



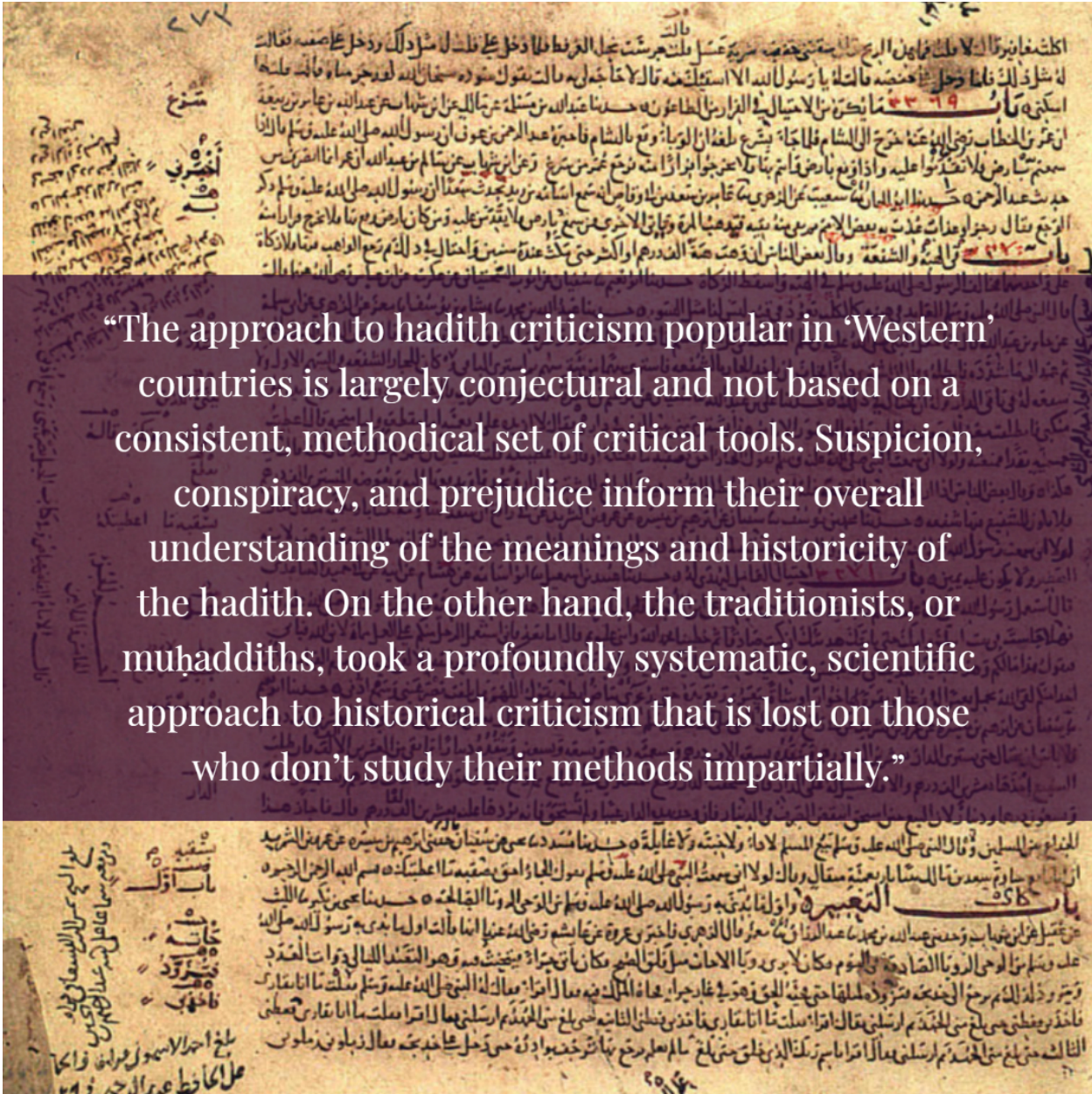
The Anatomy of a Hadith

with Chair of the Department
of Hadith Studies

Mawlana Bilal Ali Ansari




“People who are outside the field don’t really appreciate all the inner workings of Hadith Studies. And so, I think largely what we have to do is show people what happens behind the scenes, and then they’ll start to appreciate why.




“The approach to hadith criticism popular in ‘Western’ countries is largely conjectural and not based on a consistent, methodical set of critical tools. Suspicion, conspiracy, and prejudice inform their overall understanding of the meanings and historicity of the hadith. On the other hand, the traditionists, or muḥaddiths, took a profoundly systematic, scientific approach to historical criticism that is lost on those who don’t study their methods impartially.”



“One of the objectives is that students who study at Darul Qasim College will be able to appreciate how hadith, as a source of revelational knowledge, is in harmony with other knowledge sources, be it empirical evidence, be it rational evidence.”



“This was something demonstrated by some of the early hadith scholars like Imām al-Ṭahāwī, who authored voluminous works, 15, 20, 30-volume works in which he tried to demonstrate how there’s an internal cohesion in Revelation. More specifically, between hadith and other hadith, but also between hadith and the Qur’ān, between hadith and reason and logic, between hadith and also empirical evidence.”

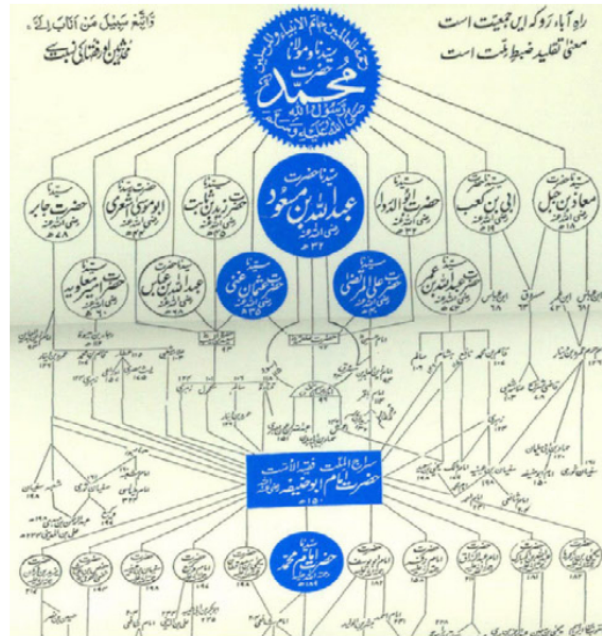




“A common misunderstanding and criticism about Hadith Studies is that we just look at the sanad, the chain of transmission, and then we have this *Husn al-Zann* (positive outlook). We have this confidence because the transmitters are Muslims and everybody says they’re okay. There’s no science behind the verification of the chain.”



"This misunderstanding that hadith are verified and considered authentic only on the basis of the chain, not based upon the coherence of the hadith statement itself or action can be challenged through breaking down a single hadith. This is what I call 'telling the story' of a single hadith or the 'anatomy of a hadith!'"



As we enter Mawlana Bilal’s classroom, students are looking at a single statement of the Prophet ﷺ that could potentially have hundreds of chains of transmission. They begin their analysis from the perspective of the chain of transmission and every transmitter by examining the different chains of narration.

The Prophet said:



Mawlana Bilal maps out the thought process and methodological steps through posing questions:

“How do we verify whether one particular chain is stronger than the other? How would we break down the text itself and cross compare, analyze the claims and the wording of the hadith? And finally we look at the legal implications. What are the legal implications?”

What you have observed is just a glimpse of a curricular exercise that requires the student to immerse himself or herself in researching the written text.

A departmental aim is to "get students to be able to interact with enough hadith that would be necessary for every Muslim to come across in order to appreciate what Shaykh Amin constantly refers to as al-Mafhūm al-Islāmiyy" which is the development of an Islamic understanding or Islamic lens through which to approach the study of hadith.

Our college's students are immersed in this rich, intellectual tradition. With the help of faculty, like Malwana Bilal, they are being given the scholarly tools to take at least a portion of these traditional texts and re-present it. Not with the same sort of technical language and expressions that you find in those works, but use different language and expressions to make it more accessible for people living in today's world.

