

# New Methodological Perspectives in Islamic Studies

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# Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Tables	VIII
Notes on Contributors	IX
Note on Transliteration	XVI

1	Introduction: Moving Beyond	1
	<i>Aaron W. Hughes and Abbas Aghdassi</i>	
2	“Islam and...”: Thinking about Islam through the Act of Comparison	10
	<i>Aaron W. Hughes</i>	

## PART 1

### *Gender*

3	Toward a “Hermeneutics of Trust” in the Current Discussion on a Gender-Just Interpretation of Islamic Primary Texts	29
	<i>Eva Kepplinger</i>	
4	The Discursive Construction of Women’s Guile in the Muslim Exegetical Tradition	46
	<i>Taira Amin</i>	

## PART 2

### *The Political*

5	Contemporary Turkish Academic Approach to Christianity <i>The Case of the New Turkish Encyclopedia of Islam (DİA)</i>	75
	<i>Betül Avcı</i>	
6	New Methods for Understanding Political Islam <i>Tradition-Constituted Rationality and the Theory of the Spirit of Meaning in the Work of Na’ini</i>	94
	<i>Ali Abedi Renani and Seyyed Ebrahim Sarparast Sadat</i>	
7	Recontextualizing Islam in the Social and Collective Memory <i>Tracing the Sociogenesis of Martyrdom in Türkiye</i>	115
	<i>Meral Durmuş and Bahattin Akşit</i>	

## PART 3

*Lived Islams*

- 8 Old, New or Digital Philology  
*Working towards an Amalgamated Work Frame* 137  
*Walid Ghali*
- 9 New Lenses for an Ethnography of Islam  
*The Case of Mevlid Ceremonies* 163  
*Isabella Crespi and Martina Crescenti*
- 10 Lived Institutions in the Study of Islam 184  
*Brian Arly Jacobsen, Pernille Friis Jensen, Kirstine Sinclair and  
Niels Valdemar Vinding*
- 11 Everyday Islam  
*Moving beyond the Piety and Orthodoxy Divide* 213  
*Magdalena Pycińska*
- 12 Moving from a Madrasa Situation to the Process of  
Doctrinal Development  
*An Explication of the Extended Case Method in the Study of Islam* 240  
*Zahraa McDonald*
- 13 A Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Lived Islam  
and Muslimness 264  
*Emin Poljarevic*
- 14 Back to Critique  
*Islamic Studies and the Vicious Hermeneutic Circle* 291  
*Abdessamad Belhaj*
- Index 307

# Old, New or Digital Philology

## *Working towards an Amalgamated Work Frame*

Walid Ghali

### 1 Introduction

Manuscripts, as primary sources, play an undisputed role in the field of Islamic studies. In addition to the oral transmission of knowledge, extant Islamic manuscripts, written over the ages, cover nearly every aspect of Islamic thought and culture. Moreover, Islamic manuscripts are important for western intellectual history, as there are many Arabic works pertaining to the heritage of Greek antiquity that remain in manuscript form. Some of these already printed texts possibly need to be re-edited critically based on new manuscript discoveries.<sup>1</sup>

Manuscript studies overlap with and use other disciplines such as diplomacy, philology, palaeography, and codicology. These fields focus on examining the intellectual history and history of ideas in a particular period or culture. As far as Islamic manuscripts are concerned, various approaches and methods were introduced to study the text and decipher the contents to make it available for scholarship. The outcome of this text-centric approach is called a *critical edition*.<sup>2</sup> Textual analysis, text criticism or critical editing of manuscripts bring the content to the forefront of scholarship, passing through many interconnected steps. However, it is believed that there are methodical differences between Western and non-Western scholarship in this field. This chapter aims to shed light on some of these differences in textual studies of Islamic manuscripts (*manāḥij al-taḥqīq*), including the newly established method of Digital Humanities.<sup>3</sup>

1 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Significance of Islamic manuscripts." In *The Significance of Islamic Manuscripts*, ed. John Cooper (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation), 7.

2 Critical Editions are produced by comparing several versions of the same work and producing a more comprehensive version, pointing out the differences in each version to arrive at a more comprehensive work. The notation of the textual differences enables placing the work in its context, be it historical, social, ideological or otherwise.

3 I previously dealt with one of those differences in my Ph.D. when I tried to answer the question of how digitisation and the metadata attached to it can speak the language of textual

The chapter also argues that working towards an integrated approach to studying Islamic manuscripts will directly impact the study of Islam. The integration of different methods to form a multi-methodological approach should assist in speeding up the analysis and publication of the vast volume of still unedited collections of manuscripts, especially in some contentious areas in the study of Islam, such as Islamic law and Sufism. Most importantly, the scientific manuscripts, seemingly remain much neglected in the studies performed by Muslims.

## 2 Philology or Textual Criticism

As this chapter attempts to analyse textual criticism as a method to study the primary sources in Islamic studies, it might be helpful to provide some definitions for the sake of clarity. In English language, Philology, old and new, is the study of language or languages. There is also textual criticism, “the study of a literary work that aims to establish the original text.”<sup>4</sup> This pattern cannot be traced in Arabic in the same way, as the language includes a wide range of terms referring to philology. Starting from using the transliterated form of *ḥilūlugiya*, (Philology) and *diblūmātīqā*, (Diplomacy), and words such as *taḥqīq wa-nashr al-nuṣūṣ* (textual editing and publishing), and *naqd al-nuṣūṣ* (Textual Criticism).

In the Arabic language, the word *taḥqīq* derives from the root *ḥ.q.q.* which relates to other words such as *al-Ḥaqq* (truth), *al-ʿAdl* (justice), *al-Ṣidq* (honesty), *mawjūd* (certain), *ṣaḥḥa* (true story), *tayaqqan* (certainty). In the field of manuscripts, *taḥqīq* means to make the text legible as close as possible to what the author intended to provide, and if this goal cannot be achieved, then to provide a text with as high proximity to the original text as possible through referring to any additions, glosses, insertions, deletions or removals in the original text’s versions that could have happened by mistake or deliberately.

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criticism and not the computer binary language. How it could support the work of *Tahqiq* and give them what they need to complete their critical editions. The challenge here was not in offering a technological solution, but was how to reach a common ground between the coding language XML and the traditional philologists. The outcome was a designed schema to absorb all codicological and philological descriptions. This chapter however is not about the nitty-gritty technical details of the digital architecture.

4 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “textual criticism,” accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/textual%20criticism>.

Aḥmad Shawqī Binbīn believes that philology in Western scholarship means studying literary texts, not including the study of language.<sup>5</sup> However, Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid argues that philology is a huge field, but the philological study of Arabic manuscripts examines the textual tradition and the content of the book. Sayyid prefers using *taḥqīq al-nuṣūṣ* (Textual criticism) over philology.<sup>6</sup>

Ahmed El-Shamsy also confirms that there are many Arabic terms used to describe different editorial practices, but the most common were *al-muqābala*, “collation,” and *al-taṣḥīḥ*, “correction.” This and the related word *muḥaqqiq*, “verifier,” became the standard terms for editing and editors, gradually replacing the corrector (*muṣaḥḥiḥ*) and his work of correction (*taṣḥīḥ*) as the primary interface between classical manuscripts and their printed manifestations.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, the term ‘textual criticism’ will be often used to supersede philology and *taḥqīq*. Philological as an adjective is also used to express the methodologies as opposed to codicological.

### 3 Significance or Tragedy?

The number of studies about the significance of Islamic manuscripts is hard to count, especially those published in the Muslim world. Perhaps we need to shift the focus from the significance of manuscripts to *What* the manuscripts can tell us about Islam and how we could use it in Islamic studies in modern times. For instance, Hossein Nasr argues that Islamic manuscripts in Arabic and Persian are an important source for a better understanding of the religions and cultures of pre-Islamic Persia, adding that the extant manuscripts written over the ages cover nearly every aspect of Islamic thought and culture. Both written and oral traditions can give a clear picture of Islamic heritage and culture.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Shamsy ascribes manifold of reasons to the significance of Islamic manuscripts. The first reason is the quantity of extant manuscripts from the corpus; for example, around six hundred thousand manuscripts have survived to the

5 Binbīn, Aḥmad Shawqī. *Dirāsāt fī ‘ilm al-maḥṭūṭāt wa-l-baḥṭ al-bibliyūgrāfi* (al-Rabāt: Dār Abī Raqrāq lil-Ṭibā’ah wa-al-Nashr, 2018), 13.

6 Sayyid, Ayman Fu’ad, *al-Kitāb al-‘Arabi al-Maḥṭūṭ wa-‘ilm al-Maḥṭūṭāt* (al-Qāhirah: al-Dār al-Miṣriyah al-Lubnāniyah, 1997), 2: 545.

7 El Shamsy, Ahmed. *Rediscovering the Islamic classics: how editors and print culture transformed an intellectual tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 137.

8 Nasr, “The significance,” 14.

present day. Perhaps El-Shamsy refers to the recorded items, as some might argue that a similar number also exists in parallel, however in unrecorded private collections. The second striking feature is linguistic continuity and internal coherence. Finally, the tradition extends far back in time and spans and connects an immense geographic area with numerous local vernaculars.<sup>9</sup>

This geographic expansion bestows much value to Islamic manuscripts in that it facilitates the understanding of several cultures. It is pertinent to many fields of scholarship outside the domain of Islamic studies, such as knowledge of ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Byzantine civilisations, and pre-Islamic societies of the eastern Mediterranean world, such as the so-called Sabaeans of Harran.

Islamic manuscripts were also afflicted with numerous tragedies,<sup>10</sup> such as Wars, distractions and looting. We need to ask ourselves whether these tragedies come from within the heritage or are a result of the methodologies. To answer this question, we need to look at the challenges related to textual traditions and research, as the issue is rather old. The following excerpt from *ʿAjāʾib al-āthār* by al-Jabartī, the Egyptian historian, (d. 1822), already demonstrates this issue. He writes: “These [books] are now merely titles; the works themselves do not exist anymore. We have seen only fragments of some of them remaining in the endowed libraries of madrasas ... the last remains were lost in conflicts and wars or were taken away by the French to their lands.”<sup>11</sup> The political instability, conquest and the effects of colonialism have greatly affected the number of extant manuscripts.

Another critical problem in the field of Islamic studies is the high frequency of using and quoting some popular works such as al-Maqrīzī and al-Masʿūdī in the history; al-Qurtubī and Ibn Kathīr in the field of *Tafsīr* and Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī in Sufism, to mention but a few examples. These works have also received great attention featured in several hundreds of printed editions. Nasr claims that scholars tend to ignore other works which are still in the manuscript form or due to ideological reasons but never gave an example. In my view, each work has its own significance and answer a specific queries. So, this challenge will remain until new works get accessed, edited and printed. I concur with Nasr that some of the most renowned historical works still need a critical edition based on the most trustworthy of existing manuscripts

9 El-Shamsy, *Rediscovering*, 8.

10 I believe the first one who used the word tragedy was Michael Albin in his study: *The tragedy of Islamic manuscripts*. MELA Notes, 1972.

11 Al-Jabartī, *ʿAjāʾib al-āthār*, 1:11, in, El-Shamsy, 9.

including major works such as al-Fihrist, al-Maqrīzī and al-Muqaddima of Ibn Khaldūn.<sup>12</sup>

I also believe that another problem lies in the subjects that scholars tend to favour working on, such as Islamic law, history and literature, while there is a vast available corpus of scientific manuscripts on medicine, mathematics and astronomy.<sup>13</sup> This is possibly linked to the thousands of Arabic manuscripts that flowed out of the Islamic world in the nineteenth century, which had an impact on the study of manuscripts in the Muslim world. Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921) admitted that “[it] wiped the most ancient and most important sources of Arabic philology and Muslim science of religion out from their original homeland where these studies have found a new home in the last decades.”<sup>14</sup>

As far as the methodologies are concerned, some agree that the major tragedy is that Muslims refrain from using new methodologies to deconstruct their heritage, particularly the textual tradition. In his interview about Muslim heritage, ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ Haykal<sup>15</sup> argues that Muslims refrain from using new methodologies out of fear of failure, to retain their own agency, and to avoid accusations of imitating western methodologies. However, he believes that the only way to renew religious thoughts is by actively engaging with the heritage (*turāth*). In his own words: “we should aim to reinterpret [the past heritage] through the present.”<sup>16</sup>

The usage of manuscripts to the study of Islam and Muslims need further attention. Even with the increasing drive to making these manuscripts available online, Western academy utilization of such manuscripts is selective,

12 Nasr, “Significance,” 13.

13 See works of David A. King in the Islamic manuscripts of science such as: *Mathematical Astronomy in Medieval Yemen—A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, 1983; *Islamic Mathematical Astronomy*, London: Variorum, 1986; *Islamic Astronomical Instruments*, London: Variorum, 1987; *Astronomy in the Service of Islam*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1993; *World-Maps for Finding the Direction and Distance to Mecca: Innovation and Tradition in Islamic Science*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999; and *The Ciphers of the Monks—A Forgotten Number Notation of the Middle Ages*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001.

14 Mestyan, Adam, “Ignác Goldziher’s Report on the Books Brought from the Orient for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* LX/2 Autumn 2015, p. 454.

15 ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ Haykal, an Egyptian researcher specializing in Islamic thought and the discourse of Islamic groups, among his most important publications: “The Concept of the Civil State in Islam,” “The Crisis of Islamic Groups’ Discourse between Ancient and Modern,” and “The Lost Rib: The Interpreter’s Relationship to the Text.” And “A Reading in Interpretive Points of Nasr Abu Zayd,” a study was recently published by him entitled: *Bab Allah, Religious Discourse between the Two Rifts*.

16 ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ Haykal. Interview by Samih Ismail (2018). <https://tinyurl.com/84pwf42h>.



where philologists and digital humanists focus on works pertaining to their research projects. On the other hand, Muslim scholars look at this heritage as indigenous and unquestionable. In addition, Muslims tend to study home-grown manuscripts; for example, Persian manuscripts of any classical texts are widely studied in Iran by Iranian scholars.<sup>17</sup> While the former approach is somehow accepted, the approach of Muslim scholarship to the manuscripts needs to be revisited. That said, one should not ignore the accessibility problems and the control of the closed scholarly circles in both scholarships, Western and indigenous.

One of the challenges is that some Muslims are suspicious of anything that comes from the West (anti-orientalists) that emerged after Edward Said's (d. 2003) famous work *Orientalism*.<sup>18</sup> While Said's work was seminal in feeding this attitude, I believe that this suspicion had already started earlier, especially with the emergence of the movable printing press, evidenced by the Muslims' rejection of printing religious texts, such as the Qur'an and Ḥadīth collections.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of when the anti-orientalism inclination started, I concur with Majid Daneshgar's conclusion that "it is naïve to say that all multilingual orientalists were puppets of a royal court that wished to enslave Muslims."<sup>20</sup>

#### 4 Arabic-Islamic Philological Tradition

This section attempts to answer an important question regarding how Muslims approached their tradition and knowledge infrastructure and whether they knew textual criticism before the rise of the genre (*taḥqīq*) in the nineteenth century. In doing so, the focus will be given to the Arabic and Islamic philological traditions before and after the age of printing.

Textual transmission was an essential part of the educational system and knowledge transmission in Muslims intellectual history. Baghdad Gharbia argues that Muslim scholars used systematic guidelines to ensure the accurate transmission of knowledge throughout texts.<sup>21</sup> Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1111) mentioned the levels of receiving knowledge and the terminology related to the process to avoid mistakes. In his view, receiving the knowledge orally from the author comes first and foremost, followed by reading to the author to confirm authen-

17 Daneshgar, "Lost Orientalism, Lost Orient, and Lost Orientals." *Deconstructing Islamic Studies* (MA: ILEX and Harvard University Press), 2020, 338–57.

18 Said, *Orientalism*.

19 Ghali, "Politics."

20 Daneshgar, "Lost Orientalism," 338.

21 Baghdad, "Contribution," 201–205.

ticity of transmission as the second important step, and a certificate to prove the first two comes third.<sup>22</sup>

Commentaries on teaching texts go back at least to the third century of Islam, but the emergence of glosses as a key medium of scholarship is characteristic of the postclassical age. The system of commentaries is built on multilayers, which consist of primary commentaries (*shurūḥ*) written by either the author or, more commonly, by later scholars; glosses (*ḥawāshī*), are usually but not always based on commentaries; and sometimes tertiary commentaries (*taqārīr*), that is, commentaries on glosses on primary commentaries were produced. As a result, the older literature came to survive only in secondhand citations of individual opinions attributed to particular scholars or intellectual stream, often in oversimplified, distorted or it censored.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, one point that tends to be missed in textual criticism is the translation movement from the second/eighth century and specifically during Harūn al-Rashīd's (d. 809) reign. In my view, this movement was not a mere translation movement, but it also included the critical interpretation and refutations, known in the Muslim heritage by *Kutub al-shukūk* (lit. suspicious). Along with the translations of books, Muslim scholars refuted the content of these books. For example, *Kitāb al-shukūk 'ala Jālīnyūs* by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 924), and *al-Shukūk 'ala Baṭlaymūs* by Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040) which criticises the treatise on the apparent motions of the stars and planetary paths, written by Ptolemy (c. 100–170), known as *Almagest*.<sup>24</sup>

Talking about the textual transmission throughout copying manuscripts as a type of authorship, al-Qāḍī 'Iyād (d. 1149) mentioned that some authors and scribes stick to the text they are copying or commenting on and ensure they do not make any changes. If they found any mistakes, they would add a *tanbīh* (note) in the margin. Others were brave enough to correct the text as they narrated, copied or used it in teaching.<sup>25</sup> Maḥmūd al-Miṣrī<sup>26</sup> collected a few

22 Suyūṭī. *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*. al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī'. 2010), 1:526.

23 El-Shamsy, 32–35.

24 Ḥalwajī, *Tārīkh al-Makhtūṭ al-'Arabī*, 32.

25 One famous example is al-Qadi Abu al-Walid Hisham ibn Ahmad al-Kinani al-Waqshi in his work on *Kitab al-Ilma'* pp. 185–186. For more examples, see: Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463) dedicated one chapter to explain text collation and comparisons; Al-Khatib Baghdadi (d. 463) chapter on matching books together to authenticate the copies; Qadi 'Iyad (d. 544) Bab al-Taḥyid bi-al-Kitabah wa-al-Muqabalah; Ibn al-Salah (d. 643) Man Nasakha Kitab f'alyh Muqabalatauh; ibn Daqiq al-'Id (d. 702) al-Muqabalah wa-kayfiyyatiha; Ibn Juma'ah (d. 733) idha sahha al-kitab wa-almuqabalah 'alayh.

26 Miṣrī, Maḥmūd, "Manāhij Taḥqīq al-Makhtūṭāt ladā al-'Arab wa-al-Gharb," *Al-Multaqá al-Duwalī al-Thānī ḥawla Manāhij al-Taḥqīq 'inda al-'Arab wa-al-Gharb*, 14–15 April, 2013.

principles that Muslim scholars used in Ḥadīth sciences in the fourth century, which they used in collating and editing any texts to confirm the authenticity of transmission. For instance, *muqābala* or *mu'ārada* was used to match and compare different copies while *iṣlāḥ al-naṣṣ* (corrections), and *ḍabt al-naṣṣ* (additions) were to correct and insert missing text portions, and finally, *ṣun' al-ḥawāshī* (glosses) in which they wrote notes and *al-ʿAzw* which meant adding citations to the quotations used.<sup>27</sup>

Ḥusayn Naṣṣār argues that it is hard to imagine that Muslim scholars had not done similar techniques (*taḥqīq*) before the Western academia. It can be easily confirmed that Muslims knew *taḥqīq* during the mass production of manuscript copies or commentaries on specific texts while teaching them.<sup>28</sup> For example, al-Nadīm (d. 995) mentions in his *al-Fihrist* that *Jamharat al-ʿArab* by Muḥammad ibn Durayd (d. 933) has multiple copies with significant variances in the number of pages. He attributes the best copy as the one produced by ʿAbd Allah ibn Aḥmad al-Naḥawī, saying “[it] was the best because he copied it from different manuscripts and also recited<sup>29</sup> it to the author [Ibn Durayd].”<sup>30</sup>

Although the above examples display some structural guidelines in knowledge transmission in general and textual transmission in particular, they cannot be used as an example of textual criticism known in Islamic and Arabic studies since the 19th century. It is better to put these examples in their historical and intellectual context to explain the modes of authorships in the classical and postclassical periods. Now, I will turn to the second cycle of textual traditions in the Muslim world, which started in the nineteenth century with movable printing.

27 Al-Suyūṭī mentioned that he never quoted another person without mentioning his name and his work “*wa-la trānī adhkrū shayʿan min taṣnīf illā maʿzuwwan ilā qāʾilīh min al-ʿulamāʾ mubayyinān kitābahu alladhī dhakarahu fīh*” (Suyuti. *Al-Muzhir fi ʿulum al-Lughah*. Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1998. 2: 273).

28 Naṣṣār, Ḥusayn, “Ittijāhāt al-Ḥadītha fi Manāhij Taḥqīq al-Turāth,” in *Fi Taḥqīq al-Nusus*, Jamʿ wa-tahrir Muḥammad Abu al-Izz Abduh. Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 2020, 368.

29 Known as certificate of audition or reading, where the student or scribe read the book to its author to confirm authenticity (see: Gacek, *Arabic manuscripts: a vademecum for reader*, 2012, p. 59).

30 *Kitāb al-Jamharah fi ʿilm al-Lughah, mukhtalif al-nusakh, kathīr al-ziyāda wa-al-nuqṣān, li-annahu amlāhu bi-Fāris wa-amlāhu bi-Baghdād min ḥifẓih. Fa-lamma ikhtalaf al-implāʾ zād wa-naquṣa... wa-ākhir mā ṣaḥḥa min al-nusakh nuskhat Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Naḥwī li-annahu katabahā min ʿiddat nusakh wa-qaraʾahā ʿalayhi* (*Kitāb al-Fihrist*, page 86, *al-fann al-awwal fi ibtidāʾ al-kalām fi al-naḥw wa-akhbār al-naḥwīyīn wa-al-lughawīyīn min al-Baṣrīyīn wa-fuṣaḥāʾ al-ʿarāb*).

Librarians who engage with classical texts in Islamic studies know the subdivision "*Early works to 1800*" which indicates the historical nature or date of the material, rather than saying something about its content. In other words, the subdivision indicates when the work was produced, not what it is about. We can call "The works before 1800" the 'world of manuscripts; and what comes after as the 'world of printing.' The delay in the widespread usage of the printing press in the Muslim world is a subject to be studied of its own and exceeds the scope of this chapter. In the final analysis, the manuscript culture was still the prevalent form of textual tradition until the twentieth century in some Muslim countries.

With the official printing press starting in Egypt in 1820 with Būlāq, there has been many developments in the textual tradition either by reproducing printed editions of manuscripts, the emergence of the correctors cult, later become *Muḥaqqiqīn* and finally the establishment of the *Nahda* (renaissance) led by Muslim reformers such as al-Ṭaḥṭawī (d. 1873)<sup>31</sup> and Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). The printing and editing culture that developed around Būlāq Press was and still is the theme of many studies and discussions.

Recently, Islam Dayeh revisited the early history of Arabic printing to examine the specific editorial practices in the nineteenth century and their editions (*taṣḥīḥ*), drawing connections and comparisons with the European editorial practices of the time.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the study by Ahmed El-Shamsy argues that the adoption of printing to reproduce Arabic and Islamic literature had a significant role in the literary landscape in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> These studies and many others have illustrated the importance of the editorial practice of classical texts in improving the intellectual sphere.

Despite the importance of the editorial practices of the correctors (*muṣaḥḥiḥūn*), it posed some challenges from within as it continued to produce, correct and read these printed texts the way they would read manuscript texts.

31 Under al-Ṭaḥṭawī's supervision, Būlāq printed numerous major multi-volume works in the 1850s–1860s, including al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* (1266/1850), al-Maqrīzī's *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār* (2 vols., 1270/1853–54), Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-'Ibar* (4 vols., 1247/1867), al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* (5 vols., 1275/1858), al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (8 vols., 1289/1872); and al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (20 vols., 1285/1868–69) (in Islam Dayeh, p. 252).

32 Dayeh, I. (2019). From Taṣḥīḥ to Taḥqīq: Toward a History of the Arabic Critical Edition, *Philological Encounters*, 4(3–4), 245–299.

33 El Shamsy, Ahmed. *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition*. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press, 2020. Accessed July 13, 2021.

Perhaps because the correctors were traditionally trained scholars, mainly from al-Azhar, working in a prevailing manuscript culture, the lithograph editions resembled manuscripts regarding how they were produced and read. Although some of the leading philologists of the time were involved in these editing projects, errors did occur and were noted. That is one of the reasons that the large corpus of editions need to be revisited.

The second development is the engagement of scholars known as reformers, who recognised the potential of printing in promoting social and religious change. Names such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905),<sup>34</sup> Ṭāhir al-Jazā’irī (d. 1920), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) and Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1854) were among the luminaries of this development. This can be noted from their choice of works to be published, which reflected their goal of challenging the postclassical scholarly orthodoxy on both methodological and substantive grounds.<sup>35</sup>

In the introduction to the *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhāni*, which was published in Beirut in 1924 AD, ‘Abduh also mentions how he validates the variances in the text. He advised using as many criteria as possible, such as grammatical correctness, lexicographical evidence, sources used by the author, stylistics, possible repetitions of the same ideas or sentences in the exact text or several texts by the same author, historical evidence, traces of a material changes. This is evidenced in his conclusion of *Faṭḥ al-Shām* that was attributed to al-Wāqidi (d. 829), which displays ‘Abduh’s knowledge and consideration of factors other than grammar and context. He pointed out that at the first glance at the style in al-Wāqidi’s book, it becomes clear that it belongs to a later historical stage and that the book is full of stories dating to the ninth century. Also, the style known of Iraqi scholars and grammarians was absent. All of these factors led Muhammad ‘Abduh to confirm that the book was misattributed to al-Wāqidi.<sup>36</sup>

34 ‘Abduh’s contribution to the earlier publication of a classical work on logic had also been described as *taḥqīq* on the edition’s cover. The largest of these projects was the edition of Ibn Sida’s (d. 458/1066) lexicographical work *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, a comprehensive multi-thematic thesaurus. The work was published in Būlāq in the years 1898–1903 and appeared in 17 volumes (in: Dayeh, p. 266).

35 El-Shamsy, *Rediscovering*, 6–7.

36 Rashīd Riḍa mentioned ‘Abduh’s efforts to collect as much copies of manuscripts as he could to the extent that ‘Abduh addressed Sultan of Maghrib to permit the release of *Mudawwanat Al-Imām Mālik*, that was in the holdings of al-Qarawayin Mosque in Fez so as to correct the printed copy against it (Riḍa, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām*).

Let me revert to the correctors' movements. One of the most famous names is Aḥmad Zakī Pasha (1868–1934), the Egyptian Statesman and Philologist.<sup>37</sup> Dayeh argues that Zakī's *taḥqīq* emerged in a burgeoning culture of textual scholarship and publishing that continued traditional Islamic scholarly methods and techniques, as well as testing new techniques and forms made possible by print technology. Zakī's *taḥqīq* also drew on this vibrant philological culture.<sup>38</sup>

Zakī systematically recorded variants texts and placed them in footnotes, which indicates him following Orientalist conventions and preferring them over the traditional practice of writing notes in the margins. The same preference for Orientalist practices is apparent in his choice to write introductions rather than colophons for the editions he produced. By adopting the term "verification" for the role of the editor as a mediator between manuscript and print, Zakī created a new cultural agent namely that of the editor as an expert scholar who employs a philological toolkit and whose work is valued for reviving the classical heritage.<sup>39</sup>

The method of the correctors, that is, "correction and collation" (*al-taṣṣīḥ wa-l-muqābala*), was concerned with the production of the authoritative text as it had been critically transmitted and read through the centuries. One major principle in this period was to confirm the attribution of the work to its author. This is a crucial step as some works have been attributed to other authors for economic reasons (best selling) or to gain particular fame. For instance, the first printed edition of *Kitāb al-burhān fī wujūh al-bayān*, originally written by Ibn Wahb (d. 813), had a different title, namely *Naqd al-nathr* and was attributed to another author, namely Qudāma ibn Ja'far (d. 948).<sup>40</sup>

ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, was another one of the pioneers in textual criticism in twentieth century, who believed that textual criticism should not involve any enhancement or correction of the main text. The transmission should happen with integrity because any work is a witness of its author, his time and the cultural environment it was produced in. Therefore, any change that could indicate the opposite is forbidden.<sup>41</sup> However, as developed by Karl Lachmann

37 For full biography of Zaki see: Jundī, Anwar al-. *Aḥmad Zakī al-mulaqqab bi Shaykh al-Urūba*. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1963, 121; for his engagement with the western scholarship, Umar Ryad, "“An Oriental Orientalist”: Aḥmad Zakī Pasha (1868–1934), Egyptian Statesman and Philologist in the Colonial Age," *Philological Encounters* 3, no. 1–2 (2018): 129–166.

38 Dayeh, 248.

39 El-Shamsy, 138.

40 Naṣṣār, "al-Ittijāhāt," 4–6.

41 Hārūn, 'Abd al-Salām. *Taḥqīq al-Nuṣūṣ wa-nashruha*, 48.

and others, European text criticism sought to break away from the traditional reception of the text to reconstruct the original text.<sup>42</sup>

There have been many limitations in the textual criticism methodologies in the nineteenth century. It continued to produce, correct and read these printed texts the way it would deal with the manuscript texts. For instance, using the margin as a critical apparatus and incorporating a long history of philological engagement with the work is in line with the commentaries tradition that was practiced with manuscript form. An index was generally not provided. The name of the corrector generally did not appear on the front cover, but was rather relegated to the colophon.

Moreover, they rarely mentioned the copies of manuscripts used. Even in those rare cases when copies were mentioned, no detailed description of the sources was given. The editorial practice was integral to the tradition. The *taṣḥīḥ* editions generally reflect the scholarly tradition of reading and engaging with the text. They often provided long comments and annotations that resemble the glosses (*ḥawāshī*) in the manuscript tradition. In addition, no introduction was added to describe the manuscript sources, the editorial method, and the problems that faced the editor.<sup>43</sup>

## 5 Orientalists and the Rise of *taḥqīq*<sup>44</sup>

As discussed above, Muslim scholars played a role in publishing printed classical texts, but their work, to some, was more of corrections on the printing drafts following the same tradition of manuscript copying. Some contemporary Muslim philologists, such as al-Munajjid, Ḥusayn Naṣṣār and Ayman Fuʾād agree on different levels that Western scholarship had a significant impact on textual criticism methods. Naṣṣār argues that it was not until the work of Western scholars who introduced the systematic methodology in the textual criticism, that Muslim scholars replicated their knowledge in Western philological studies.<sup>45</sup>

42 Dayeh, "From *Taṣḥīḥ* to *Taḥqīq*," 273.

43 Dayeh, "From *Taṣḥīḥ* to *Taḥqīq*," 262–269.

44 Although European scholars had begun printing Arabic texts centuries before, the scholarly editing of texts only began properly in the early 1800s. Influenced by the methods that were developed in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century classical philology and Biblical criticism, scholars began to apply these methods to so-called 'oriental' texts, including Arabic (Dayeh, p. 272).

45 Naṣṣār, "al-Ittijāhāt," 3.

Maşri, however, argues that the rise of publishing critical editions in the West in the nineteenth century coincided with the early publications of Būlāq through which hundreds of Arabic manuscripts were published, followed even by the appearance of private presses in Egypt and other Arab countries.<sup>46</sup> The latter claim might be valid to represent the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In this period, Dayeh argues, many of the orientalist's editions travelled to Cairo, Beirut, and other countries, and the Būlāq editions would similarly make their way to European scholars.<sup>47</sup> Al-Munajjid confirms that the first generation of *muḥḥaqqiqīn* of Arabic manuscripts utilised the orientalist's experiences by either implementing it or making some adaptations to the method. He did not mention any clear examples to support this claim, apart from how these works were printed in the Arab world. This is slightly problematic as it focuses on the *apparatus criticus* more than the edition itself.<sup>48</sup>

Ridwān al-Sayyid relates the major development in the philological studies in the nineteenth century to the efforts of the German philologists, Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), who associated philology with the study of text history.<sup>49</sup> Lachmann “brought rigorous scientific method to textual editing, formulating the principle that agreement in error implies a common origin,”<sup>50</sup> He noticed that the manuscript heritage did not reach us in its original copies, but reached through witnesses who were subject to various types of distortion and alterations. Therefore, he took it upon himself to retrieve the evidence that was lost with time and that could help to read the original text.

Lachmann's stemmatic method, known as the ‘common errors’ method, as theorised by Paul Maas (1957), came about in the historicist/positivist context of the nineteenth century, analysing the textual variations in manuscripts in genealogical/hierarchical terms. Mistakes produced in the course of the copying process are transmitted in the subsequent copies, which add their own mistakes and so on. This genealogy of mistakes provides us with an objective tool to reconstruct the pedigree of the manuscripts themselves, which is called

46 Mişrī, *Manāḥij Taḥqīq*.

47 Dayeh, “From Taṣḥīḥ to Taḥqīq,” 273.

48 Al-Munajjid, *Qawā'id Taḥqīq al-Nuṣūṣ*.

49 Al-Sayyid, Ridwan. *Usul Taḥqīq al-ʿIlmi*, p. 12.

50 “Lachmann, Karl.” In *The Oxford Companion to the Book*. Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606536.001.0001/acref-9780198606536-e-2697>.



the stemma.<sup>51</sup> This is also known as old philology, “a full collation of all significant differences between witnesses.”<sup>52</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the stemmatic approach becomes the key to another approach known as text reconstruction.<sup>53</sup> The goal of reconstructing a text, following the historical-critical method, required a comprehensive search for all extant manuscript witnesses. This means a survey of all known manuscripts, the creation of research tools such as comprehensive catalogues and bibliographies, and individual as well as institutional cooperation. While the textual reconstruction could help us understand the authorship tradition in the Muslim world, it is noteworthy that it has also been criticised, because it privileges accuracy and authenticity as it attempts to identify the closest codicological witness to the original authorial intention. This is the problem that reoccurs in the modern printed editions of classical Arabic and Persian texts.<sup>54</sup>

Tara Andrews argues that the main criticism of this method is around intuition and prejudices as part of its framework, which means they lack a scientific methodology. She adds, “The method remains grounded in assumptions about what we can and cannot know dating from before the digital age.” The new philologist is generally more interested in the individuality and the variation in each witness than in a unified *textus receptus*. They would often publish an edition of a single manuscript or of very few and meticulously provide a transcription as accurate as possible. Consequently, editions produced according to the principles of new philology only rarely required extensive text collation. This method also likely facilitated making the data digitally available, which explains why the method is often seen as more suited to digital editions than the old methods.<sup>55</sup> This is also one of the reasons that I choose this methodology in my current textual criticism projects.<sup>56</sup>

51 Chapter 3: *Textual Criticism*, p. 336.

52 Philipp Roelli, *Handbook of Stemmatology: History, Methodology, Digital Approaches* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 1.

53 Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid gave many examples of reconstructing lost texts using the stemma methodology such as Ibn Tulun biography is one of the works that was lost in its original form, but thanks to the historical method of reconstructing the work from another work “al-Mughrib fi hula al-Mghrib” by ibn al-Sa'id al-Maghribi (d. 1286) who copied in the same work *sirat Muhammad ibn taghaj al-Ikhshid* written by Ibn Zulaq (Sayyid, Ayman Fu'ad, *al-Masadir al-Tarikiya fi tahqiq al-Nusus*, p. 225).

54 Zadeh, 31.

55 Tara L. Andrews, “The third way: philology and critical edition in the digital age,” in *The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 61–76.

56 Currently working on editing an Arabic manuscript attributed to al-Jazuli, which is widely used in the daily rituals of Sufis in Morocco. The manuscript comes from a private collection of an eminent scholar and Sufi leader in Fez.

In addition to reducing time spent in the editorial projects, I argue that the method better suits the dispersed corpus of unidentified/unedited Islamic manuscripts, which need to be brought out for further studies. It is worth mentioning that in both methods, the preparatory work is still largely manual, even where/when it is computer-assisted with word processors, spreadsheets for collation, or XML editors for TEI<sup>57</sup> transcription.

While acknowledging the importance of orientalist editions and the standards they had set, a few scholars criticised their approach and methodologies, such as Mohammed Arkoun, and ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn. Others, such as Maḥmūd Shākir went so far as to deny the idea that text editing was an innovation of Western scholars. He accused all “Orientalists” of being “[the] soldiers of Christianity, who dedicated themselves to the greater jihad, they locked themselves between walls hidden behind stacks of books, written in a language other than their native tongues.” He even blamed them for the decline of the Ottoman Empire and Islam.<sup>58</sup> El-Shamsy argues that Orientalists must have seemed both grand and strangely purposeless in the eyes of Muslims.<sup>59</sup>

Some Muslim scholars, notably Maḥmūd al-Miṣrī and Hārūn, believe that orientalists adopted similar techniques used in the early tradition of knowledge transmission by Muslims, particularly in Ḥadīth, such as matching the copies and organising them hierarchically. In Arab-Islamic culture, the holographs or copies with reading or transmission certificates always had a prominent status using the principle of solid transmission against weak transmission, similar to Ḥadīth narrations. Gotthelf Bergsträsser argues that Muslim scholars were more appreciative of authorial copies than Western scholars.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, Aḥmad Shākir (1892–1958), the well-known ḥadīth scholar and editor, argued that due to the poor quality of printed editions by correctors, Egyptian scholars began to imitate European philologists and the methods used in their editions. Therefore, the work of those orientalists became a guide

57 The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) is a consortium that collectively develops and maintains a standard for the representation of texts in digital form. Its chief deliverable is a set of Guidelines that specify encoding methods for machine-readable texts, chiefly in the humanities, social sciences, and linguistics. Since 1994, the TEI Guidelines have been widely used by libraries, museums, publishers, and individual scholars to present texts for online research, teaching, and preservation (available at: <https://tei-c.org/>).

58 Shākir, Maḥmūd. *Risālah fī al-Ṭarīq ilā Thaqāfatuna*, 34–49.

59 El-Shamsy, *Rediscovering*, 15.

60 Bergsträsser, Gotthelf, and Muḥammad Ḥamdī Bakrī. 1969. *Uṣūl naqd al-nuṣūṣ wa-nashr al-kutub: muḥāḍarāt al-mustashriq al-Almānī Birshtrāsir bi-kulliyat al-ādāb sanat 1931/32*. [Cairo]: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, Markaz Taḥqīq al-Turāth.

for modern scholars among Muslims. Among the first to imitate them and follow in their path was the great scholar Aḥmad Zakī Pasha and those who followed in his path and imitated him.<sup>61</sup>

Al-Munajjid explains the relation between orientalist and Islamic heritage as a matter of mutual interest. The Arabic manuscripts, particularly the ḥadīth collections, were an excellent medium for western scholars to practice philological principles on. In return, orientalist introduced standards methods for textual criticism to the nineteenth century Muslim scholars.<sup>62</sup>

One of the most significant reflections on orientalist approaches was developed by Mohammed Arkoun. He criticised the orientalist's philological methodologies for handling the Muslim textual heritage. He argued that orientalist were keen to prove the historical facts that were mentioned in the early texts and how that becomes authentic and autoreactive. They tend to neglect the side events accompanying these facts or those that they classified as the unspoken in historical facts. He added that orientalist ignored the oral tradition and popular culture. This was part of Arkoun's more extensive agenda in studying the Islamic heritage and providing epistemological and etymological analysis to deconstruct Islamic studies, which explains why he criticised both the orientalist and the indigenous approaches alike.<sup>63</sup>

To conclude, the rise of *taḥqīq al-nuṣūṣ* can be credited to the intellectual movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, due to the influence of colonialism, scholars throughout the world adapted their editorial practices to these new standards and textual forms. As a result, the critical edition, as a textual form and a manifestation of critical historical research, became the dominant form of scholarly publishing of classical texts. Furthermore, despite the composition and translation of dozens of manuals on *taḥqīq al-nuṣūṣ*, controversies around editorial practices continued to shape intellectual life, making it an important and relevant field of research.<sup>64</sup>

61 The manifestation of textual criticism approach in the 19th century was evidenced in the appearance of many editions such as *Kitab al-Filaha li-ibn al-'Awwam al-Ishbili* edited by Panckry; *Muntakhab min Tarikh Halab li-ibn al-'Adim* in Bone 1819 edited by Firtagh; *Taqim al-Buldan li-Abi al-Fida* in Paris 1840 by De Slane; *al-Kamil lil-Mubarrid* 18640 by Wright; *Mu'jam al-Buldan lil-Hamawi* 1866 by Westfield; and *Fihrist al-Nadim* 1871 by Flughel.

62 Munajjid, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. *Qawā'id Taḥqīq al-Nuṣūṣ*.

63 The Perspectives of Orientalism in the contemporary Arab thoughts. *Journal of Social Sciences (COES&RJ-JSS)*, 7 (2), pp. 119–138.

64 Dayeh, p. 246.

## 6 Digital Textual Tradition

I will now discuss what is believed to be the proposed solution to all textual criticism challenges. Before that, I will summarize the methods that were discussed in the precious sections. The older practice of philology emphasised the “ideal” text whose authority superseded that of any surviving witnesses. The specific ideal text in question might be the author’s original, the recoverable archetype, or even the emended and conjectured version of a sole surviving witness. Conversely, the emphasis of new philology is on the “real” text as it has been preserved, received, annotated, and used. The distinction between “ideal” and “real” is a simple shift that prescribes radically different working methods.

In the end, there is no consensus on methods in textual criticism of classical Islamic texts. The advent of information technology tools in the last half of the twentieth century has transformed how editorial and textual studies can be conceived and how they are conducted.<sup>65</sup> Elias Muhanna defines Digital Humanities saying: “[its’] practitioners come from different disciplines, use different methodologies, ask different questions and constitute their research objects in a different way.”<sup>66</sup> To take a *different* approach from the too numerous instances of the word “*different*” in the previous definition, I prefer using Digital Islamic Studies over Digital Humanities. The latter has become an ocean without shores. To be specific, Digital Islamic Studies, at least in this chapter, is centred on the usage of digital tools (digitising, OCR’ing, analysing, editing) to produce critical editions of Islamic texts. Regardless of the different categories of Digital Humanities,<sup>67</sup> it can be argued that the recent academic digital trend seeks to reform the approach by encouraging scholars to re-examine manuscripts from other sources, which justify the noticeable increase in the digital corpora of Islamic and Arabic texts under the umbrella of Digital Humanities.

In this context, the critical question arises: How does digital textual criticism work, and what does it offer? Peter Robinson put forward a set of

65 Buzzetti, Dino & Gann, Jerome. (2006). Critical Editing in a Digital Horizon, p. 55.

66 Muhanna, Elias. Islamic and Middle East Studies, p. 2.

67 Muhanna provides three main categories of Digital Humanities. The first is the use of computational tools and digital metrical to facilitate traditionally scholarly inquiries. The second category begins with traditional inquiry but become qualitatively transformed in the course of their development of digital tools and methods; and the third is projects that use and often develop a computational tools and dataset to ask entirely new questions (Muhanna, p. 5).

working methods for true digital textual criticism and confirmed that digital editions challenge us with the same fundamental problems as print editions.<sup>68</sup> Andrews argues that digital textual criticism owes its origins to both “old” and “new” philological practices. The most immediate value of digital methods is assigning as much as possible of the work—particularly that which is repetitive, exacting, and error-prone—to the computer.<sup>69</sup> A practical example is the automated text collation in which a complete transcription of each witness will be produced and then automatically collated and compared instead of choosing a base text (or reference text) against which all subsequent texts are compared.<sup>70</sup>

However, given the vast quantities of data that can be produced about a set of texts and given the generally accepted notion that texts were copied from other texts, the digital philologist might expect that, with enough aggregate empirical data, a scholar ought to be able to use computational analysis to arrive at an approximate order of copying. We ought to consider having no fear of contamination, horizontal transmission, multiple archetypal versions, or extra-textual influences having skewed the results. The history of the text lies in its witnesses, and the historian of the text must seek to uncover that history.<sup>71</sup>

Critical apparatus is an essential part of the textual editing process and using digital tools can transform passive readers into active users. Tom Keeline argues that in addition to the known benefits of the apparatus, which is to inform the reader about the constitution of the text at any relevant point and to instruct the reader about the manuscripts and scribes of the tradition in question; it must also be used by readers, hence the benefit of the digital representation.<sup>72</sup>

I do not wish to criticise digital philology nor the digital humanities. The debates have been going on for a long time now.<sup>73</sup> I also do not claim expertise in the Digital Humanities’ colossal field, however I instead ask a different question “Did the field of digital humanities deliver its promises in the textual criticism field? It is believed that one main role of the digital humanities could

68 Robinson (2004, 420), in Andrews, *The Third way*, 3.

69 Robinson, Peter. “Towards a Theory of Digital Editions.” *Variants* 10, 2012. P.106.

70 Macé, Caroline, et al., “Textual editing and text editing,” 333.

71 Andrews, 7.

72 Keeline, Tom. “The Apparatus Criticus in the Digital Age.” *The Classical Journal* 112, no. 3 (2017): 350.

73 Klein and Gold, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

be advocating for humanities by helping to broaden the very idea of instrumentalism, technological, and otherwise. As Y. Liu argues, "this could be its unique contribution to cultural criticism."<sup>74</sup>

As far as textual criticism is concerned, how many digital critical editions are available online? Andrews agrees that there is a lack of production and she attributes that to the lack of clarity of what a digital edition ought to look like. She confirms that textual criticism remains fundamentally non-digital in its methods. Additionally, comparing the steps of creating a digital critical edition and a non-digital critical edition, one can still see the similarity such as the transcription and collation<sup>75</sup> are still among the steps of creating a digital edition, before providing a critical version of the consented text with its variations noted in an *apparatus criticus*.<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, some think that digital philology failed to allow detailed examination of manuscripts. It was hoped that the recent developments in digital Islamic studies will solve this problem by reforming the textual studies approach and encouraging scholars to re-examine manuscripts from other sources.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, it failed to account for how scribes, rules and authorities can systematically and deliberately censor different manuscript copies.<sup>78</sup> Another point is that neither book history nor the digital humanities are well-established subfields in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies.<sup>79</sup> The previous challenges are directly connected to the state of digitisation and manuscript access in Muslim countries, which reminds us of the historical debates about printing.<sup>80</sup>

From a methodological point of view, many of the fundamental problems associated with the textual tradition are carried over directly into the digital age.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this is linked to the fact that the majority of the digital humanities projects relied on printed editions of the work, which means that a vast corpus of manuscripts was excluded. The notion of authenticity appears again in the digital sphere; electronic texts or digital surrogates are only regarded

74 Liu, A.Y. *Where is cultural criticism in the digital humanities?* eScholarship, University of California, 2012.

75 For many decades it has been recognized that text collation is a task that is extraordinarily tedious, and requires vast attention to detail—and that such a task would be well-suited for automation.

76 Andrews, "The Third Way," 4.

77 Daneshgar, 346.

78 Daneshgar, 346.

79 Dagmar, "Of making many copies," 67.

80 Ghali, "Politics."

81 Zadeh, 12.

as authentic as long as the interference of computer technology, in particular, the loss of information, remains invisible to the readers.<sup>82</sup> Travis Zadeh raised another concern and named it the “illusion of completeness,” where most projects send a wrong signal that they are complete corpora.<sup>83</sup> These corpora are not inclusive and are controlled by curation acts of exclusion by choosing what is deemed as worthy of being passed on and what is not. Zadeh claims that most of these websites and platforms are designed to reconstitute and enunciate a particular form of normativity.<sup>84</sup>

In the end, we cannot blame digital humanities or technology alone for this uncertainty. These projects face challenges on different fronts, such as the fragmentary nature of Islamic manuscripts, the lack or absence of digitisation projects in the Muslim world, and the access restrictions on some private and public repositories. These are confirmed challenges on the resource availability side.<sup>85</sup> Some of these challenges in digital Islamic studies are also linked to the very nature of the orientalist’s methodologies of textual criticism as their focus was mainly on the quality and reliability of the resource as a witness and how they can cite it. The basis of the textual tradition is taxonomic and very much based on the idiosyncratic nature of manuscript production. A monogenetic origin from a single parent is also generally assumed. Both assumptions, according to Zadeh, prove somewhat problematic for the Arabic and Persian book culture.<sup>86</sup>

To conclude, it is undeniable that the rise of the computational paradigm in textual studies has shifted the scholarship’s approach in textual studies. Muhanna argues that thousands of online volumes have become resources for the first report for researchers and that we should ask how this affected the methodologies and practices of research.<sup>87</sup> The profound value of digital

82 Riedel, Dagmar. “Of making many copies there is no end: The digitization of manuscripts and printed books in Arabic script.” In *The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies*, ed. Elias Muhanna (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 72.

83 Such as al-Mawsu’a al-Shamila; al-Jami’ li-Kutub al-Turath and al-Jami’ to mention but a few.

84 Zadeh, 28.

85 Ghali, Walid. “13. The State of Manuscript Digitization Projects in Some Egyptian Libraries and Their Challenges.” In *Library and Information Science in the Middle East and North Africa* edited by Amanda B. Click, Sumayya Ahmed, Jacob Hill and John D. Martin III, 302–318. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Saur, 2016.

86 Zadeh, p. 31. See also: Witkam, J.J. “Establishing the Stemma: fact or fiction?”, *Manuscripts of Middle East Studies*, 3: 88–101 (1988); Zadeh, Travis, “Of Mummies Poets, and Water Nymphs: Tracing a codicological limits of Ibn Khurradadhibh’s Geography,” *Abbasid Studies IV*, ed. Monique Bernards (Exter: Short Run Press, 2013), p. 18.

87 Muhanna, Elias. *Islamic and Middle East Studies*, 2.

philology is that it should allow not only for innovative means of publication and display but also for innovative working methods and unexpected results. When can we cast aside so many of the practical limitations on the management of data that existed through to the end of the twentieth century?<sup>88</sup>

## 7 Conclusion: Towards an Amalgamated Approach

By way of conclusion, I would like to propose an amalgamated approach to the study of Islamic manuscripts, which can help us understand the intellectual history, transmission of knowledge, categories of writing and Muslim authorship cultures. Aaron Hughes argues that until a major manuscript or archaeological discovery happens, the most pressing question we can try to articulate and answer is how and why early Muslims wrote their history?<sup>89</sup> In my opinion, answers to these questions can be found in the process of searching and deciphering the written heritage (*turāth*) and reading it in its sociopolitical context. The Muslim heritage represents a tradition that has existed since the 7th century C.E. and provided a written corpus that has no similarity in other cultures. So, the fundamental question should be about how we should handle this unique and one of its kind heritage?

Let us then assume that a critical edition, in theory, aims to bridge the gap between manuscript and book cultures and to respond in a variety of forms to the interests of the editors (*muḥaqqiqīn*) as authors, their readers and to a lesser extent publishers and universities as stakeholders in cultural productions. What are the methods or method to reach this goal? With all methods and practices discussed previously, it is obvious that there is no single method or ready-made recipe for dealing with textual criticism. Methods vary according to the objective that editors strive to achieve and the objects/products they wish to approximate to.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps because the goals and approaches were diverse, some sought to reinvigorate the established scholarly tradition, others to undermine it. Some emphasized the socially relevant messages conveyed in rediscovered older works, while others focused on their aesthetically superior form. Varied methods have been used that were different from the consciously adapted one of the Orientalist tradition of editing and scholarship. In contrast, others sought

88 Andrews, p. 4.

89 Hughes, Aaron W. *Muslim identities: An introduction to Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 37.

90 Macé, "Textual criticism and text editing," 323–324.



to excavate indigenous Arabic philology to counterbalance Orientalism and its claims to privileged expertise.<sup>91</sup> Even the Text Encoding Initiative's guidelines, which comprise the *de facto* representation standard for textual scholarship, are interpreted differently and routinely customised for each new project. This idiosyncratic interpretation and insistence upon customisation, wherein exception becomes the rule, is a misunderstanding of the nature of a digital data model that effectively prohibits large-scale interchange or machine analysis across different projects.<sup>92</sup>

Digital humanities is, in fact, a method with multiple approaches. I do not believe, however, that digital methods will make critical editing obsolete.<sup>93</sup> It can take it to the open skies of new philology, computer theory and inter-textual algorithms. Andrews argued that the rise of a new professional digital philology had significant implications for the reception of the classical tradition in the modern period, and it has a direct impact on Islamic studies in general and textual analysis in particular.<sup>94</sup>

With digital humanities then we have the old and new philology mashed together. The other aspect that should be amalgamated to the textual criticism approaches is the social status and function of texts and copies. Each text is unique in terms of the ways it was authored, commissioned or copied. Why were some texts so popular, and others were less favoured or entirely ignored. The idea of social text editing was promoted by D.F. McKenzie, who believed that a scholar's attention should be directed not only at the text—the linguistic features of a document—but at the entirety of the material character of the relevant witnesses. McKenzie regarded documents as complex semiotic fields that bear within themselves the evidence of their social emergence. The critical editor, in his view, should focus on that field of relations and not simply on the linguistic text.<sup>95</sup>

The social status of manuscripts is connected to the material status of each object and is named codicology. Along the lines of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and his *The Social Life of Things*, it was recently suggested that we need to start practicing codicology (the material study of manuscripts)

91 El-Shamsy, 4–5.

92 Schmidt, 2011.

93 Stemmatology is central to the methods of digital critical edition. It is the form of text analysis that lies at the heart of classical philology, and it is the type of analysis that, if done more correctly and sympathetically, could be of great help to mediaeval philologists whether of the old school or the new.

94 Andrews, "The Third way," 7.

95 Buzzetti, Dino & Gann, Jerome. (2006). Critical Editing in a Digital Horizon, p. 55.

as social science, as texts do have a social life, which we need to know about if we want to understand them properly. Olly Akkerman argues that social codicology explores the encounter between philology and a particular community. She gave an example from the Alawi Bohras writing that “[it] is an invitation to rethink the social meaning of philology and manuscripts in Muslim societies.”<sup>96</sup> However, there has been a slight mixing between the text and the object. I believe that social codicology does not investigate the material only, but also includes textual analysis including the glosses.

Socialising manuscript studies entails looking at texts differently, transcending borders of classical philology, codicology, and palaeography to include ritual, mechanical, spatial, and social practices and oral histories of book copying, consuming, collecting, venerating and preserving. As such, social codicology works with the understanding that, as objects, the *agency*<sup>97</sup> is given to texts in all sorts of ways through practices and traditions, and, as such, narratives of social life are created.<sup>98</sup>

This proposed approach should look at each manuscript as a unique item carrying a story between the lines. Digitisation should facilitate access to these manuscripts, and if that is not possible, then the cooperative transcription projects.<sup>99</sup> All of this has to happen at once; a continuing improvement over time is an intrinsic part of the promise of digital editions. “Reading” a classical text becomes a collaborative process of critical reconstruction. In theory, this has always been the responsible way to use a critical edition; in the digital age, this theory can finally be put into practice.<sup>100</sup>

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