

**Mourad Tadghout, Frankfurt a. M.: The Construction of the False in Islamic
Transmission Traditions: Hadith Criticism and the Epistemology of Authenticity and
Forgery**

This paper examines how “the false” is constructed within Islamic transmission traditions by focusing on the development of Hadith criticism as a sophisticated epistemic practice in pre-modern Islamic scholarship. Engaging with the conceptual framework proposed by the symposium, which shifts attention from identifying modern categories of falsification to analyzing historical constructions of falsehood, the study investigates how authenticity, forgery, and reliability were actively produced, negotiated, and systematized within Islamic scholarly culture. Rather than treating hadiths simply as either “authentic” or “forged” from a modern critical standpoint, the paper argues that Islamic hadith scholarship developed its own internal epistemology of truth-making, grounded in interrelated methods of transmission control, textual scrutiny, and biographical evaluation of transmitters. Central to this system is the science of isnād (chain of transmission), which functioned not merely as a mechanism of authentication but as an epistemic infrastructure through which truth and falsehood were discursively constructed and stabilized. Alongside isnād analysis, the study also considers the role of matn criticism, rijāl literature, and the broader hermeneutical frameworks that governed the classification of reports.

The paper further explores how categories such as ṣaḥīḥ (sound), ḥasan (good), and mawḍū‘ (fabricated) did not simply reflect fixed ontological states of texts but emerged through historically contingent scholarly practices embedded in legal, theological, and social contexts. In this sense, the designation of a report as “false” is understood not as a purely descriptive act but as a normative and epistemological intervention that shaped the boundaries of authoritative knowledge in Islamic civilization. By situating hadith criticism within the broader theme of “constructing the false,” the paper highlights how pre-modern Islamic scholarship contributed to complex regimes of authenticity and exclusion, comparable in their intellectual rigor to other medieval European and Eurasian traditions of textual criticism. Ultimately, the study offers a comparative perspective on how knowledge systems define, stabilize, and contest the boundary between truth and fabrication, revealing the historical depth of epistemic practices that continue to inform contemporary debates on authenticity and authority.