

Department of Middle Eastern Studies

Seminar Series

Michaelmas Term, 2022

James White
University of Cambridge

“Writing Arabic Literature in a Persianate World: The Case of Ibn Ma‘šūm al-Madanī (d. 1119/1707)”

This talk explores the Arabic literary network of Ibn Ma‘šūm al-Madanī (1052/1642 - before Ramadan 1119/November 1707), a philologist, biographer and Shi‘i exegete who grew up in Mecca, and then emigrated to the Qutbshahi sultanate of south India, where his father, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 1085/1674), had been appointed prime minister. My focus lies on reconstructing the community in which Ibn Ma‘šūm found himself in India, and on examining how he and his father used Arabic texts to build links with their peers around the littoral of the Arabian Sea. I begin by bringing together a corpus of previously unstudied holograph and autograph manuscripts of Ibn Ma‘šūm’s works, which allow us to pinpoint the periods in his life when his participation in a transoceanic Arabic literary community was at its most dynamic. I then show the uses of emulative intertextuality in the poems which were produced by members of Ibn Ma‘šūm’s circle at the Qutbshahi court and his correspondents overseas, before contrasting this period in Ibn Ma‘šūm’s life with the years following the fall of the Qutbshahi sultanate, which he spent as a provincial bureaucrat under Mughal rule. Despite the dramatic change in Ibn Ma‘šūm’s circumstances, which saw him go from being a patron to a protégé, I show how his texts still found audiences in India, as he created a form of Arabic literature that resonated with multilingual readers.

Thursday, 01 December 2022, 17.15

Room 10 (the old common room) at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

Refreshments will be served from 17.00.