Call for Papers for the International Workshop

Layers of Interpretation: The Islamic Commentary Tradition and the Making of Scholarly Authority

Institute of Islamic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, December 11–12, 2026

Convenors: Mehmet Akif Aydın, Christian Mauder, and Mohamed Aidarus Noor

Theme

The commentary tradition occupies a central place in the history of intellectual production in the Islamic world. Across a wide range of disciplines, including but not limited to law, theology, philosophy, grammar, Sufism, and Qurʾanic exegesis, scholars engaged extensively with earlier texts by writing commentaries *(shurūḥ)*, glosses (*ḥawāshī*), super-commentaries (*taʿliqāt*), and abridgements (*mukhtaṣarāt*). Far from being merely derivative forms of scholarship, these genres provided important arenas for interpretation, debate, pedagogical transmission, and community formation. Through these layered textual practices, foundational works were continuously reinterpreted and recontextualised, contributing to processes of canon formation and intellectual continuity across the Islamic world. Moreover, commentaries often served as key pedagogical tools within scholarly institutions and networks, enabling the circulation of authoritative texts across regions and generations.

Questions and Scope

This workshop foregrounds the relationship between commentaries and scholarly authority in the Islamic world and seeks to discuss the following main question: **Which roles did commentaries play in processes of negotiation, exercise, and challenge of scholarly authority in the Islamic world?** In posing this question, the goal of this workshop is not to advance a reductionist sociological reading according to which scholars only wrote commentaries to advance their personal career goals. Instead, the workshop is intended to elucidate the fully complexity of the interconnections between commentarial literature and different forms of scholarly authority. In

order to approach this complexity from multiple perspectives, the workshop participants are invited to engage with one or several of the following sub-questions in their papers:

1) Which strategies did authors use to make their commentaries popular or influential?
2) How were commentaries used to assert scholarly status and influence in debates?
3) How did commentaries serve to present, spread, or canonize specific ideas, teachings, or texts?
4) How did commentary traditions shape scholarly communities, lineages, and networks of transmission?
5) How were commentaries connected to pedagogical authority?
6) What interconnections exist between the transregional circulation of commentaries and scholarly authority?
7) What roles did the materiality of commentaries play in the exercise of scholarly authority?

The workshop seeks to bring together scholars working on different intellectual traditions, periods, and geographical regions of the Islamic world to explore the commentary tradition as a dynamic mode of knowledge production and transmission. By examining commentary practices across time and space, we hope to highlight the foundational importance of these texts and their role in shaping Islamic intellectual history.

Practical Information

Scholars interested in participating in the workshop are requested to submit a working title of their paper and an abstract of no more than 500 words to Mohamed Aidarus Noor (mohamed.noor@fu-berlin.de) by June 5, 2026. Freie Universität Berlin will cover the accommodation costs (up to three nights) and most meals for invited participants. Participants who do not have sufficient travel funds at their disposal can request reimbursement of their economy class airfare, train tickets, and local public transportation costs in Berlin. Please note that local ground transportation costs at the point of departure cannot be reimbursed.

The language of the workshop is English. The workshop is scheduled to begin on the morning of Friday, December 11, 2026, and to end on the afternoon of Saturday, December 12, 2026. Invited participants agree to submit a revised version of their paper by August 31, 2027, for publication in a peer-reviewed edited volume.