

The Semantic Relationship Between the Qur'an and Hadith: Classical Islamic Approaches

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith has remained one of the most significant subjects in classical Islamic scholarship. The Qur'an is regarded as the primary revealed source of Islamic guidance, while Hadith, particularly the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), serves as an explanatory and practical manifestation of Qur'anic teachings. Classical Islamic scholars developed sophisticated interpretive methodologies to explain how Hadith relates semantically and legally to Qur'anic revelation. This article examines the semantic relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith through classical Islamic approaches, focusing primarily on Qur'anic verses and narrations from *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Using a qualitative textual analysis based on the IMRAD structure, the study explores how Hadith clarifies general Qur'anic commands, specifies universal rulings, restricts broad injunctions, and functions as an independent normative authority. Findings indicate that classical scholars consistently understood Hadith not as secondary commentary alone but as an essential interpretive source inseparable from Qur'anic understanding. The study demonstrates that the semantic interaction between the Qur'an and Hadith forms a foundational epistemological structure in Islamic thought.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24th

April, 2026

Accepted: 20th May 2026

KEY WORDS: Qur'an, Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari, Sunnah, Classical Islam, Tafsir, Islamic jurisprudence

Introduction

The Qur'an occupies the highest position in Islamic theology as the direct revelation of Allah to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims consider it the ultimate and preserved source of divine guidance. However, the Qur'an itself repeatedly emphasizes obedience to the Prophet and recognition of his explanatory authority. Allah states: "And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them..." (Qur'an 16:44). This verse has historically served as a major textual foundation for the interpretive role of the Prophet's Sunnah. The Qur'an contains principles, commands, narratives, and ethical directives, yet many of these remain general unless further explained through prophetic practice. The Hadith literature preserves the sayings, actions, and approvals of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Among the most authoritative Sunni collections, *Sahih al-Bukhari* occupies a unique position due to its rigorous methodology of authentication. Classical Muslim scholars regarded authentic Hadith as indispensable for understanding Qur'anic meaning. The semantic relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith involves multiple dimensions. First, Hadith acts as explanatory commentary (*bayān*) for Qur'anic passages. Second, Hadith specifies broad Qur'anic statements (*takhsis*). Third, Hadith restricts unrestricted commands (*taqyid*). Fourth, Hadith introduces rulings not explicitly stated in the Qur'an but understood as divinely sanctioned through prophetic authority. For example, the Qur'an commands prayer: "Establish prayer..." (Qur'an 2:43). However,

it does not detail the exact procedures, number of units, or practical performance. These details are preserved through Hadith traditions. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the Prophet said: "Pray as you have seen me praying" (Al-Bukhari, 631). Similarly, Qur'anic commands regarding zakat, pilgrimage, fasting, inheritance, and penal law frequently require prophetic elaboration. Classical Islamic scholars strongly defended this interdependence. Imam al-Shafi'i argued that the Sunnah serves as divinely guided explanation of revelation. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that authentic Hadith cannot contradict the Qur'an in substance because both derive from revelation. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari* further reinforced the harmonization of Hadith and Qur'anic interpretation. This study investigates how classical Islamic scholarship conceptualized the semantic relationship between Qur'an and Hadith, focusing particularly on examples drawn from Qur'anic text and *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

Methods

This study employs qualitative textual analysis using classical Islamic hermeneutical methodology. Primary sources include the Qur'an and *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Secondary interpretive perspectives are drawn from classical Islamic scholarship, particularly al-Shafi'i, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, al-Nawawi, and Ibn Taymiyyah. The research follows an analytical framework based on four categories of semantic interaction:

1. **Explanatory Function (Bayān)**
2. **Specification of General Texts (Takhsis)**
3. **Restriction of Unqualified Commands (Ta'qid)**
4. **Independent Legislative Authority of Sunnah**

Relevant Qur'anic verses were identified where prophetic explanation has traditionally been considered necessary. Corresponding Hadith reports from *Sahih al-Bukhari* were selected for semantic comparison. Classical interpretive literature was examined to determine how authoritative scholars understood these relationships. This comparative textual method enables analysis of semantic dependency between scripture and prophetic narration.

Results

One of the strongest classical positions holds that Hadith serves as direct explanation of Qur'anic revelation.

Allah says:

"And establish prayer and give zakat..." (Qur'an 2:110). Classical Islamic scholars also recognized that Hadith restricts commands that appear unrestricted in the Qur'an. This interpretive mechanism, known as *ta'qid*, allows the Sunnah to qualify otherwise broad Qur'anic injunctions. For example, Allah says:

"And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah for Allah" (Qur'an 2:196).

The Qur'anic command establishes obligation but does not provide detailed procedural requirements. The Prophet's practice preserved in *Sahih al-Bukhari* explains rituals such as ihram, tawaf, sa'i, standing at 'Arafat, and sacrificial obligations. Similarly, in matters of ablution, Allah states: "O you who believe, when you rise to pray, wash your faces and your hands..." (Qur'an 5:6). While the verse outlines general purification requirements, Hadith traditions clarify sequence, repetition, and prophetic practice. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, detailed narrations describe the Prophet's ablution procedure, demonstrating practical restriction and clarification. Classical jurists regarded such Hadith as essential interpretive qualifiers rather than optional additions. A major classical debate concerned whether Sunnah can establish rulings not explicitly stated in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an commands obedience to the Messenger:

"Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah" (Qur'an 4:80).

Also:

"Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it" (Qur'an 59:7).

These verses formed the textual basis for recognizing independent prophetic authority. One example appears in dietary prohibitions. While the Qur'an lists certain forbidden foods, Hadith expands legal rulings regarding predatory animals and other prohibited categories. Classical scholars such as al-Shafi'i argued that this does not represent contradiction but authorized elaboration through revelation. Thus, Hadith functions not merely as commentary but as legally binding interpretive revelation.

Discussion

The findings confirm that classical Islamic scholarship viewed the relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith as fundamentally integrated rather than hierarchical in a simplistic sense. Although the Qur'an remains the supreme revealed text, authentic Hadith serves as its indispensable explanatory companion. The concept of *bayān* (clarification) was central in classical legal theory. Al-Shafi'i argued that the Prophet's explanations are divinely guided manifestations of Qur'anic meaning. Without Sunnah, practical religious obligations would remain incomplete or ambiguous. Prayer offers the clearest example. The Qur'an repeatedly commands prayer but does not explain exact performance. Hadith supplies practical content. This demonstrates semantic dependency between text and prophetic explanation. Similarly, the mechanism of *takhsis* shows how apparently general Qur'anic rules are interpreted through Hadith qualification. Legal interpretation depends not merely on literal wording but on combined textual analysis. Classical scholarship also accepted *taqyid*, where Hadith restricts general textual meaning. This demonstrates interpretive sophistication rather than contradiction. The question of independent Sunnah authority generated extensive discussion. Classical Sunni scholarship overwhelmingly accepted authentic Hadith as binding revelation in meaning, citing Qur'anic obedience verses. Ibn Taymiyyah argued that authentic Sunnah cannot truly conflict with the Qur'an because both originate from divine guidance. Apparent contradictions result from interpretive error or weak transmission. Ibn Hajar's commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari* reinforced this synthesis by consistently interpreting Hadith within broader Qur'anic frameworks. Therefore, the semantic relationship between Qur'an and Hadith reflects a mutually interpretive structure foundational to Islamic epistemology.

Conclusion

This study examined the semantic relationship between the Qur'an and Hadith through classical Islamic approaches using Qur'anic evidence and narrations primarily from *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

The findings show four principal relationships:

- Hadith explains Qur'anic meanings (*bayān*)
- Hadith specifies general commands (*takhsis*)
- Hadith restricts unrestricted rulings (*taqyid*)
- Hadith functions as an independent authoritative source within prophetic revelation

Classical Islamic scholarship consistently treated authentic Hadith as indispensable for understanding and implementing Qur'anic guidance. Rather than viewing Hadith as external commentary, classical scholars understood it as integral to revelation-based interpretation. This relationship remains central to Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and hermeneutics.

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