



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Introduction

Sijpesteijn, P.M.; Adang, C.

Citation

Sijpesteijn, P. M., & Adang, C. (2020). Introduction. In *Islam at 250: Studies in Memory of G.H.A. Juynboll* (pp. 1-6). Brill.
doi:10.1163/9789004427952_002

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3249138>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Introduction

Petra M. Sijpesteijn and Camilla Adang

How did early Muslim scholars go about mining information from the oral and written sources at their disposal, what methods did they devise, how did they assess the reliability or otherwise of the information extracted, and to what extent can modern scholars rely on their findings? These are some of the themes that were central to the scholarship of Gautier H.A. Juynboll, to whose memory the present volume is dedicated. Although Juynboll is mainly known for his seminal publications on hadith, in which he provided elaborate reconstructions of how traditions ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad (“the P.” as he would usually refer to him in conversation) could have come into existence, his research in fact touched upon the entire spectrum of early Islam, its history and cultural production. At the two conferences that were organised at Leiden University in 2011 and 2015 in commemoration of Juynboll’s lengthy and fruitful academic career as well as in the present collection that resulted from these meetings, we have aimed to bring together a group of scholars whose work reflects an affinity with Juynboll’s research interests and in some cases also with his methodology. The title chosen for the book indicates this ambition, consciously going beyond the confines of hadith scholarship to cover a wider range of scholarly activity in the first three centuries of Islam. The various contributions clearly reveal the impact of Juynboll’s work and methods across the breadth of scholarship on early Islam.

Although the articles in this book are roughly ordered according to the main subdivisions in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies—while drawing upon interdisciplinary approaches—we should like to highlight some of the themes that shine through the volume as a whole. This survey does not aim to be exhaustive.

1 Searching for the *Sitz im Leben*

The concern to establish the historical background of certain texts and traditions is prevalent in several of the contributions. Thus Claude Gilliot studies the possible roots of the enigmatic term *ḥanīf*, which occurs several times in the Qurʾān, and emphasises the fact that this scripture originated in a syncretistic environment. He discusses early variant readings of the relevant passages and their reception in later Islamic scholarship and provides a survey of mod-

ern western theories concerning the term *ḥanīf*. Robert Gleave is interested in assessing the process whereby legal doctrines of Twelver Shīʿism emerged. As a case study, he examines a number of apparently contradictory statements from the Twelver Shīʿī hadith corpus that are attributed to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) concerning the legality of selling and, by implication, buying excrement, which can be used as a fertiliser or as fuel. These dicta bear a striking similarity to what is found in Sunni hadith. A comparison with statements by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) in *al-Mudawwana* and *Kitāb al-Umm* respectively shows that the issue was much debated among Sunnis as well, and suggests that the Imāmī material reflects the debates in the Sunni realm. The concern to establish the *Sitz im Leben* of the texts discussed is noticeable also in the contribution by Ahmed El Shamsy, which discusses a series of hadiths on male hair dyeing, a topic to which Juynboll himself devoted an article. El Shamsy shows how the Muslim conquerors of the seventh century CE wanted to distinguish themselves from the people they had conquered by dyeing their beards in a conspicuous and unnatural colour. He demonstrates that the elaborate corpus of traditions recommending the dyeing of hair and beards by Muslims was rooted in very specific historical circumstances, and that the custom soon fell into desuetude. Revisiting another article by Juynboll, Peter Webb studies the origins of the negative attitude among Muslim hadith scholars and jurists towards *niyāḥa*, a mourning practice involving loud wailing which was depicted as a quintessentially pre-Islamic, and therefore reprehensible Arabian practice, this in spite of the fact that in Arabia on the eve of Islam and in Muḥammad's days *niyāḥa* was apparently a relatively uncommon phenomenon. He finds that one of the reasons that motivated scholars to brand *niyāḥa* as an objectionable Jāhili practice was the strengthening of the Shīʿite community in Iraq, which engaged in mourning rituals for their imams, in particular al-Ḥusayn. Webb explains that in Arabic non-religious sources, the image of the Jāhiliyya is on the whole not all that negative. Aisha Geissinger studies a hadith according to which Muḥammad found his wife Ḥafṣa bint ʿUmar (d. 45/665) in the presence of a woman—tellingly called al-Shifāʾ—who performed an incantation for her (*ruqyat al-namla*). He asked the woman to teach it to Ḥafṣa. In another version of this tradition, the woman, this time not identified by name, is asked by the Prophet not only to teach her this incantation, but also writing. Geissinger argues that the hadith in question was primarily designed to stress that certain healing practices, having been endorsed by the Prophet, were compatible with Islam and thus permissible, which in the second/eighth and third/ninth century was much disputed. The author does not find that the version including Muḥammad's instructions to teach his wife to write (or to teach her the Book) proves that Ḥafṣa was literate, although it

has regularly been adduced by Muslims in modern times to argue in favour of teaching women to write.

2 Establishing Reliability

A number of the articles included here discuss the different ways in which early Muslim scholars were already concerned with the questions of how to establish a reliable evidence base, how to judge an oral statement or a written text and how to determine authority on the basis of the means of transmission or the identity of the transmitter. Several studies in this book examine the historical development of these criteria, which differed in the various branches of learning. The well-known observation that a continuous chain of transmitters guarantees the reliability of an account is, it turns out, only one among various different methods of ascertaining authenticity that existed (and exist) in Muslim scholarship, as is borne out in Christopher Melchert's contribution, which deals with the theory and practice of hadith criticism. Whereas Melchert focuses on works produced in the mid-ninth century CE by Sunni and Mu'tazilī authors, including al-Shāfi'ī, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Yūsuf and al-Jāḥiz, to name but the most famous ones, Asma Hilali continues her analysis of theoretical works on prophetic tradition into the eleventh century CE. She argues that there is a marked discrepancy between definitions of hadith terminology in works of theory on the one hand, and the actual understanding and use of these terms by hadith scholars on the other. Melchert proves that there was not *one* traditionalist and *one* rationalist approach, but rather an entire spectrum of views as to how to sift hadith. While some scholars were mostly concerned with establishing consensus with regard to the contents of a tradition, others focused on the probity of the *muḥaddith* when deciding whether the information passed on by him (or, occasionally, her) was reliable. A transmitter's reputation in this early period was often based on the appreciation of his moral standing among his peers. Geert Jan van Gelder presents a series of anecdotes from a work by the man of letters and religious scholar Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) that deal with hadith or its transmitters. The purpose of some of these anecdotes is apparently to take aim at careless or unreliable *muḥaddithūn*. Interestingly, each of the anecdotes from Ibn Qutayba's work is provided with an *isnād*, though none of the statements quoted is traced back to the Prophet. This indicates that models of authentication associated with hadith scholarship could easily be used in *adab* literature. Similarly, Roberto Tottoli analyses the use of devices primarily identified with hadith in other types of sources, the so-called *akhbār* (sg. *khabar*), often translated as historical accounts, which may or may not deal

with the Prophet. He traces the various ways in which Juynboll used terms like *hadith* and *khavar/akhbār* throughout his voluminous oeuvre, comparing it with the understanding of such terms in Muslim sources as well in western scholarship. While the terms often appear to be near-synonymous, the meaning of *khavar* is not always clear and a more sophisticated distinction needs to be made.

One domain that has contributed greatly to a more sophisticated and varied understanding of how Muslim scholars judged transmitted accounts is the debate on orality versus written transmission and the role of memory. Scott Lucas draws our attention to a set of hadiths transmitted by ‘Amr b. Shu‘ayb and his ancestors and going back to the Prophet that is included in the *Musnad* of the famous hadith scholar Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). The fact that ‘Amr did not receive these traditions orally, but “merely” found in them in a written collection or *ṣahīfa* was a cause for concern, as oral transmission was still regarded as being more reliable. In time the reliance on books and written texts in the transmission of knowledge increased, and notebooks of teachers were soon being combed for hadiths. Based on a saying attributed to the *muḥaddith* al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) scholars have come to the conclusion that it was the Umayyad rulers who first enforced the writing down (*kitāb*) of knowledge—generally taken to mean hadith—marking the transition from oral to written transmission. Pavel Pavlovitch discusses the contents and chains of transmitters of a number of variants of this statement, and concludes that al-Zuhrī’s original saying, which is quite ambiguous, does not warrant this conclusion. He argues that the re-interpretation of al-Zuhrī’s alleged dislike of *kitāb* in the sense of scripture caused a rewording of the hadith in question. However, even in an age when certain scholars explicitly preferred oral transmission and spoken teacher-to-pupil interaction to the conveyance of fully written and completely composed texts—accepting written lecture notes only as aide-mémoires—there were others who produced and used proper books. As Michael Lecker explains, books could be rearranged and recomposed to fit an author’s shifting insights or allegiances. Ibn Ishāq’s (d. in or after 150/767) “un-doing” his *Sīra* of the prophet Muḥammad refers to his revising his earlier recensions of the book, which resulted in the text that he transmitted to his student Ibrāhīm. Different categories of reliability for transmission existed side by side and depended on the scholarly discipline; in history different criteria were used from those applied in law. Thus when quoting traditions about the life of the prophet Muḥammad, his biographer Ibn Ishāq was not concerned with the authority of the transmitter as a hadith scholar, Lecker argues.

3 New Approaches to Scholarship on Early Islam

Several papers build directly on Juynboll's concern with the historicity of prophetic traditions, offering important novel approaches from other disciplines and adjacent fields of research which have penetrated the field, leading to new insights that are already having an impact by greatly advancing our understanding of earliest Muslim society. Ahmed El Shamsy, for example, uses non-Muslim sources to re-examine the discussion of the permissibility of dyeing hair and beards. Incorporating Syriac Christian and other sources, El Shamsy shows how Late Antique practices and ideas indirectly influenced Muslim morals and legal thought. This indicates that the booming field of Late Antique studies, which has now been accepted as extending into the Islamic period, has impacted our field and how insightful the use of contemporary non-Muslim sources in the study of the early Islamic tradition has been. Advocating a holistic approach in his article, Peter Webb demonstrates how materials culled from literary and philological materials on the one hand and hadiths on the other can complement each other and make for a more balanced picture. He cautions against reading hadiths referring to the pre-Islamic period through the distorted lens of the scholarship of previous centuries about the Jāhiliyya, suggesting instead to examine the texts carefully on their own terms and within their own historical context. And as Van Gelder reminds us in his contribution, hadith and hadith scholars can even be a topic of entertaining literary prose or poetry. The traditional division of labour in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies has of course kept the various disciplines separate, but Van Gelder shows what interesting nuggets of information can be retrieved from the literary sources if sufficient ingenuity is displayed. To this observation should be added an important point made by Maribel Fierro, namely that while scholars—and in particular historians—are mostly looking for bits of positive information in the texts, what the sources *leave out* also constitutes an important source of information. Pavel Pavlovitch appeals to scholars to apply methods from other disciplines, especially literary studies, and to use form-critical methodologies to trace information from the *matn* of the hadiths back to the earliest period. Monique Bernards' successful application of Social Network Analysis to the study of interactions among scholarly groups and '*ulamā*' has already proven its importance. She not only uncovers how integrated webs of hadith scholars developed across time and space and how this contributed to the expansion of hadith scholarship as a discipline and the building of its infrastructure, but also how it intersected with the development of other scholarly domains. Bernards shows how increasing complexity and specialisation of scholarly disciplines impacted the organisation of the Muslim scholarly landscape. While

in the earlier period scholars practiced various disciplines, later on specialisation led to a more rigorous distinction between them. Many early grammarians for example were also hadith scholars, while later ones, after the establishment of *naḥw* (systematised grammar) were subsumed under the category of *adab*. This affected the character, readership and methods used in and organisation and materiality of their works.

Another example of how scholarship has moved on since Juynboll developed the field of critical hadith studies, building on the work of venerable predecessors such as Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, is the more critical posture applied nowadays towards these other towering authorities in the field. El Shamsy's call to move beyond Schacht in tracing the role of hadith in the development of legal thought echoes similar calls in neighbouring fields but constitutes a clear break with the attitude prevalent in Juynboll's days. That much remains to be done is argued by Gleave, who signals a glaring lacuna in scholarship on Shī'ī hadith, which still lacks a sophisticated *isnād* analysis. Another area that is relatively underrepresented in modern research is the intellectual and literary production of scholars in the medieval Islamic West: al-Andalus and North Africa. Although, as Fierro makes clear, their output was by no means negligible, it was initially almost completely ignored in the Mashriq, and this ultimately also affected modern scholarship.

This short overview of some of the themes raised by the contributions in this book shows the wide range of scholarship directly or indirectly impacted by Juynboll's work. The diversity and high quality of the contributions are a fitting tribute to this magnificent scholar and human.