



HAMILTON LUGAR

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
African Studies Program

African Studies Program

Friday Colloquium Series

March 22, 2019 | 10:30am – 12:00pm | GA 1112



Professor Mauro Nobili

Department of History, University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign

***“Towards a Handbook of West African Arabic Script Styles:
Between Paleography and History”***

Handwriting can reveal a great deal of information. The script styles of West African Muslims, in the words of A.D.H. Bivar, for example, "can throw light on the fundamental problem of the origins and orientation of the Muslim religion in the Western Sudan." This talk presents ongoing research on different script styles in West African manuscripts. The presentation will draw on illustrations of several manuscripts collected in different regions of West Africa and argue against the current literature, which mainly posits the existence of a single West African style emerging as a late offshoot of the North African Maghribi tradition. It points to the development of several local script styles that originated in the very early 2nd millennium and thus forces us, along with epigraphic evidences, to rethink the standard narrative on the diffusion of literacy in West Africa.

Biography: Mauro Nobili

Professor Nobili is a historian of pre-colonial and early-colonial West Africa, with a specific focus on Muslim societies of the region and their Arabic manuscript heritage. His current project is a study of the Timbuktu chronicle known as the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*, understood by current scholarship to have been produced by three generations of West African Muslim scholars from the early 16th century. Professor Nobili's research uncovered numerous manuscript copies of this text and, based on his textual and other analyses, reveals that the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* is a novel chronicle written in the 19th century.

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