinions, as well as the role of contextual evidence (*qarā'in*) in determining whether a narration should be classified as fabricated.

Although this claim has received increasing attention in contemporary discussions of Hadith methodology, it has not been subjected to a systematic investigation that compares al-Dhahabī's theoretical statements with his actual critical practice. Existing discussions have largely relied on isolated textual interpretations, particularly his statement in *al-Mūqīḏah*, without comprehensively examining whether his practical judgments across his major works consistently support the interpretation attributed to him. Consequently, a significant methodological gap remains regarding the relationship between al-Dhahabī's theoretical principles and his practical application of fabricated Hadith classification.

This unresolved issue is particularly relevant to contemporary Hadith education, where students and researchers frequently rely on condensed methodological summaries without critically examining their practical implementation in primary sources. Effective Hadith education requires more than the transmission of theoretical principles; it demands the cultivation of critical reasoning through the examination of how classical scholars applied those principles when confronted with conflicting evidence. In this respect, al-Dhahabī's methodology offers a valuable pedagogical model for developing analytical competence, methodological consistency, and evidence-based judgment in advanced Hadith studies.

Accordingly, this study critically reassesses the claim that al-Dhahabī was reluctant to classify Hadith as fabricated whenever scholarly disagreement existed concerning their authenticity. Specifically, the study seeks to analyse the intended meaning of al-Dhahabī's statement in *al-Mūqīḏah* within its broader methodological context and to evaluate whether his practical judgments support the interpretation commonly attributed to him.

Furthermore, by examining representative case studies, this study demonstrates that al-Dhahabī explicitly classified numerous narrations as fabricated despite their being regarded by other Hadith scholars as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, or *ḍa'īf*. Through this theoretical and practical reassessment, the study contributes to a more accurate understanding of al-Dhahabī's methodology while highlighting its pedagogical significance for enhancing critical thinking and methodological instruction in contemporary Hadith education.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design based on textual analysis to reassess the claim that al-Dhahabī refrained from classifying disputed narrations as *mawḏū'*. Rather than examining the issue through isolated textual quotations, the study adopted a structured analytical framework that integrates contextual analysis, comparative interpretation, and empirical examination of al-

Dhahabī's critical practice. This approach was selected because the research problem concerns the interpretation of a classical methodological text and its consistency with the author's practical application in Hadith criticism.

The primary sources of analysis consisted of al-Dhahabī's *al-Mūqīḏah* as the principal methodological text and his major Hadith-critical works in which he evaluated narrations as *mawḏūʿ*.

To contextualise the disputed passage, classical and contemporary commentaries on *al-Mūqīḏah* were also examined, together with selected Hadith collections and biographical-critical literature relevant to the representative case studies analysed in this research. These sources were selected because they directly address the methodological question investigated in this study and provide sufficient evidence for evaluating the consistency between al-Dhahabī's theoretical statements and his practical judgments.

The analysis was conducted through three complementary analytical stages. The first stage involved a contextual and linguistic analysis of the disputed passage in *al-Mūqīḏah*. Rather than interpreting the expression "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" in isolation, the surrounding discussion, grammatical structure, narrative flow, and literary context were examined to determine whether the statement represented al-Dhahabī's own methodological position or a reported scholarly opinion.

The second stage consisted of a comparative analysis of the commentary tradition on *al-Mūqīḏah*. The interpretations of leading Hadith scholars who explained the disputed passage were analysed comparatively in order to identify areas of agreement, methodological differences, and the interpretive principles underlying their

explanations. Particular attention was given to how these scholars distinguished between al-Dhahabī's authorial voice and the opinions of other scholars that he cited within his discussion. This stage enabled the study to evaluate whether the contemporary interpretation corresponds with the mainstream scholarly understanding of the text.

The third stage involved an empirical analysis of al-Dhahabī's critical practice through selected representative case studies. Narrations that had received differing evaluations among Hadith scholars were examined to determine how al-Dhahabī applied the concept of *mawḏūʿ* in practice.

His judgments were then compared with the evaluations of other prominent Hadith critics to identify recurring methodological patterns. The purpose of this stage was not to reassess the authenticity of the narrations themselves, but to evaluate whether al-Dhahabī consistently applied the methodological principles articulated in *al-Mūqīḏah*.

The findings from these three analytical stages were subsequently synthesised to assess the validity of the contemporary claim under investigation. By integrating internal textual evidence, the classical interpretive tradition, and empirical evidence from al-Dhahabī's own critical practice, the study developed a comprehensive analytical framework for reassessing disputed methodological claims in classical Hadith scholarship.

This multidimensional approach enables the interpretation of methodological texts to be examined not only through their wording but also through their scholarly reception and practical application, thereby providing a more rigorous basis for understanding the methodological principles of classical Hadith critics.

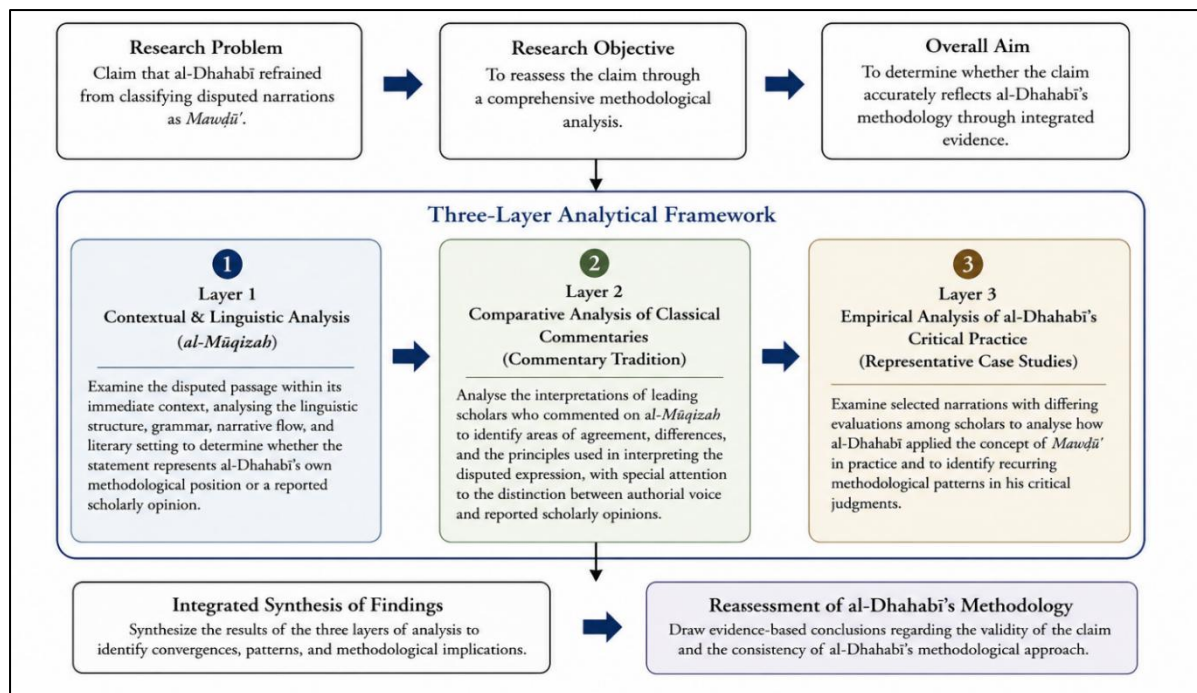


FIGURE 1. Three-Layer Analytical Framework for Reassessing al-Dhahabī's Methodology

3. Results and Finding

The findings of this study are presented through a three-layer analytical framework designed to reassess the claim that al-Dhahabī refrained from classifying disputed narrations as *mawḍūʿ* whenever scholarly disagreement existed regarding their authenticity. Rather than relying on a single textual statement or an isolated historical example, the analysis integrates three complementary sources of evidence to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the claim. The first layer examines the theoretical framework presented by al-Dhahabī in *al-Mūqīḏah* through contextual and linguistic analysis of the disputed passage. The second layer investigates how leading Hadith scholars interpreted the same passage within the classical commentary tradition. The third layer evaluates the consistency of al-Dhahabī's theoretical position by examining representative examples from his own Hadith-critical practice. The integration of these three analytical layers enables the study to assess the validity of the contemporary claim from textual, interpretive, and empirical perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of al-Dhahabī's methodology.

The Theoretical Framework of al-Dhahabī in *al-Mūqīḏah*

The One of the most significant methodological discussions in al-Dhahabī's *al-Mūqīḏah* concerns his treatment of *mawḍūʿ* (fabricated) Hadith, particularly his framework for determining when a narration should be classified as fabricated. The present debate largely originates from the following passage, in which al-Dhahabī defines *mawḍūʿ* Hadith and outlines its various levels:

"A fabricated (*mawḍūʿ*) Hadith is one whose text contradicts established principles and whose transmitter is a liar, such as al-Arbaʿīn al-Waḍʿāniyyah and the falsely attributed version of Nuskhaḥ ʿAlī al-Riḏā. Fabricated Hadith exist in different levels, including:

- Narrations unanimously recognised as fabricated, established through the fabricator's own confession, repeated evidence of lying, or similar indicators.
- Narrations regarded as fabricated by the majority of scholars, whereas others describe them merely as rejected or abandoned reports, stating: "We do not dare to designate them as fabricated."

- Narrations considered extremely weak and rejected by the majority, while some scholars classify them as fabricated.”

At the theoretical level, this passage demonstrates that al-Dhahabī did not treat fabricated Hadith as a single, undifferentiated category. Instead, he conceptualised *mawḍūʿ* Hadith as comprising different epistemological levels based on the strength of the evidence (*qarāʾin*) indicating fabrication. He distinguishes three principal categories: (i) narrations unanimously recognised as fabricated, supported by unequivocal evidence such as the fabricator's confession; (ii) narrations regarded as fabricated by the majority of scholars, while others refrain from employing the term *mawḍūʿ* despite rejecting the narration; and (iii) narrations considered extremely weak by most scholars but classified as fabricated by others. This classification indicates that the designation of *mawḍūʿ* is not merely terminological but reflects varying degrees of epistemic certainty concerning fabrication.

Despite this, some contemporary researchers have interpreted the expression "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" (*wa lā najsuru an nusammiyahu mawḍūʿan*) as evidence that al-Dhahabī himself was reluctant to classify disputed narrations as fabricated whenever scholarly disagreement existed (Iqbal Zain al-Jauhari, 2026). However, a contextual reading of the passage suggests that this interpretation arises from a failure to distinguish between the author's own voice and the viewpoints that he was reporting. The structure of the passage indicates that al-Dhahabī was describing different scholarly positions concerning the classification of Hadith rather than expressing his own methodological preference.

From a methodological perspective, the passage serves two principal functions. First, it establishes that fabricated Hadith constitute a hierarchical category whose internal divisions depend upon the strength of the evidence supporting fabrication. Second, it acknowledges the existence of scholarly disagreement arising from differences in epistemic certainty and the evaluation of relevant *qarāʾin*. Consequently, the

statement "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" should be understood as representing the cautious approach adopted by a particular group of scholars rather than al-Dhahabī's own position.

A linguistic analysis further reinforces this conclusion. The use of the first-person plural pronoun (*naḥnu*) in the expression "we do not dare" represents a common rhetorical convention in classical Hadith literature whereby an author temporarily adopts the perspective of another scholarly group while reporting its opinion. The placement of the phrase immediately after mentioning two groups of scholars with differing evaluations strongly indicates that the pronoun refers to those scholars who preferred not to apply the label *mawḍūʿ*, rather than to al-Dhahabī himself. Accordingly, the pronoun "we" should be interpreted as the reported voice of that scholarly group rather than the author's personal voice.

Furthermore, al-Dhahabī's inclusion of both the second and third categories within his discussion of *mawḍūʿ* Hadith demonstrates that he did not exclude such narrations from the broader conceptual framework of fabrication. Instead, he emphasised that differences in terminology employed by Hadith scholars do not necessarily reflect fundamental differences in epistemological judgment. This observation is consistent with the classical methodology of Hadith criticism, in which the classification of narrations depends primarily upon the cumulative strength of supporting evidence rather than strict terminological uniformity.

Additional evidence may be found in al-Dhahabī's own writing style. Whenever expressing his personal opinion, he consistently employs explicit authorial expressions such as "I say" (*qultu*), whereas the plural pronoun is typically reserved for reporting the views of other scholars, including his teacher Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd. For example, al-Dhahabī writes:

“Our teacher Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd said: "A narrator's confession that he fabricated a Hadith does not conclusively establish that the narration is fabricated, since it is possible that he is lying in

his confession." I say: This opinion is open to criticism, for if we were to open the door to every remote possibility, we would inevitably fall into baseless speculation and sophistry."

The explicit expression "I say" (qultu) clearly signals the transition from reporting another scholar's opinion to presenting al-Dhahabī's own view. The absence of such an expression in the passage under discussion therefore provides further evidence that the phrase "we do not dare" should not be attributed to al-Dhahabī himself but rather to the group of scholars whose position he was describing.

Overall, the theoretical analysis of al-Mūqīḏah demonstrates that al-Dhahabī was constructing a methodological framework that recognised varying degrees of certainty in establishing fabricated Hadith while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of legitimate scholarly disagreement concerning their classification. When the passage is read within its full textual and linguistic context, the contemporary claim that al-Dhahabī personally refrained from classifying disputed narrations as fabricated is not supported by the evidence. Instead, the passage reflects his methodological precision in distinguishing different levels of epistemic certainty and faithfully representing the diversity of opinions within the classical tradition of Hadith criticism.

Scholarly Interpretations of the Expression "We Do Not Dare to Designate It as Fabricated"

The interpretation of the expression "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" (wa lā najsuru an nusammiyahu mawḏū'an) in al-Dhahabī's al-Mūqīḏah has attracted considerable attention among contemporary Hadith scholars. Since this phrase has frequently been cited as evidence that al-Dhahabī himself refrained from classifying disputed narrations as fabricated, its interpretation must be examined in light of the established tradition of scholarly commentaries on al-Mūqīḏah. A review of these commentaries reveals a striking degree of consistency: the disputed expression is generally understood not as al-Dhahabī's own methodological position but

as his citation of a more cautious approach adopted by a particular group of Hadith scholars.

This understanding is clearly articulated by Aḥmad Ma'bad 'Abd al-Karīm (2015), who explains that the phrase "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" belongs to al-ākharūn ("the others") referred to by al-Dhahabī in the preceding sentence. According to him, the expression reflects the methodological caution (iḥtiyāt) of a minority of scholars who preferred not to employ the designation mawḏū' despite the majority having already classified the narration as fabricated. Consequently, the phrase should not be interpreted as expressing al-Dhahabī's own epistemological hesitation but rather as faithfully reporting an alternative scholarly position within the broader discourse of Hadith criticism.

A similar interpretation is advanced by Ḥātim al-'Awnī (2007), who understands the passage as an explanation of the hierarchical nature of fabricated Hadith based upon differing levels of evidential certainty (qarā'in). He argues that disagreement over the classification of a narration does not necessarily indicate disagreement regarding the existence of fabrication itself. Instead, it reflects differences in the ability of individual scholars to recognise the evidential indicators supporting that conclusion. Certain qarā'in may only be identified by accomplished Hadith critics possessing extensive knowledge of transmitted reports and narrator criticism, whereas other scholars may not attain the same level of epistemic certainty. Accordingly, the reluctance of some scholars to designate a narration as fabricated reflects the limitations of their own evidential assessment rather than the absence of sufficient evidence for fabrication. This interpretation reinforces the methodological principle that a narration may legitimately be classified as mawḏū' whenever the cumulative evidential indicators convincingly establish fabrication, even if some scholars choose more cautious terminology.

The same conclusion is reached by 'Abd Allāh al-Sa'd (2018) in his commentary on al-Mūqīḏah. He explains that the disputed phrase refers

specifically to the second category of fabricated Hadith described by al-Dhahabī, namely narrations regarded as fabricated by the majority while a minority refrain from employing that designation. According to al-Sa'd, such hesitation reflects the uncertainty of some later scholars rather than any genuine weakness in the evidence supporting fabrication. He further characterises this cautious position as a methodological error because the indicators of fabrication had already been firmly established by the leading nuqqād. Accordingly, the phrase cited by al-Dhahabī should be understood as illustrating the opinion of a minority rather than expressing his own methodological commitment.

Taken together, these scholarly interpretations converge upon several important methodological conclusions. First, the expression "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" should be understood as a reported scholarly opinion rather than an authoritative declaration by al-Dhahabī himself. Second, disagreement concerning the classification of fabricated Hadith arises primarily from differences in the assessment of evidential indicators (qarā'in) and the corresponding levels of epistemic certainty rather than from disagreement over the methodological principles governing Hadith criticism. Third, the majority of Hadith critics consistently recognised the legitimacy of classifying a narration as mawḍū' whenever the available evidence convincingly established fabrication, even though a minority preferred more cautious terminology out of methodological restraint.

Beyond their individual interpretations, these scholars also share a common hermeneutical approach in reading al-Dhahabī's text. Rather than interpreting the disputed expression in isolation, they consistently distinguish between authorial voice and reported voice, recognising that al-Dhahabī frequently records the opinions of other scholars without necessarily endorsing them as his own. Consequently, the phrase "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" is interpreted within its immediate literary context as the reported position of a particular group of scholars rather than as al-Dhahabī's personal methodological stance. This shared interpretive

principle explains the remarkable consistency among contemporary commentators despite the different analytical emphases found in their respective commentaries.

This hermeneutical consensus also reinforces the contextual and linguistic analysis presented in the previous section. The internal textual evidence derived from the structure of al-Mūqīzah corresponds closely with the external evidence provided by its principal commentators, demonstrating that the contemporary claim attributing methodological hesitation to al-Dhahabī is not supported by the mainstream tradition of interpreting his work. Instead, the claim appears to arise from reading a reported statement as though it represented the author's own voice.

The cumulative weight of both the textual analysis and the scholarly commentaries therefore provides compelling evidence that al-Dhahabī was not expressing personal reluctance to classify disputed narrations as fabricated. Rather, he was documenting the diversity of methodological approaches among Hadith scholars while preserving the distinction between their respective positions. The disputed expression should therefore be understood as reflecting the cautious terminology adopted by a minority of scholars, whereas al-Dhahabī's own methodological framework continued to recognise the legitimacy of declaring narrations mawḍū' whenever the evidential indicators of fabrication were sufficiently established.

Reassessing the Claim through al-Dhahabī's Practical Judgements

The preceding sections have demonstrated that the disputed expression in al-Mūqīzah neither represents al-Dhahabī's personal methodological position nor reflects the mainstream interpretation adopted by its principal commentators. Nevertheless, the strongest evidence for evaluating the contemporary claim lies not merely in theoretical discussion but in al-Dhahabī's own critical practice. An examination of his Hadith-critical writings reveals that he repeatedly classified narrations as mawḍū' even when earlier and later authorities differed

regarding their authenticity. This pattern indicates that al-Dhahabī's classification of fabricated Hadith was determined primarily by his assessment of the evidential indicators (*qarā'in*) of fabrication rather than by the existence or absence of scholarly consensus.

A representative example is the well-known narration, "I am the City of Knowledge, and 'Alī is its Gate" (al-Ṭabarānī, n.d.; al-Ḥākim, 2018; al-Khaṭīb, 2012). While al-Ḥākim regarded the narration as *ṣaḥīḥ*, and later scholars such as al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī considered it worthy of *taḥsīn* (al-Ḥākim, 2018; al-Sakhāwī, 2018; al-Suyūṭī, 2004), al-Dhahabī explicitly classified it as *mawḍū'* (al-Dhahabī, 1963). His judgment therefore demonstrates a willingness to depart from both earlier and later authorities whenever he considered the available evidence sufficient to establish fabrication.

A similar pattern appears in the narration, "Love the Arabs for three reasons: because I am an Arab, the Qur'an is in Arabic, and the language of the people of Paradise is Arabic" (al-Ḥākim, 2018; al-'Uqaylī, 1984; al-Ṭabarānī, n.d.; al-Bayhaqī, 2003). Whereas al-Ḥākim authenticated the narration and al-'Uqaylī classified it as *munkar*, al-Dhahabī unequivocally regarded it as fabricated (al-Dhahabī, 1963). This example further illustrates that terminological disagreement among Hadith critics did not prevent al-Dhahabī from declaring a narration *mawḍū'* whenever he considered the evidential indicators of fabrication to be decisive.

The same methodological independence is evident in the famous narration describing Adam's supplication through the status of Prophet Muḥammad before his creation (al-Ḥākim, 2018; al-Bayhaqī, 1985). Although al-Ḥākim evaluated the narration as *ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Bayhaqī regarded it as merely *ḍa'īf*, Ibn al-Mulaqqin records that al-Dhahabī classified it as *mawḍū'* (Ibn al-Mulaqqin, 1411H). Once again, the presence of scholarly disagreement did not deter al-Dhahabī from reaching a stronger conclusion when, in his assessment, the

cumulative evidence justified such a classification.

Another illustrative example concerns the narration stating that on the Day of Resurrection a caller will command people to lower their gaze while Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad passes before them (al-Ṭabarānī, n.d.; Ibn al-A'rābī, 1997; al-Ḥākim, 2018). Although al-Ḥākim considered the narration authentic and Ibn 'Adī classified it as *munkar*, al-Dhahabī regarded it as fabricated, as reported by Ibn al-Mulaqqin (1411H). This case further confirms that al-Dhahabī did not treat scholarly disagreement as a methodological barrier to declaring a narration fabricated.

The same tendency is observable in the narration stating that "Everything has a key, and the key to Paradise is love for the poor and the needy" (Ibn 'Adī, 1997). Ibn 'Adī regarded the narration as extremely weak, whereas al-Dhahabī, while discussing the narrator Aḥmad ibn Dāwūd ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffār, cited the narration as one of the fabrications attributed to that transmitter after referring to al-Dāraqūṭnī's assessment of him as a fabricator (al-Dhahabī, 1963). This example is particularly significant because it demonstrates that al-Dhahabī was prepared to elevate a narration from the category of severe weakness to outright fabrication when the cumulative evidential indicators warranted such a conclusion.

Although these narrations differ in subject matter and chains of transmission, they collectively exhibit a consistent methodological pattern. In every case, al-Dhahabī explicitly classified a narration as *mawḍū'* despite the existence of alternative evaluations ranging from *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan* to *ḍa'īf* or *munkar*. Such consistency is difficult to reconcile with the contemporary claim that he avoided declaring disputed narrations fabricated whenever scholarly disagreement existed. Instead, the evidence suggests that al-Dhahabī regarded disagreement among scholars as an expected feature of Hadith criticism arising from different assessments of the available *qarā'in*, rather than as a constraint preventing him from reaching an independent critical judgment.

More importantly, these practical examples closely correspond to the theoretical framework established in *al-Mūqīḏah*. There, al-Dhahabī explained that fabricated Hadith exist in different epistemological levels according to the strength of the evidence supporting fabrication. His practical judgments demonstrate the consistent application of this principle. Rather than relying upon terminological consensus, he evaluated each narration on the basis of its cumulative evidential indicators and was prepared to classify it as fabricated whenever those indicators were, in his judgment, sufficiently compelling.

Viewed collectively, the empirical evidence presented in this section substantially weakens the contemporary assertion that al-Dhahabī was reluctant to designate disputed narrations as fabricated. On the contrary, his critical practice consistently demonstrates methodological independence, a willingness to depart from the judgments of earlier authorities, and a commitment to evidence-based evaluation rooted in the principles of classical Hadith criticism. The phrase "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" should therefore be understood as describing the methodological caution of a particular group of scholars rather than as reflecting al-Dhahabī's own critical methodology.

4. Conclusion

This study critically re-examined the contemporary claim that al-Dhahabī refrained from classifying disputed narrations as *mawḏūʿ* whenever disagreement existed among Hadith scholars regarding their authenticity. The research sought to determine whether this widely cited claim accurately reflects al-Dhahabī's methodology by analysing the disputed passage in *al-Mūqīḏah*, examining the classical commentary tradition surrounding that passage, and evaluating al-Dhahabī's practical judgments in representative cases of disputed narrations. Through this integrated approach, the study aimed to establish whether the claim is supported by the broader textual and methodological evidence rather than by an isolated reading of a single statement.

The findings consistently demonstrate that the disputed expression "We do not dare to designate it as fabricated" does not represent al-Dhahabī's own methodological position. The contextual and linguistic analysis of *al-Mūqīḏah* shows that the statement describes the cautious terminology employed by a particular group of Hadith scholars rather than expressing the author's personal judgment. This interpretation is further confirmed by the mainstream commentary tradition, which consistently distinguishes between al-Dhahabī's authorial voice and the scholarly opinions that he reports. Furthermore, the empirical analysis of representative case studies reveals that al-Dhahabī repeatedly classified narrations as *mawḏūʿ* despite the existence of competing evaluations by earlier and later authorities. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that his critical methodology was fundamentally evidence-based and guided by the strength of the available *qarāʾin* rather than by the existence of scholarly consensus.

The study also identifies several broader methodological patterns. It demonstrates that disagreements among Hadith critics primarily reflect differences in the evaluation of evidential indicators rather than inconsistencies in the principles of Hadith criticism itself. Likewise, the analysis illustrates that classical Hadith scholars frequently documented multiple scholarly opinions without necessarily endorsing each of them. These findings emphasise the importance of contextual interpretation, literary analysis, and methodological consistency when examining classical Hadith texts and caution against drawing broad methodological conclusions from isolated textual quotations.

The originality of this study lies in its three-layer analytical framework for reassessing al-Dhahabī's methodology. Rather than relying exclusively on a single textual quotation or the opinion of an individual commentator, the study integrates three complementary analytical perspectives: contextual and linguistic analysis of the original text, examination of the classical commentary tradition, and empirical analysis of al-Dhahabī's own critical practice. The convergence of these three layers of evidence provides a more

comprehensive basis for evaluating disputed methodological claims and offers a structured analytical framework that may be adapted for future research on other classical Hadith scholars whose methodologies continue to be debated.

The findings also carry important implications for contemporary Hadith education and research. They highlight the need to teach classical methodological works through contextual reading, critical engagement with the commentary tradition, and careful examination of practical scholarly applications. Such an approach strengthens critical thinking, enables students to distinguish between an author's own methodological position and reported scholarly opinions, and promotes a more evidence-based understanding of Hadith criticism. More broadly, the analytical framework proposed in this study may contribute to improving the teaching of Hadith methodology by encouraging a balanced integration of theoretical texts, interpretive traditions, and practical critical analysis.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The present study focuses specifically on the disputed statement in al-Mūqīḏah and examines selected representative cases from al-Dhahabī's Hadith-critical works rather than providing an exhaustive analysis of all narrations that he classified as *mawḏūʿ*. Similarly,

the discussion is confined to the methodological question surrounding this particular claim and does not attempt to reconstruct al-Dhahabī's entire theory of fabricated Hadith. Future studies may therefore expand the scope by analysing a larger corpus of al-Dhahabī's critical judgments, comparing his methodology with that of other leading Hadith critics, or investigating the evolution of his methodological principles across his various works.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that a comprehensive reassessment of classical Hadith methodology requires the integration of textual, interpretive, and practical evidence rather than reliance upon isolated textual statements. By addressing a persistent misunderstanding regarding al-Dhahabī's approach to fabricated Hadith, the study contributes to a more accurate understanding of his critical methodology and illustrates the value of multidimensional textual analysis in contemporary Hadith scholarship. The analytical framework developed in this research provides a systematic model for evaluating disputed methodological claims and offers a foundation for future studies seeking to achieve a more contextual, evidence-based, and methodologically rigorous understanding of the classical Hadith tradition.

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The authors confirm that this manuscript is an original work. It has not been published previously, is not under consideration by any other journal, and does not contain plagiarized material. All sources have been appropriately acknowledged and cited. The authors also declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study