

GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS ARABES (GEAR-DEFIHIS) – ILC SEMINARIO

From manuscript to print:
The creation of the classical Islamic canon

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The transition from a manuscript culture to a culture of printed literature in Islamic scholarship began barely a century ago, and its significance remains untheorized. The advent of the printing press did not merely replace one medium of recording with another. Rather, the process of selection, edition, and publication of medieval Islamic texts that took place in the early twentieth century effectively created a new canon of classics. This process was guided by the agendas of the scholars who carried out the work, and their choices markedly shaped the "Islamic tradition" that emerged from the presses. Far from offering a neutral representation of classical Islamic scholarship, therefore, the published literature that we have today is underpinned by scholarly debates and polemical agendas that need to be identified and recognized. A study of the editors and their role in the creation of the classical canon offers a window into twentieth-century debates about what the Islamic tradition is and what it should be, as well as into struggles regarding the external influence of Orientalist scholarship in defining the tradition.

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