

The Text–Culture–Living Hadith Model: An Anthropologically Informed Framework for Hadith Contextualization

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Abstract

Hadith contextualization requires a method that preserves textual authority while accounting for the historical, cultural, and social conditions relevant to interpretation. Existing studies have examined contextual criticism, anthropological approaches, and living hadith, but these components are not always organized into an explicit analytical sequence with clearly differentiated evidentiary functions. This article formulates the Text–Culture–Living Hadith model as an anthropologically informed framework for hadith contextualization. It employs qualitative library research, content analysis, and conceptual synthesis of hadith sources, methodological scholarship, anthropological studies of Muslim practice, and living hadith research. The framework comprises seven stages: textual identification, attributed evaluation of hadith status, examination of *asbab al-wurud* and related reports, sociohistorical and cultural analysis, analysis of normative purpose and cultural form, examination of documented reception, and contemporary contextualization. Its application to the report “Whoever has hair should honor it” identifies the source as *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadith 4163, and distinguishes it from the related report concerning disheveled hair in hadith 4062. The analysis shows that textual evidence, historical inference, social reception, and contemporary interpretation must be treated as related but non-equivalent forms of evidence. The model contributes a transparent procedural framework for connecting hadith criticism with cultural and reception analysis. It remains a conceptual proposal whose empirical usefulness requires testing through clearly defined textual corpora and field-based studies of Muslim reception.

Keywords: *Hadith Contextualization; Anthropological Approach; Living Hadith; Hadith Criticism; Text–Culture Relations*

A. Introduction

Hadith constitutes a major source of Islamic teaching and has shaped Muslim law, ethics, ritual practice, and social conduct. Its interpretation has traditionally involved the evaluation of transmission chains, textual criticism, linguistic analysis, and attention to the circumstances surrounding particular reports. These procedures remain indispensable, but contemporary hadith

scholarship also faces questions concerning the relationship between normative texts and historically situated forms of language, conduct, and social organization. A reading that treats every historically contingent expression as a universally binding form may obscure the purposes of a hadith, whereas an approach that reduces hadith entirely to its cultural setting may weaken its normative function. Contextual interpretation therefore requires a method that maintains textual authority while examining the historical and social conditions relevant to meaning (Suryadilaga 2014; Ramle and Huda 2022; Wasman, Mesraini, and Suwendi 2023).

Anthropology offers concepts for examining how religious meanings and practices are constituted through language, symbols, institutions, social relations, and historically situated forms of conduct (Rudyansjah et al. 2012; Asad 1983). Applied to hadith studies, an anthropological perspective directs attention to the cultural settings in which reports emerged and to the ways Muslim communities subsequently receive and practice them. This perspective does not replace *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *matan* (textual content) criticism. It addresses a different analytical question: how textual meanings interact with cultural forms and social experience. Research on living hadith (socially enacted and practiced *hadith*) has developed this concern by shifting part of the analytical focus from written reports to their reception in rituals, traditions, institutions, and everyday conduct (Rohmana 2015; Qudsy and Dewi 2018; Saputra et al. 2024).

Existing scholarship provides several foundations for such an approach. Suryadilaga (2014) examined the implications of anthropological reading for historically situated hadith practices. Rohmana (2015) positioned anthropology as both an approach and a perspective for studying living hadith in Indonesia. Qudsy and Dewi (2018) developed the study of living hadith through the relationships among practice, reception, text, and transmission. Other studies have emphasized contextual criticism, the role of *asbab al-wurud* (the circumstances or occasions associated with a hadith's utterance), and the interaction between hadith and cultural interpretation (Ramle and Huda 2022; Wasman, Mesraini, and Suwendi 2023; Khalilurrahman et al. 2024). More recent Indonesian scholarship has also examined integrative approaches and the methodological development of living hadith studies (Saputra et al. 2024; Nurfatihah, Al Aryachiyah, and Al Anwari 2025; Rizkiy 2025).

These studies establish the importance of textual criticism, historical context, cultural analysis, and social reception. However, they do not always present these components as a single sequenced procedure that moves from identifying and evaluating a hadith to examining its historical setting, distinguishing normative values from local cultural forms, analyzing documented reception, and proposing a contemporary interpretation. The gap is therefore not the absence of contextual or anthropological hadith scholarship. It

concerns the need for a more explicit operational sequence that clarifies the role and limits of each analytical component. Such clarification is necessary to prevent cultural analysis from replacing hadith criticism and to prevent textual analysis from disregarding relevant historical and social contexts.

This article formulates a Text-Culture-Living Hadith model for anthropologically informed hadith contextualization. It has three objectives: to clarify the conceptual foundations of anthropological contextualization in hadith studies, to explain the relationship among hadith texts, cultural contexts, and living hadith practices, and to organize these elements into a seven-stage analytical procedure. The model treats the hadith text as the normative and documentary starting point, culture as a context of interpretation, and living hadith as a field of reception and practice documented in relevant scholarship. It is proposed as a conceptual and methodological framework, not as an empirically validated model or a substitute for established hadith criticism. Its application to a selected report on personal grooming is intended to illustrate the analytical sequence and must remain subject to accurate source attribution, hadith grading, and differentiation between textual evidence and contemporary social inference.

B. Methods

This article employs a qualitative library-research design to formulate a conceptual model for anthropologically informed *hadith* (prophetic traditions) contextualization. The unit of analysis is the relationship among three bodies of scholarship: *hadith* textual criticism, anthropological approaches to religion and culture, and living *hadith* studies. The primary textual corpus comprises two reports in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadiths 4163 and 4062. The secondary corpus comprises methodological works on hadith interpretation, peer-reviewed studies of anthropological and contextual approaches, and published research documenting Muslim reception and practice. Because the article develops a conceptual framework rather than reporting field research, references to community practices are drawn exclusively from published empirical studies and are not presented as the authors' original observations (Creswell 2014).

Sources were selected purposively according to their relevance to at least one component of the proposed model: textual identification and *hadith* evaluation, *asbab al-wurud*, sociohistorical and cultural interpretation, the distinction between legislative and nonlegislative *Sunnah* (prophetic tradition or practice), or the reception of *hadith* in Muslim communities. The illustrative textual application centers on the report "Whoever has hair should honor it" in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadith 4163. A separate report concerning the Prophet's response to a man with disheveled hair, recorded in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadith 4062, is used only as related intertextual evidence. It is not treated as the

established occasion of utterance for *hadith* 4163. This distinction is necessary because the available sources do not establish that the two reports describe the same event (Abu Dawud 2009).

The materials were examined through qualitative content analysis and conceptual synthesis. The analysis involved identifying the principal concepts and methodological functions assigned to text, context, culture, and reception; comparing the boundaries and limitations proposed in the selected literature; and organizing the resulting relationships into a seven-stage analytical sequence (Krippendorff 2018). Source comparison was used to identify convergence, disagreement, and differences in analytical scope. Emic perspectives (insider cultural perspectives) were included only insofar as they had been documented in published empirical research, while etic analysis (outsider analytical interpretation) referred to the conceptual interpretation undertaken in this article. Accordingly, the resulting model should be understood as a theoretically derived methodological proposal. Its internal coherence and traceability can be assessed through the cited sources, but its empirical effectiveness requires subsequent application in field-based or corpus-based research.

C. Results and Discussion

The conceptual synthesis produced three related results. First, anthropologically informed contextualization requires a clear division of labor between *hadith* criticism and cultural analysis. Second, the *hadith* text, cultural context, and *living hadith* represent analytically distinct but connected dimensions. Third, these dimensions can be arranged into a seven-stage procedure, provided that textual evidence, historical inference, documented social reception, and contemporary interpretation are not treated as equivalent forms of evidence.

1. Conceptual Foundations of Anthropologically Informed Hadith Contextualization

Understanding a *hadith* involves more than translating its wording. It requires attention to linguistic meaning, transmission, textual coherence, the circumstances associated with the report, and the interpretive implications of its historical setting (Asriady 2017; Berutu 2023). These elements do not perform the same function. *Sanad* (chain of transmission) and *matan* (text of the report) criticism address the status and transmission of a report, whereas historical and cultural analysis concerns the conditions under which its meanings may be interpreted. Anthropological analysis should therefore begin after the report, its source, and the status assigned to it have been clearly identified.

The distinction matters because *hadith* authentication cannot be reduced to a general statement that a chain is continuous or that its narrators are reliable. Brown (2008) shows that early *hadith* criticism included forms of *matan* evaluation

even when critical judgments were expressed through the language of transmission. Hallaq (1999), from another position in the debate, demonstrates that questions of *hadith* authenticity involve competing assumptions about legal, historical, and epistemological authority. These debates indicate that an anthropological approach cannot independently establish *hadith* authenticity. It must rely on transparent textual documentation and attributed scholarly evaluations before proceeding to cultural interpretation.

Within this article, an anthropological approach refers to the use of concepts concerning culture, symbols, social relations, embodied conduct, and meaning-making to examine the social settings associated with a *hadith* and its subsequent reception. Anthropology does not provide a culturally neutral explanation of religion. Asad (1983) argues that anthropological accounts may obscure the historical conditions, institutions, and forms of authority through which religious meanings are produced. Starrett (1995) similarly shows that interpretations of bodily and ritual practices may reflect the analytical assumptions of observers as much as the understandings of practitioners. Anthropological contextualization must therefore examine both community meanings and the categories used by researchers to describe them.

Culture, in this model, refers to historically situated systems of meaning, convention, social relations, and practice. It should not be treated as a homogeneous set of customs shared uniformly by all members of a society. The relevant analytical question is not simply whether a *hadith* emerged in an “Arab culture,” but which linguistic conventions, social relations, practices, and historical conditions are supported by available evidence. General statements about seventh-century Arab society must therefore be distinguished from claims supported by a particular report or historical source (Rachmad et al. 2022; Suryadilaga 2014).

Contextualization is defined here as a controlled interpretive process that relates a *hadith* to its textual source, reported historical setting, and relevant social context before considering its contemporary application. This process may distinguish a normative purpose from a historically specific form, but the distinction cannot be assumed in advance. It requires textual, legal, and historical argumentation. The categorization of *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition) as *tasyri’iyyah* (legislative) and *ghairu tasyri’iyyah* (non-legislative) provides one framework for this inquiry, although the boundary between the two categories remains an interpretive question rather than an automatic classification (Jakfar 2019; Sumbulah, Zainuddin, and Bawazier 2021).

Living hadith refers to the ways *hadith* are received, interpreted, invoked, and embodied in rituals, traditions, institutions, and everyday behavior (Rohmana 2015; Qudsy and Dewi 2018). A *living hadith* practice is not authenticated merely because participants associate it with a Prophetic report.

Conversely, variation from an assumed Arab cultural form does not itself invalidate a practice. Textual provenance and social reception must be investigated separately before their relationship is interpreted (Saputra et al. 2024; Rizkiy 2025).

2. Relationships among Text, Culture, and Living Hadith

The proposed framework assigns a different function to each of its three principal elements. The *hadith* text provides the documentary and normative point of departure. Cultural analysis examines the historical and social conditions relevant to interpretation. *Living hadith* research investigates how individuals and communities receive, transform, or contest *hadith* in practice. Their integration is therefore relational rather than hierarchical: cultural analysis does not replace textual criticism, and observed practice does not by itself determine the normative meaning of a *hadith*.

This distinction also prevents “culture” from being treated as a single explanation for religious behavior. Bowen’s (1992) comparison of Muslim sacrificial practices in Sumatra and Morocco demonstrates that a shared scriptural tradition may generate different interpretations within and across societies. The finding challenges both scriptural essentialism and the assumption that each culture produces a single, stable religious meaning. In the Indonesian context, local expressions of prayer, recitation, religious gatherings, respect, and solidarity should consequently be examined as situated forms of reception rather than as direct and uniform manifestations of a *hadith* (Febriyanto and Ekanara 2020; Sagir et al. 2025).

Research on Muslim religious practice also complicates a simple separation between an abstract universal value and its external cultural expression. Mahmood (2001) shows that ritual form may participate in the formation of ethical dispositions rather than merely express values that already exist. Hirschkind (2001) likewise demonstrates that engagement with religious discourse can shape embodied capacities, emotions, and forms of moral selfhood. These studies suggest that cultural forms cannot always be discarded as neutral containers once a universal value has been identified. Form and value may be connected, although the strength and nature of that connection must be established for each case.

At the same time, religious practice should not be represented as perfectly coherent. Schielke (2009) finds that Muslim moral life can include ambivalence, inconsistency, and competing aspirations. *Living hadith* research must therefore allow for selective reception, disagreement, and discontinuity between stated ideals and everyday conduct. Such variation is especially important for the proposed model: evidence that a community cites a *hadith* does not prove that the report alone explains the practice, while the existence of a practice does not establish a single community interpretation.

The *emic* (insider perspective)-*etic* (analytical outsider perspective) distinction helps organize this inquiry but does not eliminate the problem. An *emic* account concerns meanings attributed by practitioners, whereas an *etic* account is constructed through scholarly categories and comparison (Rizkiy 2025). Because the present article does not collect primary field data, it cannot establish how particular Indonesian communities understand the *hadith* on hair care. Published studies of other *living hadith* practices can demonstrate the methodological relevance of examining reception, but they cannot serve as empirical evidence for the reception of this particular report.

The resulting relationship may be expressed as follows: the text establishes what report is being discussed; historical and cultural analysis identifies relevant conditions and interpretive possibilities; *living hadith* research documents how the report is received; and contextualization develops an interpretation by comparing these forms of evidence. The model is intended to reduce two methodological risks: treating historically specific forms as automatically universal and allowing an unspecified appeal to culture to displace textual and normative analysis (Mauludin and Khadijah 2025; Sattar et al. 2026).

3. The Text-Culture-Living Hadith Model and Its Implications

The Text-Culture-Living Hadith model organizes the preceding relationships into seven stages. The sequence is analytical rather than mechanically linear. A finding at a later stage may require the researcher to return to the source text, reconsider the historical evidence, or revise the distinction between a normative value and its cultural expression.

Table 1.

The Text-Culture-Living Hadith Model: Seven-Stage Analytical Framework

Stage	Analytical step	Function
1	Identification of the <i>hadith</i> text	Identify the wording, narrator, collection, numbering system, variants, theme, and immediate textual meaning.
2	Evaluation of <i>hadith</i> status	Report the <i>hadith</i> 's classification by reference to identifiable critical editions or specialist assessments; distinguish attributed grading from the researcher's own analysis.
3	Examination of <i>asbab al-wurud</i> (occasions of utterance) and related reports	Determine whether a specific occasion of utterance is established. Do not convert a thematically related report into <i>asbab al-wurud</i> without evidence.
4	Sociohistorical and cultural analysis	Examine relevant language, conventions, institutions, social relations, and practices using documented historical evidence.

5	Analysis of normative purpose and cultural form	Assess whether the report contains binding guidance, ethical direction, context-specific practice, or a combination of these elements.
6	Analysis of documented reception	Examine how identifiable communities receive, interpret, negotiate, or contest the <i>hadith</i> . This stage requires field data or published empirical evidence.
7	Contemporary contextualization	Formulate a present-day interpretation proportionate to the textual, historical, normative, and reception evidence established in the previous stages.

Source: Authors' synthesis of Asriady (2017), Berutu (2023), Ramle and Huda (2022), Rohmana (2015), and Rizkiy (2025).

The first two stages prevent contextual interpretation from being built on an unidentified or incorrectly attributed report. The third stage is deliberately separated from general historical contextualization because a specific *asbab al-wurud* requires evidence concerning the occasion of a report. General knowledge of a period cannot substitute for such evidence (Berutu 2023; Ramle and Huda 2022). The fourth and fifth stages then examine historical setting and normative implications. The sixth stage requires empirical evidence of reception, while the seventh states the contemporary interpretation and its evidentiary limits.

The model is illustrated through the report on honoring one's hair. Abu Hurayrah's report, "Whoever has hair should honor it," is recorded in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadith 4163. A separate report concerning the Prophet's response to a man with disheveled hair appears as hadith 4062. The latter may provide related intertextual evidence concerning personal grooming, but the available sources do not establish it as the specific occasion of utterance for hadith 4163 (Abu Dawud 2009).

Table 2.
Illustrative Application of the Model to *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith 4163

Stage	Application
1. Text identification	Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet said, "Whoever has hair should honor it" (<i>Sunan Abi Dawud</i> , hadith 4163). The report concerns the treatment or care of one's hair.
2. Hadith status	The critical evaluation associated with the edition edited by Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut grades its chain as <i>hasan</i> . The present article reports this attributed evaluation and does not claim to conduct an independent <i>sanad</i> analysis.
3. <i>Asbab al-wurud</i> and related reports	No specific occasion of utterance for hadith 4163 is established in the sources examined here. Hadith 4062 is a separate report and should be treated as related

	evidence rather than as the confirmed <i>asbab al-wurud</i> of hadith 4163.
4. Sociohistorical and cultural analysis	The wording presupposes recognizable practices of hair care and personal presentation. More specific claims about hairstyle, social rank, or Arab identity require independent historical evidence.
5. Normative purpose and cultural form	A defensible interpretation concerns responsible care of personal appearance. Cleanliness and dignified self-presentation may be treated as ethical purposes, while grooming styles vary by context.
6. Documented reception	This article does not present field data or empirical studies on Indonesian reception of this <i>hadith</i> .
7. Contemporary contextualization	The report may support responsible hair care and appropriate self-presentation according to local norms, without extending its meaning to unrelated domains.

Source: Authors's application of the Text–Culture–Living Hadith analytical model.

This application demonstrates the sequence of the model but does not constitute empirical validation. Its value lies in showing where different evidentiary decisions must be made. Accurate identification of the hadith source illustrates the importance of textual identification; distinguishing the two *Sunan Abi Dawud* reports demonstrates the need for caution in identifying *asbab al-wurud*; and the absence of reception data shows why a living hadith stage cannot be completed through conceptual inference alone.

The model also clarifies the limits of the universal-value/local-form distinction. The distinction can prevent an interpreter from treating a particular hairstyle as universally required, but it should not be used to detach an ethical principle from every textual and practical form. Anthropological research indicates that repeated practices may help constitute religious dispositions and identities (Mahmood 2001; Hirschkind 2001). Researchers must therefore examine whether a form is incidental, ethically formative, socially contested, or normatively significant instead of deciding its status solely from its cultural origin.

For *living hadith* studies, the framework encourages researchers to connect reception with identifiable texts while retaining the complexity of community practice. A study should document who associates a practice with a *hadith*, whether that association is shared or disputed, and how textual authority interacts with local institutions and histories. This requirement responds to the methodological concern that *living hadith* research may conflate practitioners' reception, researchers' interpretation, and textual transmission (Rizkiy 2025).

The model's principal contribution is thus procedural. It brings textual documentation, cultural analysis, and reception research into a single sequence while preserving their different evidentiary functions. It is designed to reduce the risks of rigid literalism and unrestricted cultural relativism, but the present

library study cannot demonstrate that it successfully prevents either outcome. Its usefulness must be assessed through applications involving clearly defined *hadith* corpora, documented historical sources, and empirical studies of reception.

D. Conclusion

This article develops the Text-Culture-Living Hadith model as a seven-stage procedure for anthropologically informed hadith contextualization. The model begins with textual identification and attributed evaluation of hadith status before examining *asbab al-wurud*, related reports, sociohistorical context, normative purpose, documented reception, and contemporary interpretation. It therefore treats the hadith text, cultural context, and living hadith as connected but methodologically distinct dimensions. Applied to the report on honoring one's hair, the procedure identifies the report as *Sunan Abi Dawud*, hadith 4163, distinguishes it from the disheveled-hair report in hadith 4062, and supports a limited interpretation concerning responsible grooming without treating a particular hairstyle as a universal obligation.

The model contributes a transparent sequence for connecting established hadith scholarship with cultural and reception analysis. It is intended to reduce the risk of imposing historically specific forms as universal requirements while preventing cultural interpretation from displacing textual authority. Its contribution remains conceptual rather than empirically validated. The study does not provide field evidence concerning the reception of hadith 4163, and it does not conduct an independent reclassification of its chain of transmission. Future research should apply the procedure to a clearly defined corpus, document the historical evidence used at each stage, and test the living hadith component through ethnographic or other empirical research in specific Muslim communities.

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