

Ubade b. Samit

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THE °UBĀDA B. AL-SĀMIT TRADITION AT THE  
CROSSROADS OF METHODOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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During the past few decades Western studies of the origin of Islam have made considerable advances in assessing sources which have long been considered a repository of exegetic, legal and historical material about the first centuries of Islam. Growing scepticism towards the Islamic foundation narratives and the traditional accounts of Islamic history undermined the notion that, unlike other religions, Islam "was born in the full light of history" and "its roots are on the surface" (A. Renan). The study of the first centuries of Islam has thus become the focus of clashing methodologies, often yielding conflicting accounts on how, when and where Islam emerged. While studying Muslim traditions (*hadīths*), Western Islamicists expressed varying opinions about reliability of lines of narrative transmission (*isnāds*), which, according to the traditional Muslim view, control the authenticity of the information included in the substantive part of the tradition (*matn*). One pole of the spectrum is represented by scholars who reject the link between the *isnād* and the *matn*. For them, the *isnād* is a fictitious authentication device that does not give any information about the historical development of the narrative. These scholars prefer to study the relationship between topically affiliated narratives, whence they derive information about the chronological development of the concepts conveyed by these narratives (literary analysis). The other part of the spectrum varies in the degree of acceptance of the *isnāds*. Nevertheless, these scholars generally agree that, provided certain methodological stipulations are met, a considerable part of the transmission line is authentic and correctly represents the ways through which the traditions were transmitted. With certain qualifications, the method of scholars who accept the *isnād* may be described as *isnād-cum-matn* analysis. In this article, I study the famous °Ubāda tradition dealing with the punishment for adultery and fornication (*zinā*). First, I follow the historical development of the tradition by means of literary analysis. Then I apply to the same tradition the principles of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis. Although different in their treatment of the *hadīth* material, the two approaches are shown as capable of yielding results that are not mutually exclusive.

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