

Workshop: "Quotation practices in pre-modern Arabic: what is an *isnād*?"

Friday 22nd - Saturday 23rd March 2019

Conveners: Julia Bray (University of Oxford) and Isabel Toral-Niehoff (FU Berlin)

Description:

Stijn Aerts's entry "*Isnād*" in The *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE* reflects the accepted view of the *isnād* when it says that it is found in "Islamic historiography and the Islamic sciences, including *ḥadīth*, Prophetic biography, exegesis, and jurisprudence" and that it gives "varying levels of authority to reports by demonstrating their provenance from earlier authorities or eyewitnesses." In both medieval and modern scholarship, the *isnād*, a string of names that links a quotation or text (*matn*) to its original source via a sequence of receptors and transmitters, has been predominantly associated, as a scholarly device, with oral teaching or the fiction of orality. In modern scholarship it is usually associated with the types of religious discipline enumerated by Aerts. Over the centuries, *isnāds* leading back to a *ḥadīth* (an eyewitness report of what the Prophet Muḥammad said, did, endorsed or disapproved of) gave rise to a vast body of scholarship organised prosopographically around transmitters. This scholarship, however, was often wary if not openly critical of easy assumptions about the reality of personal contact, textual reliability and historical authenticity.

It is the credibility of *isnāds* connected with *ḥadīth* that has engrossed the attention of modern western scholarship, obscuring the fact that there are many other kinds of *isnād* which are found across a wide range of Arabic writings, in varied contexts, and that all *isnāds* are instances of quotation practice—something that is not peculiar either to Arabic or to the "Islamic sciences." Conferring or denying authority or authenticity by showing provenance may not be their only function, and the familiar string or "chain" format may not be the only type.

The purpose of the workshop is:

- to look at different contexts in which *isnāds* occur in pre-modern Arabic writings;
- to examine the forms and investigate the functions of *isnāds* as quotation practices;
- to ask whether new forms and functions developed in the course of time.

The workshop will bring together Arabic scholars from different fields (literature, history, law, etc.) and is intended to establish a conversation between disciplines on the subject of the quotation practices represented in *isnāds* and the questions they raise.

The main aim of the workshop is to raise interdisciplinary consciousness rather than to publish, but it may nevertheless result in a jointly-authored publication (e.g. a survey article), an edited publication (e.g. a journal special issue) or individual publications.

Presenters will speak to their topic for between 30 and 45 minutes and provide participants with copies of the texts they are speaking to. The ensuing group discussion will be moderated by a **Chair**.

Venues: the Seminar Room, St John's College Research Centre, 44-45 St Giles, with tea and coffee across the road in the Kendrew Café, Kendrew Quad, St John's.

On arrival at St John's, will presenters please go to the main Porters' lodge on St Giles, where staff will tell you how to make your way to the Kendrew Café for Registration/Tea, coffee.

Provisional programme and abstracts so far received:

Friday March 22nd:

15.00 - 15.30: at St John's Kendrew Café

Reception/registration/welcome/Tea, coffee: Julia Bray (Oxford: Oriental Institute/St John's College) and Isabel Toral-Niehoff (Freie Universität Berlin)

15.30 - 17.30: at St John's Research Centre, 44 45 St Giles

First session: "Isnāds: should ḥadīth studies dictate how we approach Arabic quotation practices?"

Chair: [Isabel Toral Niehoff] t.b.c.

Presenters:

J. Little (D.Phil candidate, Oxford): "The problem of 'single strand' (SS) *isnāds*."
 Julia Bray (Oxford): "Varieties of *isnād* in the first three chapters of al-Tanūkhī's 'Deliverance Follows Adversity' (*al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda*)."

7 p.m.: Dinner for presenters, St John's SCR

Saturday March 23rd:

10.00 - 12.30: at St John's Research Centre, 44 45 St Giles

Second session: "Arabic quotation practices in historiography"

Chair: [Hilary Kilpatrick] t.b.c.

Presenters:

Edward Coghill (Cambridge): [*Isnāds* in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr*]
Tea/coffee break at St John's Kendrew Café
 Peter Webb (Leiden): [*Isnāds* of materials on Jāhili outlaws]

Cafeteria lunch for presenters at St John's Kendrew Café

14.00-15.30: at St John's Research Centre, 44 45 St Giles

Third session: "Are *isnād* practices in Islamic Spain special?"

Chair: [J. Little] t.b.c.

Presenters:

Delfina Serrano (CSISCO): [*Isnāds* in Andalusi and Maghribi religious scholarship]

Isabel Toral-Niehoff (Freie Universität Berlin): [*Isnāds* in Andalusi *adab*: Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*]

Tea/coffee break at St John's Kendrew Café

16.00-18.00: at St John's Research Centre, 44 45 St Giles

Fourth session: "What can *isnāds* tell us about how *adab* was collected and passed on?"

Chair: [Edward Coghill] t.b.c.

Presenters:

Hilary Kilpatrick (Lausanne): "*Isnāds*: yes or no? Evidence from al-Shābushtī's *Kitāb al-diyārāt* and some other *adab* works"

James White: "Transmission, Editing, and Authorship: *Isnāds* in al-Tha'ālibī's (d. 429/1037 or 1038) *Yatīmat al-dahr*"

[Drinks]

8.30 p.m.: *Dinner for presenters, Pizza Express, The Golden Cross, Cornmarket*