

Commentaries read horizontally:

Towards a sociological approach to the study of commentaries in the Islamicate world

Call for papers – International Conference and Collective Volume

For a long time, Islamicate commentary literature was ignored almost entirely by Western scholarship due to the conviction that commentaries merely repeated previous writings without or with little innovative potential. Only recently has the vast commentary tradition of the Islamicate world in general and of the Middle Islamic Period in particular received an increased scholarly interest. Locating the commentaries in a tradition of knowledge transmission and evolution, several recent studies have scrutinized commentaries more closely for the processes of adding explanatory information (*šarḥ*, *ḥāšiya*), abridging and synthesizing knowledge (*iḥtišār*), or versifying the contents (*manzūma*) within different disciplines, hence have read them vertically (i.e., across time).

Besides the tendency of commentaries to initiate and further processes of knowledge specialization and differentiation, a close examination of the social context of the commentaries' authors can also reveal the social functions of the texts. Whenever an author decides to comment on a previous work, he takes this decision not only because of the intrinsic quality of the work itself, but a variety of social and political reasons are usually part of this decision. The commentator might feel a deep attachment to the work or the author for close social relations or intellectual affinity. In other cases, the work might be perceived as part of the intellectual and cultural 'capital' of a certain group that the author of the commentary writes to attain status or recognition within a specific group. The work commented on might also be the arena for an intellectual rivalry played out in defending or criticizing the work, including for, but not restricted to, political patronage, or to reinforce general political support or suppression of a certain intellectual trend. All those considerations distinguish commentary literature from other genres, since they already implicitly and sometimes even explicitly express a variety of intellectual and social alliances and rivalries.

Hence, the conference and the planned publication aim for a holistic approach to commentary literature, reading them horizontally (across space, including social space) as well as vertically, and understanding the commentary's contents on the one hand and the author's social and political context on the other as two complementary and equally necessary elements of the analysis. The social context goes a long way in explaining the author's choice to comment on a work and the way he does that. Vice versa, those very factors reveal additional information about the author's motivation and the audience he had in mind while compiling the commentary. Only if text and context are analyzed together can commentary literature be seen in its full function, intellectually and socially.

Papers are welcome that focus on a commentary tradition in one of the fields of Islamic studies, such as Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), *ḥadīth*, Qur'ān commentaries (*tafsīr*), Grammar, Medicine, Philosophy, Logic, Kalām, Ṣufism etc. Papers focusing on the 12th to 16th centuries with a regional focus on Egypt and Syria are especially welcome taking into account the shared political, social, economic, and intellectual context in this time and region. However, for comparative reasons, studies on other periods and regions are welcome as well, provided they sufficiently contextualize the selected commentary tradition in its social, political, and intellectual background. Studies should be guided by the following lead questions: When and why did the selected commentary tradition start and end? How are the authors of the commentaries related to each other and to the author of the commented work? What are the new elements that were brought by the commentary into the knowledge tradition and how are

they connected to the social, political, and intellectual life of the author? What functions do the commentaries fulfill? Is there any political patronage or policies that could have influenced the commentaries? Are the commentaries connected – and therefore possibly limited to – certain regions or teaching institutions?

Organization:

The conference will be organized and the proceedings edited by Mohammad Gharaibeh, academic coordinator of the Alexander von Humboldt Kolleg for Islamicate Intellectual History, University of Bonn. The conference will take place in Bonn from **January 25th–27th 2019**. Expenses for travel and accommodation will be covered by the AvH Kolleg. The papers will be peer reviewed and the volume is foreseen to be published in the series *Islamicate Intellectual History* (Brill, eds. Shahzad Bashir, Heidrun Eichner, and Judith Pfeiffer).

Time Frame

- Please submit proposals by **February 28, 2018**, including the title of the contribution and an abstract of about 300 words.
- Once the paper has been accepted, you will be asked to hand in a manuscript of about 10 pages by **October 31, 2018** (can already be the talk for the conference, about 30 min talk).
- The first draft of the full article will be due by **March 31 2019** (10.000–20.000 words)

For more information please contact Mohammad Gharaibeh at mgharaibeh@uni-bonn.de