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***Modern Hadith Studies: Continued Debates and New Approaches* Edited by Belal Abu-Alabbas, Michael Dann and Christopher Melchert, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, 232 p. ISBN: 978-1474441797**

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For a long time, western studies on Islam in general and hadith in particular has been occupied with the question of origin. For hadith studies, discussions ensued on whether the hadiths purporting to go back to the Prophet actually did go back to the Prophet. Goldziher, Schacht and Juynboll believed that, although the hadith cannot be an accurate report of the origins of Islam, they can function as documentary evidence for some of the tendencies found in the community during its mature development. With the seminal works of Jonathan Brown, Scott Lucas and Eerik Dickinson, a shift is seen in the field from searching for the origins of hadith to its reception history. The works of Garret Davidson and Joel Belcher is a continuation of this reception history, extending our understanding of hadith reception to post the era of the canonical collections.

The book under review is an addition to this body of scholarship. It is a collection of papers from a conference held at Pembroke College, Oxford in 2019 on the topic of ‘Modern Hadith Studies between Arabophone and Western Scholarship’. About half a century ago, Professor Zafar Ishaq Ansari, a student and critic of Schacht, translated some of his works and presented them to the Egyptian scholar Abu Zahra to introduce him to Schacht’s methodology. Ansari’s attempt to synthesise western and Islamic methods of hadith scholarship miserably failed. He laments that the scathing rejoinder to Schacht by Abu Zahra ‘illustrates the gulf that continues to exist between the Orientalist and Islamic traditions of knowledge’ (Ansari, PhD thesis, 1966). Five decades later, the present work begins to evidence the convergence of Islamic and western scholarship on hadith. It brings together ‘contributions from scholarly communities typically inaccessible to one another,’ although they may still be deadlocked in initial assumptions and end goals. In particular, hitherto, hardly explored works of al-Thānawī, ‘Itr, Abū Ghudda, al-‘Awnī, al-Mallībārī (chapter 7: Snober) and Turkish academics’ reception of western hadith studies (chapter 8: Kızıl) are warmly welcomed.

The book has an introduction (Melchert) and nine chapters. The final chapter (Dann) can also be read as a conclusion to the book since it discusses assumptions, goals and methodological questions.

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In chapter 1, through a detailed study of the evolution of the *athar*, ‘*kunnā nakrah al-kitāb*’, Pavlovitch demonstrates the utility of the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis when coupled with other forms of analysis such as delving into the semantic structures of the *matn*. Pavlovitch refers to the evolution of concept from vagueness to clarity of expression. I will return to the theme of historical dynamism later on in the review.

In the ‘History of the *adhān*’ (ch. 2), Benarkiewicz, discusses the concept of a proto-narrative or an ur-narration. By using computer-assisted visualisation tools to produce data-dense graph, she was able to systematically analyse the primary sources. She concludes that this type of data analysis allows to uncover the various interests attached to the proto-narrative by historians, jurists, hadith narrators and story-tellers among others.

Melchert (ch. 3), in his study of the life and work on ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubārak reviews the extant scholarship on him in Arabophone and western hadith scholarship before presenting his own findings on the topic. He is highly critical, and in my opinion too harsh, of Feryal Salem’s work on Ibn al-Mubārak. Melchert makes some interesting observations about the nature of scholarship in Arabophone and western hadith studies. A common feature of Arabophone scholarship, Melchert writes, is that Arabic books are full of quotations but lack in-depth analysis. They are akin to having a good ‘research assistant’. Furthermore, Islamic scholarship is more geared towards normative truths rather than historical accuracy as a result of which Arabophone scholars treat their subjects as constants incapable of change. In contrast, western scholars are concerned with change and dynamism which illustrate certain tendencies of western historical writings such as being sceptical of orthodoxies, having a critical attitude and always saying something new (p. 52).

Jeremy Farrell (ch. 4) using machine-assisted network analysis method (using a software called *Gephi*), explores the relationship between sufis and traditionists. He names this relationship the ‘split-reconciliation hypothesis’. Melchert writes that like many statistical models, Farrell’s digital methodology doesn’t add too much to our knowledge of what we already know. However, he welcomes this confirmation.

Joseph Schacht first introduced the importance of the ‘common-link’ for historical studies. GHA Juynboll further developed it and embellished an elaborate *usūl* around it using terms like ‘partial common-link’ ‘inverse common-link’ ‘fulan’ ‘spiders’ and ‘dive’. Halit Ozkan, retorted to Juynboll’s argument that his ‘common-link’ is the same as the ‘*madār*’ used by classical hadith scholars. In chapter 5, Aghaei vindicates Juynboll from Ozkan’s criticism by providing further evidence for Juynboll’s claim through studying the concepts of *gharīb* and *taffarrud* in the works of al-Tirmidhī and other hadith scholars. It maybe that Ozkan was put off by the fact that Juynboll claims that it is the common-link who forged the hadith and put it in to circulation. Aghaei, tempers this and argues that even though the ‘common-link’ and the ‘*madār*’ is the same person, there are alternatives explanation for the proliferation of the *isnād* from him beyond the CL being a forger. This is where, Aghaei makes the case for a synthesis of Islamic and western scholarship.

In chapter 6, Mutaz al-Khatib engages in deflecting the charge of those who claim that classical Muslim scholars were too infatuated with the *isnād* and did not give much attention to the *matn*. Al-Khatib argues that most *matn* criticism took place within the discipline of *usūl al-fiqh* as this is where scholars were concerned with authority and applicability rather than authenticity. He argued that *matn* criticism in practice was defined by the genre that a scholar wrote in and not by their personal affiliation to any school of thought (p. 131). Al-Khatib embarks on a detailed excursion on *matn* criticism in the *usūl al-fiqh* literature by focusing on when and how a ‘solitary report’ (*al-akhbār al-āḥād*) is to be rejected. Whilst the task is lauded and a welcome corrective to the state of knowledge, it raises a number of questions and observations:

1. *Ulūm al-ḥadīth* is dominated by the Shāfi‘ī/Ḥanbalī method. Hadith collections have also been influenced by this approach. Therefore, the majority of the collections, which are accessible to the masses are based on this method which ‘allows formally authentic hadiths to stand as legal evidence.’ (p. 143)

2. It is difficult to find a hadith collection where hadiths are categorised according to the *usūls* of the *fuqahā’*.

3. How would a major hadith collection like al-Bukhārī’s look if it was reformulated according to a Ḥanafī or Mālikī method of *matn* criticism? And more importantly would Ḥanafīs and Mālikīs accept this declaration of weakness given the status of al-Bukhārī in the Sunnī community?

4. Finally, whilst Ibn al-Qayyim’s discussion on *matn* criticism borders on those which are obviously absurd, can the *usūls* of *matn* criticism discussed here be extended to other areas besides Islamic law?

In chapter 7, Ahmad Snober sets out to explore hadith scholarship in the Levant. Through investigating the works of two groups of scholars (*zāhir al-isnād* and *‘ilal al-ḥadīth*), Snober makes some interesting sociological observations for the emergence of hadith studies in the Levant. Since the high Middle Ages until the modern period, hadith scholarship in the Levant was stagnant. It is only through the efforts of Rashīd Ridā’s students, Jamāluddīn al-Qāsimī and Ṭāhir al-Jazāi’rī that hadith studies came to life in the Levant. But the real reviver of hadith was the Syrian Salafī Nāṣiruddīn Al-Albānī. The latter’s work led to rejoinders and caustic responses from modern traditionalist Syrian scholars such as Nuruddīn ‘Itr and Abū Ghudda. However, Snober, argues that although ideologically they were different, in their hadith methodology they were both the same as Al-Albānī: using the theoretical discussions developed in the high Middle Ages by the likes of Ibn Ḥajar as the foundation for hadith analysis. In contrast, hadith scholarship that developed in Jordan and represented by the South Indian scholar Ḥamzah ‘Abdullāh al-Mallībārī questioned the utility of applying theoretical discussions to hadith analysis. They opted for analysing each hadith on its own merit rather than judging a narrator based on Ibn Ḥajar’s *Taqrīb*. This question was raised many years ago by Dickinson as to whether hadiths are analysed using biographical dictionaries or by comparison and corroboration (*mutāba‘ah* and *shāwahid*). Snober

makes an interesting observation. He writes that since Jordan had no established school of hadith, the field was empty for scholars to develop novel methods of hadith analysis. He believes that the *Ilal al-isnad* school would definitely have met with heavy resistance and would not have succeeded had it been suggested in Syria due to its established schools there. Finally, *Nuzhat al-Fikar* (p. 159) should read *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, and Al-Tahānawī (p. 170) should read Al-Thānawī as it is attributed to the small Indian town of Thana Bawan situated in the State of Uttar Pradesh, India.

Fatma Kızıl in chapter 8 discusses the reception history of western critical hadith studies in Turkey. She argues that the introduction of western hadith studies is a result of wider westernisation project in Turkey. And yet, the general attitude towards western hadith studies is one of scepticism played out mainly in their treatment of Prophetic medicine and its relation to modern medicine. However, the author argues that we should not make too much of the influence of Orientalist hadith studies on Turkish hadith studies. She argues, that with the exception of two authors, it is hard to make a direct causal relationship with progressive hadith studies and Orientalist studies. It may be nothing more than an extension of the Indian and Egyptian discussions on hadith turning the progressive hadith scholarship of Turkish academics into a second-hand Islamic modernism. This study is an original and welcomed contribution to field of modern hadith studies in English.

Finally, in chapter 9, Michael Dann investigates the historiographical contributions of Islamic scholars (Imāmī Shī‘a, pro-‘Alīd Sunnīs, and confessionals Sunnīs) as seen from the standpoint of western scholars. Interestingly, Karīmiah Sūdānī’s study on Shī‘a narrators in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* corroborate the theoretical discussions of the Mamluk period *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth* literature. Dann acknowledges that contributions of these strands of Islamic scholarship significantly increases our knowledge of the place of Shī‘a narrators in the Sunnī hadith traditions even though the work maybe normative or sectarian (p. 193).

Finally, the book alludes to the different assumptions and ends of both worlds of scholarship. Islamic scholarship as well as western scholarship hinge on a spectrum of the ‘relative centrality’ of historical and normative questions (yes, western scholarship has its own normativity and orthodoxy). The starting point and assumptions are different. A Muslim scholar doing normative Islamic studies is not really interested in whether *Kitāb al-Zuhd* can be accurately attributed to Ibn al-Mubārak or not as long as the message of *zuhd* in it corresponds with the message of Islam. The edited book under review has paved the way in introducing macro-studies and global trends in hadith studies which is a welcome addition to the canons of hadith literature in western Islamic Studies.