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What makes a Hanafi? The Juristic Boundaries of the Hanafi School of Law across Thatta and Medina in the 18th Century

This paper focuses on the circulation of scholars and manuscripts across Sindh and the Hijaz in the first half of the eighteenth century to interrogate how Sindhi scholars transformed the Hanafi school of law. Based on a range of geographically dispersed biographical dictionaries, *ijazas* of intellectual transmission, and legal and doctrinal treatises, it analyzes the intellectual output and social mobility of a series of Sindhi scholars who contested the authoritative corpus of the Hanafi school of law and its relationship to hadith scholarship. In epistemological terms, it explores how they began to unravel the relationships between scripture, law, and theology that had been canonized in earlier centuries through reformulations of key foundational concepts such as independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and scripture itself. In contextual terms, it locates these contestations within a multi-centered and diverse ecumene of law that spanned South Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Peninsula. It thus analyzes how Sindhi scholars participated in overlapping networks of legal and hadith scholarship to construct normative and social authority in a context characterized by the rise of regional South Asian dynasties, of European presence in the Indian Ocean, as well as of intellectual traffic across the Indian Ocean. This paper argues that the intellectual history of Sindh and the Hijaz in the eighteenth century must take seriously the extent to which they constituted connected intellectual zones to understand the deep transformations that occurred in law and legal theory in the eighteenth century.

Biography:

Sohaib Baig is a PhD Candidate in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His dissertation explores intellectual exchange across the Hijaz and South Asia from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, with particular focus on the ‘ulama of Sindh and Delhi.