

# **IQSA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2021**

**LA PIRA LIBRARY  
Palermo, Italy**

**5-10 JULY 2021**

***Qur'an in Contact:  
Plurality of Views  
from Other Traditions,  
Disciplines and Peripheries***



The 2021 International Conference has been possible thanks to the contributions and enthusiasm of all speakers who submitted a proposal or a panel. Scholars and colleagues from La Pira and IQSA have worked jointly towards putting together this event and gathering all of us to share our research and discover new approaches in studying the Qur'anic text.

### **The La Pira Library team**

Alberto Melloni

Gianmarco Braghi

Andrea Amato, Francesca Badini, Giuseppe Brocato, Rosanna Budelli, Francesco Cargnelutti, Ines Cumerlato, Minoo Mirshahvalad, Adnane Mokrani, Ivana Panzeca, Margherita Picchi, Riccardo Vigliermo

### **IQSA**

Alba Fedeli

Hythem Sidky

Anne Marie McLean

Andrew O'Connor

Johanna Pink

Board of Directors

International Programming Committee

Special thanks to Emran El-Badawi and Devin Stewart who encouraged and supported the idea of having an international meeting in Palermo, although regrettably the pandemic prevented all the participants from the pleasure of spending time in a nice environment like Palermo which would have indeed fostered our academic and personal exchange.

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## FSCIRE AND LA PIRA LIBRARY

The **Fondazione per le scienze religiose (FSCIRE)**, with headquarters in Bologna and Palermo, is a research institution that publishes, trains, serves, organises, welcomes and communicates research in the field of religious studies, with particular regard to Christianity, Islam, and the religions with which they have been in contact. The final destination of a journey that began in 1953 and is recognised as a Foundation by a decree of the President of the Italian Republic, FSCIRE has an agreement with the University of Bologna and other universities: it operates in conditions of full autonomy from churches and universities, collecting funds from public and private donations, foundations, companies, and cooperatives, and creating synergies with other research centres. FSCIRE continues scientific research in the field of historical-religious disciplines initiated by Giuseppe Dossetti (1913-1996) and developed by Giuseppe Alberigo (1926-2007), who was its soul and Secretary for almost fifty years. In 2014, FSCIRE was recognised as a national research infrastructure.



In October 2018, the **La Pira Library** was established in Palermo as a library specialised in the history and doctrines of Islam, with the aim of representing all its linguistic, doctrinal, and cultural varieties. It is dedicated to Giorgio La Pira, a Sicilian scholar and political leader who played a key role in the peace movement throughout his life and career.

The La Pira Library was founded thanks to the crucial support of the Italian institutions and has three main goals:

1) planning and realising a long-term scientific activity which will deal with a sensitive issue for the future of Europe and the Mediterranean area through knowledge and research. In order to reach this goal, the La Pira Library intends to be one of the major independent centres in this field and one of the few to represent all Islamic traditions;

2) making the city of Palermo a crucial hub for religious studies and one of the main poles of research and cultural diplomacy in the Mediterranean region and in the European Research Area, complementing the successful example of the Dossetti Library in Bologna;

3) encouraging the research cooperation of different traditions, which will be able to create an area of rights and understanding through scientific progress in the fields of history, theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and philology.

The La Pira Library follows a few clear principles: scientific excellence, which makes us think of dissemination as a consequence of knowledge, not as a substitute for it; a system of top-level international relations, which enhances Italian leadership and visibility through the network of the European Research Infrastructure of Religious Studies; full independence from universities and religious communities, which avoids opportunistic conditioning and allows for rigorous and open competitions. In order to maintain its independence, and following the example of the Dossetti Library in Bologna, the La Pira Library has never asked and will not ask for financial support from Islamic countries or institutions; its economic resources are provided by the Italian government and the top players of national and European culture through direct awards and successful EU competitive procedures.



Donations of books and manuscripts are welcome and a great effort is being made with the goal of reaching 200,000 books in two years and 500,000 in six years. Since 2018, the librarians and researchers based in the La Pira Library have established, and continue to establish, collaborations and relationships with major institutions in numerous countries, including Albania, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia, China, Egypt, Russian Federation, Jordan, Dubai, Kazakhstan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Malaysia, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Syria, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the USA, and Yemen. The collaborations are aimed at the acquisition of duplicates, rare items, and gifts, following in the footsteps of the great libraries of the Islamic tradition.





The mission of the La Pira Library is based on a few main pillars: a coenobitic rigour in its labour; an administration inspired by parsimony and based on an out-of-time egalitarianism; scientific excellence as an instrument to disclose knowledge; a network of international, first-class relationships; full independence from universities and religious communities; a planned cognitive voracity. With its ambitious project, the La Pira Library does not plan to become an institution exclusively focused on the Arab world, nor an educational centre for imams, nor an organisation of interreligious dialogue, and not even an academy devoted to detached erudition. On the contrary, it hopes to become a reference forum for cultivated research, enhancing the experience of the EU research infrastructure on religious studies as launched and led by FSCIRE.

A ten-person team of researchers and librarians with different specialisation and academic backgrounds is currently working full-time at the La Pira Library and their number is expected to double in the next five years. The team is affirming its scientific leadership inside and outside Europe with an agenda based on scientific excellence, open research, inclusive independence, and diplomatic integrity.

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## PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP

### IQSAweb.org

**IQSAweb.org** has *all* the information necessary for you to benefit from IQSA and for you to get involved. On this site, visitors can familiarise themselves with IQSA's governance, resources, and programs, as well as learn about its policies, vision, and history. To receive updates, subscribe online by entering your e-mail address where it states "Follow IQSA by E-Mail" on the left margin of IQSA's website.

### Online Discussion Group

Join the Google Discussion Group to share ideas, discuss, and collaborate with other scholars and members of IQSA. Join by visiting <https://groups.google.com/g/IQSAdiscussion>.

### Weekly Blog Updates

The IQSA blog has attracted widespread international interest and participation of scholars, students, and the general public. The blog includes weekly updates about IQSA, information on its academic meetings (North American and International), schedules for other conferences and colloquia taking place around the world, and various stories and reports on new research. IQSA strongly encourages all those working on new and exciting Qur'anic Studies projects to contribute to the IQSA blog.

### Advertise with Us

IQSA is the first and only learned society of its kind devoted to the critical investigation of the Qur'an, encompassing a broad community of scholars, students, publishers, and members of the public.

IQSA encourages advertising partnerships and opportunities in the following capacities:

**1. Advertise in the Annual Meeting Program Book**

– Every year the International Qur'anic Studies Association holds an Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Society of Biblical Literature/ American Academy of Religion, attracting a wide audience in the scholarly community from across the nation. The accompanying Program Book published by IQSA is read by hundreds at the Annual Meeting and thousands around the world, providing a critical platform for relevant businesses market their publications and services. Email [contactus@iqsaweb.org](mailto:contactus@iqsaweb.org) to reserve an advertising space today!

**2. Advertise in Print** – IQSA provides advertising space in three of its flagship publications: the *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association (JIQSA)*, the monthly *Review of Qur'anic Research*, and the forthcoming monograph series *IQSA Studies in the Qur'an (ISIQ)*. Email [contactus@iqsaweb.org](mailto:contactus@iqsaweb.org) for details.

**3. Advertise Online** – While IQSA does not currently hold a physical headquar-

## Become a Member of IQSA

Become a member of IQSA, join from the IQSA website, located under “Membership & Governance”. Be sure to follow IQSAweb.org for updates about this and other matters. Through the website, members will receive access to our publications, including:

- ◇ *Review of Qur’anic Research*
- ◇ Membership Directory
- ◇ *Bilingual English-Arabic Journal of the International Qur’anic Studies Association*

If you are interested in getting involved, writing for the IQSA blog, or have advertising or other inquiries, please write to **contactus@iqsaweb.org**. Do not forget to find IQSA on Facebook and Twitter!

## Donate:

Support IQSA’s work by making a tax-deductible contribution. Donate online at **members.iqsaweb.org/donate** or e-mail us at **contactus@iqsaweb.org**.

ters, its website serves as the central meeting point and face of the organization visited by hundreds of members and non-members every day. Email **contactus@iqsaweb.org** to inquire about advertising with us online via **www.iqsaweb.org**.

4. **Send an Email to IQSA Members** – IQSA will send emails on behalf of publishers and other advertisers of interest to our members. The publisher/advertiser is responsible for composing the email. Please contact the Executive Office at **contactus@iqsaweb.org** for more information.



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# **IQSA MISSION AND STRATEGIC VISION**

## **Mission Statement**

Foster Qur'anic Scholarship

## **Strategic Vision Statement**

The International Qur'anic Studies Association is the first learned society devoted to the study of the Qur'an from a variety of academic disciplines.

The Association was founded to meet the following needs:

- ◇ Regular meetings for scholars of the Qur'an
- ◇ Cutting edge, intellectually rigorous, academic research on the Qur'an
- ◇ A bridge between different global communities of Qur'anic scholarship
- ◇ Regular and meaningful academic interchange between scholars of the Bible and scholars of the Qur'an
- ◇ Involvement of Islamic scholarly institutions and faith communities

The Association offers its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development through the following:

- ◇ Advancing academic study of the Qur'an, its context, its relationship to other scriptural traditions, and its literary and cultural influence
- ◇ Collaborating with educational institutions and other appropriate organizations to support Qur'anic scholarship and teaching
- ◇ Developing resources for diverse audiences, including students, faith communities, and the general public
- ◇ Facilitating broad and open discussion from a variety of academic perspectives
- ◇ Organizing congresses for scholarly exchange
- ◇ Publishing Qur'anic scholarship
- ◇ Encouraging and facilitating digital technology in the discipline
- ◇ Promoting cooperation across global boundaries

## **Core Values**

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| ◇ Accountability   | ◇ Openness to Change    |
| ◇ Collaboration    | ◇ Professionalism       |
| ◇ Collegiality     | ◇ Respect for Diversity |
| ◇ Critical Inquiry | ◇ Scholarly Integrity   |
| ◇ Inclusivity      | ◇ Tolerance             |

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

### ***The Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association***

The *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* (JIQSA) commenced publication annually in 2016, with Michael E. Pregill and Vanessa De Gifis serving as its founding editors. Articles are rigorously peer-reviewed through a double-blind review process, with reviewers appointed by the Head Editors in consultation with the Editorial Board.

The journal's launch reflects a time of particular vitality and growth in Qur'anic Studies, and its primary goal is to encourage the further development of the discipline in innovative ways. Methodologies of particular interest to the journal include historical-critical, contextual-comparative, and literary approaches to the Qur'an. We especially welcome articles that explore the Qur'an's origins in the religious, cultural, social, and political contexts of Late Antiquity; its connections to various literary precursors, especially the scriptural and parascriptural traditions of older religious communities; the historical reception of the Qur'an in the West; the hermeneutics and methodology of Qur'anic exegesis and translation (both traditional and modern); the transmission and evolution of the *textus receptus* and the manuscript tradition; and the application of various literary and philological modes of investigation into Qur'anic style and compositional structure.

The journal's website, including additional information and contact details, can be found at [lockwoodonlinejournals.com/index.php/jiqsa](http://lockwoodonlinejournals.com/index.php/jiqsa). For more information on the International Qur'anic Studies Association, please visit [www.iqsaweb.org](http://www.iqsaweb.org).

#### **Editors**

Nicolai Sinai, *University of Oxford/ Pembroke College, UK* (volumes 3 and following)

Michael E. Pregill, *University of California, Los Angeles, USA* (volumes 1 to 3)

Vanessa De Gifis, *Wayne State University, USA* (volumes 1 and 2)

#### **Editorial Board**

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Sarra Tlili, *University of Florida, USA*

Shawkat Toorawa, *Yale University, USA*

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## PROGRAMME

*All times on the conference schedule are listed in Central European Summer Time*

### Monday 5 July 2021

- 2 pm      **Introductory Remarks by IQSA and La Pira**  
**Alberto Melloni**, Secretary of FSCIRE and the La Pira Library team,  
Convenors  
**Hythem Sidky**, IQSA Executive Director  
**Alba Fedeli**, Director of the Conference
- 3–4 pm      **Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting  
spontaneously with new and old colleagues**
- 4–6 pm      **PANEL 1. Scripture, Epigraphic Corpora, Gnosticism, and Beda  
Venerabilis**  
**Holger Zellentin**, Universität Tübingen, Germany, Presiding  
1.1. *Notes on the Genre of Scripture in the Qur'an* (20 min)  
**Devin J. Stewart**, Emory University, USA  
1.2. *“Invoke Allāh or Invoke al-Raḥmān”: the Multiple Names of  
the Arabian One God(s). A Comparison between the Qur'an and the  
Arabian Epigraphic Corpora* (20 min)  
**Valentina Grasso**, University of Cambridge, UK  
1.3. *Gnostics of Arabia: Syncretizing Indigenous Beliefs* (20 min)  
**Abdulla Galadari**, Khalifa University of Science and Technology, UAE  
1.4. *Caedmon, Muḥammad, and the Sleepers of Ephesus* (20 min)  
**Thomas Eich**, Hamburg University, Germany  
*Discussion* (40 min)
- 6.15–7.15 pm      **Publisher corner**  
*The Exceptional Qu'ran: Flexible and Exceptive Rhetoric in Islam's  
Holy Book* - Author Talk and Book Preview  
**Johanne Louise Christiansen** and a representative from Gorgias  
Press

## Tuesday 6 July 2021

### 2–4.45 pm **PANEL 2. Characters, Narratives, and Strategies in the Qur’anic Text**

**Devin J. Stewart**, Emory University, USA, Presiding

2.1. *Characters Round or Flat? Hud and Salih in Context* (20 min)

**David Penchansky**, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

2.2. *Unbinding Isaac: Comedy, Critique, and Conversation between Midrash and Tafsīr* (20 min)

**Madeline Wyse**, University of California, Berkeley, USA

2.3. *Confrontation between the Early Christians and their Enemies in Qur’an 61:14 and its Allusion to Luke 10* (20 min)

**Mohammad Ghandehari**, independent scholar

*Discussion* (30 min)

### 3.30–3.45 pm **Short break**

2.4. *Who is Solomon of the Qur’an? An Inquiry into the Pragmatic Mind of Muhammad* (20 min)

**Mustapha Tajdin**, Khalifa University of Science and Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences, UAE

2.5. *Cognitive Verbs as a Strategy for Expressing Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in the Qur’an* (20 min)

**Yehudit Dror**, University of Haifa, Israel

*Discussion* (20 min)

### **PANEL 3. Qur’anic Perspective and Other Views**

### 5.15–7.15 pm **Orhan Elmaz**, University of St Andrews, UK, Presiding

3.1. *What is the fiṭra? A Qur’anic Perspective* (20 min)

**Jacob Kildoo**, University of Notre Dame, USA

3.2. *On Ḥanīf as an Arabic Qur’anic Term* (20 min)

**Ivan Dyulgerov**, Sofia University “St. Kiment Ohridski”, Bulgaria

3.3. *The Neoplatonic Qur’an: Nasir-i Khusraw’s Ismaili Vision of Qur’anic Revelation* (20 min)

**Khalil Andani**, Augustana College, USA

3.4. *The Qur’an and the Rabbis - A New Look at the Evidence* (20 min)

**Holger Zellentin**, Universität Tübingen, Germany

*Discussion* (40 min)

7.30 pm

## End of the day

Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting spontaneously with new and old colleagues

## Wednesday 7 July 2021

2–3.30 pm

### PANEL 4. Miracles and Magic: Explorations in the Qur'an and the Supernatural

Panel Organiser: **Stephen Burge**, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, UK

4.1. *The Miracles of Muḥammad in the Qur'an and the Sīra: The Conception of Muḥammad as Case Study* (20 min)

**Rebecca Williams**, University of South Alabama, USA

4.2. *From Supernatural to Natural: Modernist Sunnī and Aḥmadī Exegetes on Prophetic Miracles* (20 min)

**Nebil Husayn**, University of Miami, USA

4.3. *Magic and Modernism: The Tafsīr al-Manār on Occultism and Q. 2:102* (20 min)

**Stephen Burge**, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, UK

*Discussion* (30 min)

4.30–6.30 pm

### PANEL 5. Theology, Mysticism, and Pluralism

**Andrew O'Connor**, St. Norbert College, USA, Presiding

5.1. *Mulla Sadra on the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Mystical or Pseudo-mystical* (20 min)

**Reza Akbari**, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran

5.2. *Nonviolence Horizon in the Qur'an: Is it Possible to Go Beyond the Just War Theory?* (20 min)

**Adnane Mokrani**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy

5.3. *Dialogue in the Holy Qur'an in Light of Pluralism and Peace-making* (20 min)

**Munshid Falih Wadi**, University of Diyala, Iraq and Angela Bivol, independent researcher

5.4. *A Religion for All Religions. Abul Kalam Azad's Idea of Pluralism in Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an* (20 min)

**Shameer K Sulaiman**, Other Books, Calicut, Kerala, India

*Discussion* (40 min)



6.45 pm

## End of the day

Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting spontaneously with new and old colleagues

## Thursday 8 July 2021

2–4 pm

### PANEL 6. Carriers of the Text and Readings. 1. Manuscripts, Illustrations, Amulets, and Printed Editions

**Hythem Sidky**, IQSA, and **Alba Fedeli**, Universität Hamburg, Presiding

6.1. *Qur'anic Healing or Magic? Amulets as Medical Intervention inside Islamic West Africa* (20 min)

**S. Beena Butool**, Department of Religion, Florida State University, USA

6.2. *The Bigger Picture: Employing a Ṣan'ā' Manuscript for Dating Early Mosques* (20 min)

**Hagit Nol**, Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

6.3. *The Readers of Basra* (20 min)

**Marijn van Putten**, Leiden University, Netherlands

6.4. *Reading in Abraham Hinckelmann Qur'an Edition and Sources* (20 min)

**Abdallah El-Khatib**, Qatar University, Qatar

*Discussion* (40 min)

4.30–7.45 pm

### PANEL 7. Carriers of the Text and Readings. 2. The Qur'an in Light of Digital Humanities

Panel organisers: **Alba Fedeli** and **Alicia González Martínez**, InterSaME Project, Universität Hamburg, Germany

7.1. *Mushaf Muscat: a New Approach to Arabic Text Editing in the Digital Age* (20 min)

**Thomas Milo**, Decotype, Amsterdam, Netherlands

7.2. *Statistical Methods for Identifying Unknown Qur'anic Readings: An Application to Pronominal Variation in Manuscripts and Secondary Literature* (20 min)

**Hythem Sidky**, IQSA

7.3. *Artificial Intelligence and Text Analytics for Understanding the Qur'an* (20 min)

**Eric Atwell**, School of Computing, University of Leeds, UK

*Discussion* (30 min)

6–6.15 pm **Short break**

7.4. *Doc2vec to Measure Semantic Similarity between Verses of the Qur'an* (20 min)

**Menwa Alshammeri**, Jouf University and School of Computing, University of Leeds, UK

7.5. *AraBERT to Measure Semantic Relatedness between Qur'an Verses* (20 min)

**Abdullah Alsaleh**, King Abdulaziz University and School of Computing, University of Leeds, UK

7.6. *Deep Learning to Measure Semantic Relatedness between Qur'an Verses and Hadith* (20 min)

**Shatha Altammami**, King Saud University and School of Computing, University of Leeds, UK

*Discussion* (30 min)

8 pm **End of the day**

Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting spontaneously with new and old colleagues

## Friday 9 July 2021

2–4 pm **PANEL 8. Qur'an Translation and its Exegetical Dimension: Transfers and Transformations**

Panel organiser: **Johanna Pink**, GloQur, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

8.1. *The Construction and Reconstruction of the Qur'an's Meaning Through Translation* (20 min)

**Johanna Pink**, GloQur, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

8.2. *"Inclined to Chop?" Debates over a "Naturalist" Reading of Q. 2:260* (20 min)

**Sohaib Saeed**, GloQur, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

8.3. *The Birth of an Islamic Language: on the Qur'an Commentary in Türki-Tatar* (20 min)

**Gulnaz Sibgatullina**, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands

8.4. *Standardization and Exegetical Variety in Translations of the Qur'an: Recent Cases from the King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex* (20 min)

**Mykhaylo Yakubovych**, GloQur, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

*Discussion* (40 min)

4.30–5 pm **Publisher corner**

Get published! Tips and Tricks from within the Publishing Business  
(**Sophie Wagenhofer**, De Gruyter)

5.15–8 pm **PANEL 9. Striking Back at the Empire: Anti-imperialism in Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis**

Panel organisers: **Francesca Badini** and **Francesco Cargnelutti**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy; **Johanna Pink**, GloQur, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany Presiding

9.1. *Sayyid Quṭb Conception of Jihād against the Ṭawāğīt of the New Jāhiliyyah* (20 min)

**Riccardo Amerigo Vigliermo**, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE), FSCIRE, Italy

9.2. *The Qur'an in the Political Thought of Rāshid al-Ghannūshī* (20 min)

**Francesco Cargnelutti**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy

9.3. *The Anti-imperialism in the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and his Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī* (20 min)

**Francesca Badini**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy

*Discussion* (30 min)

6.45–7 pm **Short break**

9.4. *Bāqir al-Ṣadr's Fight on Cultural Imperialism: al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī and the Islamic Alternative in Iqtiṣādunā* (20 min)

**Pietro Menghini**, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Naples, Italy

9.5. *Siding with the Mustaqḍāfin: Liberation Theology and Decolonial Paradigms in Claremont Main Road Mosque's Community Tafsir* (20 min)

**Margherita Picchi**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy

*Discussion* (20 min)

8 pm **End of the day**

Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting spontaneously with new and old colleagues

## Saturday 10 July 2021

2–4 pm

### **PANEL 10. Women in the Qur'an and Using the Qur'an: Its Lexicon, Interpretations, Exegesis, History, Geography and its Use to Demand Women's Rights**

**Margherita Picchi**, La Pira/FSCIRE, Palermo, Italy, Presiding

10.1. and 10.2. *Women in the Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Approach* (40 min)

**Karen Bauer**, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, UK

**Feras Hamza**, University of Wollongong in Dubai/the Institute of Ismaili Studies

10.3. *The Most Controversial Verse in the Qur'an: a New Interpretation* (20 min)

**Abla Hasan**, Nebraska University, USA

10.4. *Using the Qur'an to Demand Women's Rights in the Late Ottoman Empire and Beyond* (20 min)

**Orhan Elmaz**, University of St Andrews, UK

*Discussion* (40 min)

4.30–7.15 pm

### **PANEL 11. Medieval Falsafa and the Qur'an: a Changeable Relationship**

Panel organisers: **Andrea Pintimalli**, PhD, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy

11.1. *The Mu'tazilah Rationalization as a Valid Philosophical System to Islamic Metaphysics of Divine Unity and Divine Justice* (20 min)

**Syed M. Waqas**, Cincinnati Christian University, Ohio, USA

11.2. *"A Clear Proof of the True religion": the Qur'an as a Normative Source in al-Bīrūnī's Studies on Other Religious Traditions* (20 min)

**Andrea Pintimalli**, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy

11.3. *From Greek 'Demonology' to Qur'anic Angelology: Textual Traces in al-Bīrūnī* (20 min)

**Vincenzo Muggittu**, IIS Galilei-Pacinotti, Pisa, Italy and **Andrea Pintimalli**, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy

*Discussion* (30 min)

6–6.15 pm

### **Short break**

11.4. *Rational and Mystical Dimensions in al-Ghazali's Interpretation of the Qur'an* (20 min)

**Ines Peta**, Università di Bologna, Italy

11.5. *Alchemical Tafsir in the Works of Ibn Arfaʿ Ra's* (20 min)

**Richard Todd**, University of Birmingham, UK

*Discussion* (20 min)

7.30 pm

**Concluding remarks**

La Pira/IQSA

8 pm

**End of the day**

Virtual meeting rooms – optional rooms for chatting spontaneously with new and old colleagues



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## ABSTRACTS

### PANEL 1. Scripture, Epigraphic Corpora, Gnosticism, and Beda Venerabilis

#### 1.1. Notes on the Genre of Scripture in the Qur'an

Both Western and traditional Islamic scholarship on the Qur'an have done an injustice, in my view, to the category of scripture. The doctrine of Qur'anic inimitability has portrayed the Qur'an as *sui generis*, not only distinct from all human literary works but also categorically different from other sacred texts, despite abundant evidence in the text that the Qur'an is one member in a category labelled *kitāb* "scripture", which includes a number of texts from the Biblical tradition. The Qur'anic term *kitāb* is widely recognized as meaning "scripture" and is used in the later Islamic terms *kitāb* "scriptural proof-text" – i.e., a verse from the Qur'an cited as a basis for a legal ruling or theological doctrine – and *ahl al-kitāb* usually "People of the Book" – referring to the legal status accorded to Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians under Muslim rule. It is also widely recognized that the Qur'an refers prominently to particular Biblical texts such as the Torah (*tawrāt*), the Gospel (*injīl*), the Psalms (*zabūr*), and the scrolls of Abraham and Moses. Even the many works by western scholars that address the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an, beginning with the work of Geiger and going up until the recent works of Neuwirth, Reynolds, El-Badawi, Droge, and others, underestimate, in my view, the connection of the Qur'anic genre of scripture with the Biblical tradition, its use of the term *al-Kitāb* "the Book", as a direct label for the Bible, and the idea that the terms such as *al-Furqān*, *al-Ḥikmah*, and *al-Dhikr* refer directly to Biblical texts. Highlighting these connections, this study undertakes a survey of references to scripture portrayed in the Qur'an, attempting to identify its generic conventions of language, form, content, and function.

**DEVIN J. STEWART** earned a B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University in 1984 and a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991. He now teaches in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. His areas of scholarly interest include the Qur'an, Shiite Islam, Islamic legal scholarship, biography, autobiography, speech genres, and other topics in Arabic and Islamic studies. He is the author of *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy* (Utah University Press, 1998) and *Disagreements of the Jurists* (NYU Press, 2015) and a co-author of *Interpreting the Self* (University of California Press, 2002). He has written a number of studies on Qur'anic rhyme and rhythm, on form criticism of the Qur'an, and on other topics in Qur'anic studies.

## 1.2. “Invoke Allāh or Invoke al-Raḥmān”: the Multiple Names of the Arabian One God(s). A Comparison between the Qur’an and the Arabian Epigraphic Corpora

At a time when a nomenclature struggle was dividing the Christian World, Muḥammad aptly merged the One God(s) of late antique Arabia. In Medina, the prophet adopted the generic *Allāh* over *al-Raḥmān*, the god venerated in South Arabia by Jewish-sympathisers and Christians. Muḥammad opted to employ a simple name (and interpretation of God) over a more complex one to better fit Islam’s universalistic message. Nonetheless, echoes of the tension between the Arabian One Gods can still be traced. This paper will shed light on the genesis of Allāh. After a comparison between the Qur’an and the epigraphic corpora of late antique Arabia, I will argue that a Ḥijāzī High God was primitively venerated in Arabia, but only gained prominence from the end of the fifth century when it was merged with *al-Raḥmān* under clear Jewish-Christian influences. While the merging of Allāh with *al-Raḥmān* was a key event for the emergence of Islam, the two gods grew increasingly estranged when Muḥammad’s movement strengthened and Islam grew farther apart from the two preceding *Ahl al-Kitāb*.

**VALENTINA A. GRASSO** is a final-year PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge working on the history of pre-Islamic Arabia under the supervision of Professor Garth Fowden. Her PhD delves into the political and cultural developments of late antique Arabia by probing the socio-political exploitation of cults in the shaping of Arabian identities. Valentina will be Visiting Assistant Professor at New York University’s Institute for the Study of the Ancient World from September.

## 1.3. Gnostics of Arabia: Syncretizing Indigenous Beliefs

There is much debate in recent scholarship about the religious attitudes of pre-Islamic Arabs, some suggesting that they were not idol-worshippers, and perhaps even espoused some forms of pseudo-monotheistic or henotheistic beliefs, as they are described believing in the Supreme God along with God’s begotten children.

This paper explores the hypothesis of the possibility of some sort of syncretized beliefs that might have existed between local indigenous cultures with other adopted concepts, which might have included traces of Judaeo-Christian beliefs. A good model for this kind of syncretized belief system is Gnosticism, which syncretized neo-Platonism with Judaeo-Christian elements.

Gnostics are not typically described as idol-worshippers, even though they had an elaborate cosmology of many lesser deities to the Supreme God. Understanding the historical context of the Gnostics and their presence in pre-Islamic Arabia might provide us with some possible hints of, at least, *some* of the communities with whom the Qur’an might be in conversation. Not that they were necessarily Valentinians, Basilideans, or other Gnostic groups that emerged in other regions, but perhaps this model allows us to understand the possibility of syncretized belief systems, which might have existed in pre-Islamic Arabia that allows us to contextualize certain Qur’anic passages.

**ABDULLA GALADARI** is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Khalifa University. His field is in Qur'anic hermeneutics and the Qur'an's possible engagement with Near Eastern traditions in Late Antiquity. He uses a multidisciplinary approach towards the Qur'an, such as using cognitive science of religion and philology. He is the author of *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible* (2018), *Metaphors of Death and Resurrection in the Qur'an: An Intertextual Approach with Biblical and Rabbinic Literature* (2021) and *The Spiritual Meanings of the Ḥajj Rituals: A Philological Approach* (2021).

#### 1.4. Caedmon, Muḥammad, and the Sleepers of Ephesus

For some decades research has been discussing a possible relation between one of the surviving depictions of how Muḥammad received his first revelation as it is included in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and a very similar passage in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* composed in Northumbria by Bede Venerabilis (d. 735). By now, strong arguments have been put forward to substantiate the idea that the similarities between the two texts are not coincidental. However, a model of *how* this connection can be satisfactorily explained is still lacking. In this paper I will develop such a model by reviewing the extensive research on Bede and his *Historia* pointing to a possible origin of the story in early 7th century Palestine. Along the way, this delving into the history of 8th century Northumbria resulted in the “discovery” of a Latin intertext for the Qur'anic version of the Tale of the Sleepers of Ephesos, which has gone unnoticed in research so far. This staggering 100% increase in the number of intertexts for that passage from one to two helps shed additional light on possible contexts, in which the story might have circulating in early 7th century Palestine.

**THOMAS EICH** is a scholar of Arab and Islamic studies. He graduated from Bamberg University and did his PhD at Bochum University. He works on imaginations of prenatal human life as they are expressed in Arabic texts including the Qur'an and Hadith material.

## PANEL 2. Characters, Narratives, and Strategies in the Qur'anic Text

### 2.1. Characters Round or Flat? Hud and Salih in Context

E.M. Forster described two kinds of characters in stories, round and flat. A round character has complex and often contradictory motives, and is full of details. A flat character is motivated by a single desire or *idée fixe*. (These categories were introduced to me in an article by Evan Kindley in *The New York Review of Books*.) At first glance, Hud and Salih, two of the Arabian prophets introduced in the Qur'an, seem flat. The stories follow one another in Surat Hud (verses 50–68) and are structurally almost identical. Hud warns the people of Ad against the worship of gods other than the one God. They spurn the warning and God destroys them but saves the prophet. God sends the prophet Salih to Thamud which results in a similar sequence of events.

However, distinctive elements in each story suggest otherwise. For instance, in the first story, the people of Ad accuse Hud of possession by their gods. In the second story, Salih reveals “the she-camel of God” as a sign and a challenge to the people of Thamud. Two more quotes from Kindley give shape to my research interest: “Character [is the] container that gives shape to the materials it contains”, and “the load-bearing mechanisms for ideas that exceed them”. I propose to examine characterization techniques in the Sura 11 account of Hud and Salih.

**DAVID PENCHANSKY** is professor emeritus at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, where he taught from 1989 to 2019. His most recent book was published by Eerdmans, *Understanding Hebrew Wisdom* (2012). Forthcoming is his commentary on Hosea which is a chapter in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* from Bloomsbury. His book, *Solomon and the Ant: The Qur’an in Conversation with the Bible* will appear this fall, published by Wipf and Stock. He continues to apply to the Qur’an a literary critical methodology he developed studying the Hebrew Bible. His work on Surat-Hud is a continuation of that project.

## **2.2. Unbinding Isaac: Comedy, Critique, and Conversation between Midrash and Tafsīr**

The story of Avraham/Ibrāhīm almost sacrificing his son is a mainstay of Jewish and Islamic ritual and reflection, but this paper will focus on two passages – one from the 5th century rabbinic midrash collection, *Genesis Rabbah*, and one from *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* – that deploy comedy to challenge mainstream interpretations of the story. Our passage from *Genesis Rabbah* parodies other passages from the same chapter that advance the doctrine of *zekhut avot* or “merits of the forefathers”, and instead provocatively proposes that Avraham misunderstood God. Some of these other passages from the *midrash* (although not the passage we will focus on) have long been identified as sources for our narrative in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. I will dig deeper into the *tafsīr*’s critical engagement with *Genesis Rabbah*, noting the role of word play, comic juxtaposition, compensation in translation, as well as blatant misquotations of the Qur’an in crafting a narrative that also features a potentially mistaken Ibrāhīm. Despite their overlapping intertexts and similar critical depictions of Avraham/Ibrāhīm, I will demonstrate that the critical aim of the *tafsīr* passage is significantly different than that of the midrash. I ultimately hope to position both texts as participants in a dynamic, ongoing theological and literary conversation.

**MADLINE WYSE** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California – Berkeley with a dual specialization in Islamic Studies and Rabbinic Studies. She received an M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from UC Berkeley, a B.A. in Arabic Language and Literature from Portland State University and a B.A. in Classics and Mathematics from Pomona College. Her current research focuses on literary approaches to *tafsīr* and *midrash*.

### **2.3. Confrontation between the Early Christians and their Enemies in Qur'an 61:14 and its Allusion to Luke 10**

Aṣ-Ṣaff 61:14, reporting the victory of a group of Israelites who believed in Jesus over their enemies, has been challenging for both classical commentators and modern scholars. Modern scholarship has regarded this account significantly different from that of Jesus in the New Testament, maintaining that “this verse is not related or reflect not so much anything in the Gospels”. However, there are some pieces of evidence showing that the Qur'an is aware of the story of the mission of the seventy-two disciples in the Gospel of Luke and the Qur'anic verse alludes to Luke 10 (vv. 1 & 16–23). The account of the faithful group in the Qur'an is analogous to the way the disciples of Jesus are described in Luke 10 (their identity, the number of the group and the way Jesus sends his disciples). In both Qur'an and Luke, there is a confrontation between the disciples and their enemy, in which the strengthening that the faithful received from God was spiritual in nature, which resulted in final domination of the disciples of Jesus over their enemies. Addressing these parallels, in this paper, I will examine how the Qur'anic text relates to the Lukan narrative.

**MOHAMMAD GHANDEHARI** is a scholar of Islamic studies. He holds a PhD from the University of Tehran, Department of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies. His primary research interests are Qur'anic explanation of the Bible and Early Shi'i Hadith. His publications include “Facing Mirrors: The Intertwined Golden Calf Story”. Among the courses he has taught are The Qur'an and the Bible, and Early Shi'i Hadith.

### **2.4. Who is Solomon of the Qur'an? An Inquiry into the Pragmatic Mind of Muhammad**

It is common Knowledge that the Qur'an is replete with ancient biblical lore. In this paper, I discuss how Solomon, the biblical figure, is reformulated in the Qur'an in order to achieve some immediate goals relevant to Muhammad and his religio-political mission. I use pragmatism in its philosophical and linguistic meanings to uncover the discursive strategies the Qur'an employs for persuading its audience and refuting its opponents' religious doctrines. Muhammad's mindset, as expressed throughout his ministry, was highly practical and pragmatic, a fact that explains his intelligent reference to ancient biblical stories. The paper focuses on Solomon's dealings with the queen of Sheba and demonstrates that the details in the Qur'anic story, which have no parallels in biblical or extra-biblical narratives are critical to our understanding of Muhammad's mind and mission.

**MUSTAPHA TAJDIN** teaches Islamic Studies and Symbolic Logic at Khalifa University of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi, UAE. He holds a PhD from al-Qarawiyyin University, and has previously held faculty appointments at the International Islamic University, Malaysia, and the Canadian University in Dubai. Tajdin's primary research interests are Islamic Law, Islamic Theology, and Qur'anic Studies. His publications include *Islamic Institutions in Early*



## **2.5. Cognitive Verbs as a Strategy for Expressing Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in the Qur'an**

Studies dealing with the concept of knowledge in the Qur'an have underscored the specificity of cognitive verbs such as *ya'qilūna* "(they) understand" and *ya'lamūna* "(they) know". However, much less is known about their pragmatic grammatical functions. My thesis builds on Western pragmatic theories and shows that cognitive verbs, particularly those that occur in *āya*-final words (*fawāṣil*) not only indicate the mental state of the addressees but also show the attitude of God toward them; namely, they express subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Based on work by Nuyts, I will show that the cognitive verbs in the third person plural such as (*li-qawm*) *ya'qilūna* "(to people who) understand" convey subjectivity. These verbs have more than a descriptive use since people are asked by God to ponder and exercise sapiential reflection on a specific form of action. Thus, they function as the expression of God's awareness of the addressees and His evaluation of His addressees, whose faith is based (or not based) on understanding why God is omnipotent. When cognitive verbs in the second person plural are used, this produces an intersubjective meaning. The cognitive verb indicates that a set of beliefs and values are projected as shared by the speaker and the addressees.

**YEHUDIT DROR** was awarded her PhD from Erlangen-Nürnberg University, Germany. Since 2019, she has been a senior lecturer in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. Her primary interest is Arabic syntax, and in particular the syntax of the Qur'an. Her current publications deal with grammatical and syntactic phenomena in the Qur'an, including the functions of particles and pronouns in the Qur'an, the pragmatics of various syntactic structures, issues of time (tense) and aspect, defining the linguistic features of discourse in the Qur'an, and grammatical issues within Qur'anic exegesis.

## **PANEL 3. Qur'anic Perspective and Other Views**

### **3.1. What is the *fiṭra*? A Qur'anic Perspective**

A number of recent studies have called attention to the dearth of scholarship on the Islamic notion of *fiṭra* ("natural disposition"). This term has its origins in the 30th chapter of the Qur'an, in which God declares that he has created (*faṭara*) humankind upon the "*fiṭra* of God" (Q. 30:30). Many Muslim thinkers have understood *fiṭra* to refer straightforwardly to Islam. This interpretation would seem to follow naturally from a famous hadith, in which the Prophet says that all children are born on the

*fiṭra*, and then it is their parents who turn them into Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians. However, as recent scholarship has shown, there is in fact a great deal of diversity among Muslim thinkers concerning the precise meaning of this term, especially in its epistemological content. My essay seeks to examine the Qur’anic basis for equating *fiṭra* with Islam. More broadly, I aim to uncover the underlying epistemological context in which the Qur’an’s presentation of this concept is couched. To this end, special attention will be devoted to the connection drawn in the text between the *fiṭra* and the *ḥanīfī* religion (*dīn*), epitomized by the figure of Abraham. Taking Abraham as the paradigmatic follower of the *fiṭra*, we examine the epistemological upshots of his markedly “natural theological” reasoning in various Qur’anic narratives. In addition to close lexical and intratextual analysis, this examination will involve reading these texts alongside a number of parallel ancient Jewish traditions, which similarly depict Abraham as a sort of natural theologian (*Jubilees*, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Genesis Rabbah*, etc.).

**JACOB KILDOO** is a rising 4th year PhD student in the Theology department at the University of Notre Dame. He holds a master’s degree in Islamic and Near Eastern studies from Washington University in St. Louis, and a bachelor’s in Philosophy and Arabic studies from Notre Dame. In his upcoming dissertation project, directed by Gabriel Said Reynolds, he aims to give a systematic account of the epistemological framework underlying the Qur’anic discourse. Besides Qur’anic studies and the epistemology of religion, his research interests include comparative theology, the theology of religious pluralism, and premodern Islamic theology.

### 3.2. On *Ḥanīf* as an Arabic Qur’anic Term

Two antithetical assumptions appear to be similarly implausible: that the Qur’anic vocabulary does not include Biblical and Bible-related borrowings, or that these borrowings tend not to be at least partly Arabicized, i.e., occurring with meanings that more or less differ from what their non-Qur’anic cognates usually denote. Taking this statement as a presupposition, I intend to apply it to the particular case of the Qur’anic word *ḥanīf*, which has become notorious for the conspicuous discrepancy between its monotheistic Qur’anic semantic and meanings attested in other Semitic languages (such as “pagan” for the Syriac *ḥanpā*, or “godless” for the Hebrew *ḥanēf*). By counting on a predominantly semantical approach, I will argue that is hard to consider the Qur’anic *ḥanīf* as a genuine development of a pre-Qur’anic Arabic term. Furthermore, I will provide support to the hypothesis of Francois de Blois, which confirms antedating insights of Margoliouth and Ahrens, and according to which the loanword in question must have had entered the pre-Qur’anic Arabic milieu within a formulaic phrase attributing to Abraham the state of being *ḥanpā* “gentile”. Thereafter, I will do my best to demonstrate, however, that the Qur’an did not actually adopt the sense of “gentile” through this term. The suggestion I would like to argue for, instead, is that in the Qur’anic text, *ḥanīf* acquires a quite different, metaphorical sense. It seems to be derived from the idea of an entirely arched curvedness into the left (*ḥanaḥ*) as op-

posed to the notion of such a curvedness into the right (*qasaf*). An implementation of the latter is to be found in (Q. 72:14–15) at the outset of which one can read: “*Wa-’innā minnā l-muslimūna wa-minnā l-qāsiṭūna* – Among us some are *muslims* (submitted to God) and some of us are perverse”. This is how due to an arguable association between *ḥanīf* and *muslim* (as in *ḥanīfan musliman* – Q. 3:67) an apparent semantical opposition between *ḥanīf* and *qāsiṭ* “perverse” might come to light.

**IVAN DYULGEROV** is a scholar of Arabic and Qur’anic Studies. He holds a PhD from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, where he teaches a range of classes on Arabic lexicology, phonetics and phonology, and grammar. His research activities focus primarily on the semantics of the Arabic Qur’an. Among his publications is *The Qur’an on the Concept of Religion* (in Bulgarian).

### 3.3. The Neoplatonic Qur’an: Nasir-i Khusraw’s Ismaili Vision of Qur’anic Revelation

The belief that the Qur’an is God’s Speech revealed to the Prophet Muhammad as a verbatim revelation may be the most popular account of Qur’anic revelation, but is by no means the only Muslim view on the topic. This paper showcases Nasir-i Khusraw’s (d. ca. 1080) Ismaili Muslim Neoplatonic view of revelation in which the Qur’an is not the direct Speech of God; rather, the true Speech and Book of God are metaphysical realities and cosmic archetypes that ground the spiritual and material Cosmos. The Arabic Qur’an is the Prophet’s creative depiction (*tanzil*) or translation of spiritual inspiration (*ta’yid, wahy*) that he receives from the Neoplatonic Universal Soul, which is itself a secondary emanation from God’s eternal Word. The Arabic Qur’an, accordingly, is a symbolic representation of the Neoplatonic Cosmos consisting of symbols coined by Muhammad to serve the audiences of his own time. This Ismaili vision of the Qur’an entails important hermeneutical consequences: the Qur’an must be properly read in light of the Neoplatonic hierarchy where specific Divine names, actions, and pronouns properly refer to the Universal Intellect and/or Universal Soul.

**KHALIL ANDANI** is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Augustana College (USA) and specializes in Qur’anic studies, Islamic intellectual history, Ismailism, and Sufism. He holds a PhD and two Masters degrees in Islamic Studies from Harvard University. His current book project explores Qur’anic, Sunni, and Ismaili theologies of revelation and is based on his dissertation that won best PhD Dissertation of the Year from the Foundation for Iranian Studies. Khalil’s publications have appeared in several journals and edited volumes including *Religion Compass*, the *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*, the *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies*, and *Deconstructing Islamic Studies*.

### 3.4. The Qur'an and the Rabbis – A New Look at the Evidence

Relating the Qur'an vis-a-vis the variegated strands of the Jewish tradition remains a desideratum. The field of Jewish studies has learned carefully to distinguish between rabbinic and non-rabbinic forms of late antique Judaism, between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions, and between earlier, formative, and later, more mature expressions of Jewish thought, especially after the Constantinian shift. Yet the echo of these advances in Qur'anic studies has been incremental at best. This presentation will revisit a few of Qur'anic passages relating to the rabbinic tradition that have been intensely studied before (such as Q. 5:32 and 9:34), and a few ones that have received less attention, in order to present a new thesis revising some of my earlier suggestions along with most other views. I will argue for post-Talmudic forms of Palestinian Judaism, roughly contemporary with the emergence of the Qur'anic community, as the key tradition that shaped the type of Arabian Judaism that is reflected, positively and negatively, in the Qur'an.

**HOLGER ZELLENTIN** is Professor of Religion (Jewish Studies) at the University of Tübingen where he is the Principal Investigator of the research project “The Quran as a Source for Late Antiquity” (2020–2025). He holds a PhD from Princeton University, and has previously held faculty appointments at the Graduate Theological Union and the University of California, Berkeley, at the University of Nottingham and at Cambridge. Zellentin works on Hellenistic and Rabbinic Judaism and on the relationship of the Qur'an to late antique law and narrative. His publications include *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins* (Routledge, 2019), *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Mohr Siebeck, 2013), and *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

### PANEL 4. Miracles and Magic: Explorations in the Qur'an and the Supernatural

The supernatural forms an important element in both the Qur'an and in Muslim thought. This panel will explore different aspects of the supernatural, both the use of miracles as a sign of power bestowed upon Muhammad (and other prophets) by God, as well as the human attempt to control the supernatural world through the use of magic. The first paper in this panel discusses the importance of miracles in the accounts of Muḥammad's birth and their association with the miracles performed in the Qur'an by other prophets. Having introduced the centrality of the supernatural in early Islam and biographies of the Prophet, the panel moves to the modern period, with two papers discussing modern responses to miracles and magic. The second paper will discuss the ways in which works of modernist *tafsīr* have interpreted and responded to miracles included in the Qur'an, and the third paper analyses the attack on magic found in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* in the exegesis of Q. 2:102. These three papers

aim to provide an exploration of miracles, magic, and the supernatural in the Qur'an and in Islam more broadly, and the different ways interpreters of the Qur'an have responded to the world of the supernatural.

#### **4.1. The Miracles of Muḥammad in the Qur'an and the Sīra: The Conception of Muḥammad as Case Study**

This paper examines the connection between the Qur'an and the earliest *sīra* works in relation to the miracles of the Prophet Muḥammad. Using the conception story of Muḥammad as a case study, I argue that the Qur'an and *sīra* worked together to present an image of Muḥammad that respected his humanity yet provided him with the supernatural credentials required by late antique audiences. This paper will focus on two supernatural occurrences in the accounts of Muḥammad's conception in the works of Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Rāshid, and al-Wāqidī: acts of divination and light as a sign of divine favor. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib uses divination by casting arrows to determine which son to sacrifice and how many camels to sacrifice in his place. 'Abd Allāh is later marked by a light shining from his face that disappears after Muḥammad is conceived. The Qur'an does not mention these stories, but connects Muḥammad with other religious authorities, especially Moses and Jesus, emphasizing their humanity, but also pointing out that each had been granted signs by God. While the signs granted Muḥammad are not the same as those of Moses and Jesus, they serve to coordinate his image in the scripture with that in the *sīra*.

**REBECCA WILLIAMS** is Associate Professor of History at the University of South Alabama. She earned her PhD in Islamic Studies from McGill University and is the author of *Muhammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views* (Routledge, 2013). Her research interests include the depiction of Muhammad's miracles in early works of *sīra*, history, and *tafsir*, the history and historiography of prophetic miracles and the supernatural more generally in Early and Medieval Islamic Civilization, and, more recently, the ways in which utilizing the theory of biocritical hermeneutics might expand upon our understanding of the life and works of such authors as Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923).

#### **4.2. From Supernatural to Natural: Modernist Sunnī and Aḥmadī Exegetes on Prophetic Miracles**

This paper examines the work of writers who utilized English *tafsīr* as a site for discourses on religion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I survey exegetes who viewed themselves as modernists and reformers in their attempts to reconcile their understanding of the natural world with depictions of supernatural miracles in the lives of prophets in verses of scripture. These exegetes frequently interpreted the miracles attributed to Israelite prophets mentioned in the Qur'an in creative ways. The case studies in this survey include the miracles attributed to Moses, Solomon, and Christ. Authors in this survey include Muḥammad 'Alī, Malik Ghulām Farīd, Ghulām



Aḥmad Parwez, and Muḥammad Asad. Questions include: what is the definition and purpose of a miracle? How do these authors respond to traditional Muslim interpretations of miracles? Do these authors consider prophetic miracles to have been historical events or allegories? If differences exist, how do the Aḥmadī exegetes differ from their Sunnī counterparts?

**NEBIL HUSAYN** is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. His research broadly considers the development of Islamic theology, historiography and debates on the caliphate. Husayn obtained his PhD in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University and an M.A. in Arabic and Islamic Studies from Harvard University. Husayn is the recipient of a Fulbright award and the University of Miami Fellowship in the Arts and Humanities. He is the author of *Opposing the Imam* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

### 4.3. Magic and Modernism: The *Tafsīr al-Manār* on Occultism and Q. 2:102

In Q. 2:102, the Qur'an states that during the time of Solomon devils brought magic into the world and taught it to the angels Hārūt and Mārūt. Narratives about these two angels were incredibly popular in the classical period and they were closely associated with magic; more broadly magic was a common part of popular forms of religious belief and practice, particularly the use of talismans and protective spells. Such beliefs jarred with the rationalist approach adopted in Muḥammad 'Abduh's and Rashīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Consequently, their exegesis of Q. 2:102 provides a concerted attack on magic. The main focus of this paper is to provide a detailed analysis of the exegetical strategies used in their refutation of magic. However, it will also ask whether the attack on magic is rooted in attacks on popular religious beliefs and practices made by figures such as Ibn Taymiyya, or whether the rejection of magic was influenced by their scientific and rationalist approach to scripture. More broadly, this paper will place the arguments against magic and occultism in the broader context of Biblical 'Higher Criticism' and the extent to which the *Tafsīr al-Manār* may have been influenced by its approaches.

**STEPHEN BURGE** is Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He has published two monographs, *Angels in Islam* (Routledge, 2012) and *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message* (Bloomsbury, 2020), as well two edited volumes *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exegesis* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and with Asma Hilali, *The Making of Religious Texts in Islam* (Gerlach, 2019). He is also Islam editor of the *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception* and on the editorial board of SBL Press' *The Bible and its Reception* series.

## PANEL 5. Theology, Mysticism, and Pluralism

**ANDREW J. O'CONNOR** (presiding the panel) is Assistant Professor of Theology & Religious Studies at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin (USA). He holds a PhD from the University of Notre Dame, a M.A. from the University of Chicago, and a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In the 2017-18 academic year, he was the recipient of a Fulbright Research Grant to study in Amman, Jordan. Andrew's research interests include prophetology in the Qur'an and the Qur'an's engagement with the cultural/religious environment of Late Antiquity. He is currently preparing a monograph on the Qur'an's prophetology.

### **5.1. Mulla Sadra on the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Mystical or Pseudo-mystical**

Skimming Mulla Sadra's interpretation of the Qur'an, one can find expressions telling that God has bestowed him spiritual hearings, vision, and intellect. So, he claims, more than once, that he has achieved difficult mystical points in his interpretation by disclosing the inner parts of the verses, using these divine faculties. But is it the case? Anyone can brag consciously or unconsciously that he has divine gifts that allow him to understand something deeply that others cannot. But in an academic atmosphere, we need evidence for such claims. Reading different parts of Mulla Sadra's exegeses, it is apparent that he interprets the Qur'an in the framework of neo-Aristotelian philosophy: Celestial bodies and souls, vegetative soul, the simplicity of seeds, the simplicity of sperm, so on. The inexactness of these theories is a sign of lacking spiritual hearings, visions, and intellect. It is the case for many other mystical interpretations of the Qur'an that questions this approach.

**REZA AKBARI** is a professor of Islamic philosophy and theology at Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran. He graduated from the University of Tehran in 2001. His first academic interest is in Mulla Sadra and Avicenna's philosophy. Also, he teaches religious epistemology, life after death, and Qur'anic hermeneutics at various Iranian universities. *Immortality, fideism, and the exegesis of Sharh-i Manzumeh* (a philosophical textbook in Iran) are among his publications in the Persian language.

### **5.2. Nonviolent Horizons in the Qur'an: Is it Possible to Go Beyond the Just War Theory?**

Classical and modern Islamic exegetical thought uses the Qur'an to justify three distinct approaches to violence and war: (1) the preventive or expansionist approach, (2) the defensive approach, (3) and the radical nonviolent approach. Critical reading of these approaches shows that it is difficult to justify aggressive war using the Qur'an, in which the ethical conditions of defensive warfare are explicit. This paper looks in the Qur'an for elements that support a radical nonviolent reading and go beyond the just war theory. This trend emerged from the "Gandhian moment", a new religious and po-

litical consciousness that influenced various religions, including Islam. Nonviolence is seen as an interpretative horizon and an implicit meaning, which require time to be manifested and explicated. It is somehow similar to the horizon that permitted the overcoming of slavery, considering the ethical finalities and the impact of history. In this context, Sufi hermeneutics are helpful to interiorize the meaning, seeking an inner transformation. This paper offers some interpretative examples from Qur'anic tenets and narratives.

**ADNANE MOKRANI** is a Senior Research Fellow and member of FSCIRE at the La Pira Library and Research Centre on the History and Doctrines of Islam, Palermo. He has been Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome since 2005. Formerly he was a professor at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), Rome (2009-2020). He obtained his doctorate in Islamic theology and comparative religions from al-Zaytuna University, Faculty of Islamic Theology, Tunis (1997). He received his second doctorate in Islamic studies and Muslim-Christian relations from PISAI (2005). Among his writings: *Toward an Islamic Theology of Nonviolence, in Dialogue with René Girard*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing (forthcoming). "Semitic Rhetoric and the Qur'ān: The Scholarship of Michel Cuyppers", in *New Trends in Qur'ānic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation*, ed. by M. Sirry (Lockwood Press, 2019).

### **5.3. Dialogue in the Holy Qur'an in Light of Pluralism and Peace-making**

Dialogue that is based on pluralism and mutual respect, and which aims to build a just peace among nations is at the centre of the Qur'an's teachings. Pluralism is a human characteristic and a constant principle of accepting the other. It is well-known that the first word revealed by God is اقرأ (Recite), 96:1. The exact meaning is "read". It is a call for education, knowledge, and constructing civilizations. The Qur'an acknowledges the principle of pluralism and dialogue among religions and doctrines in many verses, but a persisting question remains: why does violence arise and some movements emerge as violent ideologies? This issue addressed in this research stipulates a hypothesis which is that political or economic or social circumstances create an environment for the emergence of these violent movements, and the religious basis constitutes a cover that is employed to serve irreligious and inhuman agendas. Heavenly religions' philosophy arises through solid foundations in calling for loving, accepting, and recognizing others as partners in life who have full rights as stated by religious teachings. This concept strengthens human rights perceptions in light of scientific development through various scientific disciplines (such as historical, religious, jurisprudential, intellectual, philosophical, and philological majors).

**MUNSHID F WADI** holds a PhD from the University of Baghdad in the Philosophy of Fundamentals of Religion. Within the faculty at the University of Diyala, he works as a teacher for Oriental Studies, Qur'anic Studies, and Islamic Political Thought. He graduated from the MA with his dissertation, *Analysis of the Qur'an Text*, and his PhD thesis dealt with the theory of governance in the Qur'an, a critical study.

**ANGELA BIVOL** is a medical doctor with PhD in medicine and a certified translator. Beside her medical practice she is interested in Orientalism and Arabic language which she studies in the St Petersburg University (Russia). As a freelance translator (En-Ro/Ru) one of her main fields of expertise is Religion, including Islam.

#### **5.4. A Religion for All Religions. Abul Kalam Azad's Idea of Pluralism in *Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an***

This paper aims to analyse Moulana Abul Kalam Azad's interpretation of the word *din* in his Qur'an Commentary *Tarjuman-ul-Quran*, especially in the light of his proposition of *wahdat-e-din* (unity of all religions). Azad has been influenced by the Upanishads to formulate keywords related to religion. This influence has been significant in a milieu where religious differences play a crucial role in determining political identity. Attempts to locate the origins of Islam from non-Muslim sources have identified it as a non-confessional ecumenical movement that can encompass all monotheistic religions. Fred Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (2012) relies on the Qur'an to expound on the idea of a Believers' movement that encompasses all monotheistic religions. However, this idea is rather popular in contexts where religious pluralism needs a theological orientation for accommodating divergent streams of faith beyond a liberal acknowledgement of other religions. Fazlur Rahman argued for such a theologically mandated ecumenism in the interpretation of the verses 2:62 and 5:69 in his *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (2009). Though this bridging of differences between Islam and what the Qur'an calls "people of the Book" is possible without a major controversy, propositions of ecumenism in the case of eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism would be tortuous. Moulana Abul Kalam Azad's *Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an* makes this endeavour rather insightful. His work purports to suggest that interpreting the Qur'an in India without recourse to Indian religious traditions is an unfinished affair.

**SHAMEER K SULAIMAN** is an independent scholar focusing on Qur'anic Studies, Arabic Language, and Stylistics and Islamic studies. He graduated from the University of Kerala, English Language and Literature, and is a Moulavi Alim, having graduated in the traditional Islamic curriculum. His research interests are hermeneutics of the Qur'an, Qur'an and polysemy, reception of revelation, and multiculturalism. He has translated into Malayalam the Qur'an and the scholarly critical edition of Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. He has led sessions on the Qur'an and modern scholarships in the Department of Islamic Studies, University of Kerala and Darul Huda Islamic University.

## PANEL 6. Carriers of the Text and Readings. 1. Manuscripts, Illustrations, Amulets, and Printed Editions

### **6.1. *Qur'anic Healing or Magic? Amulets as Medical Intervention inside Islamic West Africa***

Are Qur'anic amulets magical or religious? Many contemporary and early anthropologists categorize Qur'anic amulets found in Islamic West Africa, especially the ones prescribed for healing purposes, as “magical objects”. My curiosity regarding amulets compelled me to study the health and illness worlds of three regions inside Mali: the inhabitants of Kel AlHafra, the people of Timbuktu, and the Dogons in Bandiagara. I observed that marabouts (religious healers) in Islamic West Africa deduce causality (of illnesses) on the basis of social signs, and not simply on physical signs. Although I continue to deliberate about the above-mentioned question, my initial observation is that Qur'anic healing and amulets offer a medical intervention which is public and therapeutic. If that is so, then how and why have scholars categorized Qur'anic amulets as magical objects? Islamic material culture from West Africa, especially Qur'anic amulets, reveal that believers are anxious about illnesses, just like persons ensconced in a western scientific culture are. But the approach of Islamic West Africa towards health and illness differs from western biomedicine. Biomedicine emerged from a social context geared towards mastering nature, controlling individual bodies, and eliminating illnesses; the patient's physical body was ruptured from the social and moral realms. Significantly, biomedicine did not make appeals to a higher deity. By contrast, for West Africans, the human body is connected to the cosmos. Additionally, West African Muslims do not eliminate appeals to the moral and social realms in their theory about the universe. Therefore, their account of the ‘illness worlds’ is porous across the physical, social, and moral realm. I argue that by using Qur'anic amulets as a medium, marabouts (religious healers) in West Africa, especially Mali, resist the western categorization of the “magical.” A thorough investigation of amulets lays bare the arbitrary classification erected between magic, science, and religion inside the western academy. This paper dismantles the categorization of amulets as “magical objects” by questioning the obfuscation caused by the Western categorization of science, religion, and magic. I engage Frazer's dichotomies of science, religion, and magic, only to critique them by employing insights from Robert Thornton (2015) and Jo Wreford (2005). The field has matured to a level where scholars have dissolved the boundary between science, magic, and religion when it comes to religious healing. However, when it comes to the categorization of amulets, the field continues to categorize them as magical and occult. I am, however not convinced by the terms “occult” and “magical” (healing) being used for maraboutic services or amulets (Mommersteeg 1990, 66–67). The reason why I argue that the category of the magical is unsuitable is because scholars have not paid due attention to the missing piece in the study of amulets: the Qur'an acting as a medium between the physical and the moral realm. The porosity of Qur'an as a medium cannot be construed as magical.



Hence, the engagement between the earliest and the contemporary anthropological insights helps me in dismantling the alleged “magical” nature of the Qur’an, as well as of Qur’anic amulets.

**BEENA BUTOOL** is a PhD candidate in Religion, Ethics, and Philosophy at Florida State University. Her research interests include Islamic ethics, early Islamic history, Christian ethics, and Science and Religion. Her research uncovers the link between the ethics of jihad and the project of the Islamic empire.

## **6.2. The Bigger Picture: Employing a *Ṣan‘ā’* Manuscript for Dating Early Mosques**

Chronicles in Arabic from the ninth century onward portrait the distribution of mosques across the Middle East in the seventh and eighth centuries. The archaeological evidence, however, rarely supports this narrative and points to later processes. Inscriptions which use relevant terminology, as well as scarce papyri, similarly indicate a later date for early mosques. One of the Qur’an manuscripts from *Ṣan‘ā’* (MS DaM 20–33.1) constitutes an important contribution to this debate. On the manuscript, two monuments are depicted and are often interpreted as mosques. If the illustrations indeed reflect such structures, the date of the manuscript can assist in dating the earliest known mosques in the Islamicate world. The document has been dated over the years by various tools, including 14C, paleography, and art history, which produced a possible terminus post quem. This paper focuses on the variety of methods employed for dating early mosques, each in its own context. It demonstrates the importance of a critical reading of chronicles and of consulting different methods within the studies of early Islam.

**HAGIT NOL** holds a postdoctoral fellowship at the Université libre de Bruxelles where she conducts research on the distribution of early mosques. Her PhD thesis, at Universität Hamburg, focused on settlement patterns in central Israel/Palestine during the 7th–11th centuries. Her research interests involve landscape archaeology, early Islam, economic and social history of the early medieval period, and the diffusion of knowledge and ideas.

## **6.3. The Readers of Basra**

While recent years have seen a great increase in interest in early Qur’anic manuscripts and what they may tell us about the early history of the Qur’an, the somewhat later corpus of vocalized Qur’anic manuscripts have not yet received the same attention. Yet, such manuscripts are of great interest for those interested in the history of the recitation of the Qur’an, as they form the earliest layer that can give direct insight into how the *rasm* was interpreted in recitation, centuries before the canonization of the seven reading traditions. In this talk I will focus on a specific subset of manuscripts, all written in the B.II style, all written in the *rasm* of Basra. These manuscripts



have in common that they all have non-canonical pronominal morphology (*‘alayhu*, *fīhu*, *biḥī*, *‘alayhumū*, *fīhumū*, *bihumū*), and thus represent a layer of pre-canonical recitations that did not make it into the canon. I will compare these readings to the canonical readings, and other non-canonical Basran readings from around the same period, and highlight the commonalities and differences between them.

**MARIJN VAN PUTTEN**'s research focuses on the history of Qur'anic Arabic and its reading traditions and the textual history of the Qur'an. He has just finished a research fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, where he focused on a comparative study of the non-canonical reading traditions present in a corpus of B.II manuscripts produced in Basra. Besides this, he continues to publish on the linguistic history of Arabic, Semitic, and Berber.

#### 6.4. Reading in Abraham Hinckelmann Qur'an Edition and Sources

Abraham Hinckelmann's edition of the Qur'an in 1694 was a milestone in the history of Qur'an printing in Europe. This paper tries to shed light on this edition by presenting an introduction to the history of Qur'an printings in Europe. Secondly, by presenting the Qur'an manuscripts and exegetical works which Hinckelmann used. Thirdly, this paper presents some analysis about Hinckelmann's introduction. Fourthly, I provide some remarks on the text he produced in comparison to the original text. Lastly, the aim of this paper is to give the reader a whole picture on the circumstances in which this edition was written.

**ABDALLAH EL-KHATIB** is currently a professor of Qur'anic Studies at Qatar University since 2017, and he is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of college of Sharia and Islamic Studies* at Qatar University. He holds a PhD from Manchester University, UK. He was the previous dean of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Sharjah University, UAE, and taught at many Universities such as a-Awzai Islamic College in Lebanon, and the Northern Border University in KSA. El-Khatib's main focus is on Qur'anic Exegesis, Qur'an translation, and editing Qur'anic manuscripts. His publications include *Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Quran into English Language (from 1649 till 2013): A Critical Study* (Jāmi'at al-Shāriqah, 2014) and *The Philosophical Exegesis of the Glorious Quran: Avicenna's views, a Critical Study for his manuscripts*.

### PANEL 7. Carriers of the Text and Readings. 2. The Qu'ran in Light of Digital Humanities

This panel will discuss the features of the Qur'anic text in its new digital horizon and will present a few projects that apply corpus linguistics, text analytics, and statistical analysis exploring the possibilities given by Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing methods as well as the epistemological implications of using bits and codes in our textual analyses of the text.

Machines, AI, and statistical analysis can help scholars to answer their research questions on the Qur'anic text. In fact, Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing methods can provide representations to capture the meanings of the words and passages from the texts; Artificial Intelligence formal semantic representations provide suggestions to identify abstract concepts, topics, themes, and relatedness within and between verses and passages, to enable semantic search, linkage, topic-modelling, classification, question-answering, and chatbot-training from religious texts. The panel will present some general features of AI methods for capturing the semantics of the Qur'anic text and a few examples of works that measure the semantic similarities and relatedness between Qur'anic verses. These projects are just an example of the infinite possibilities given by the application of AI methods for Arabic language in which the "Leeds School" is one of the most active institutions.

Statistical analyses can also be performed to explore variations of the readings of the Qur'anic text in terms of secondary literature and manuscript witnesses.

However, the use of the text in its digital form – for conducting our research and answering our questions – requires the philological approach that scholars have used in textual scholarship and textual analysis with the awareness of the importance of the carrier of text made of bits and codes. Analysis of manuscripts and printed editions is the basis of the new technology for a proper encoding and representation of a digital Qur'an.

In 2017, a digital-born edition of the Qur'anic text was launched as the official edition of the Sultanate of Oman by applying a new computer technology. The Mushaf Muscat went through all the necessary steps of verification of its correctness and thus was approved by al-Azhar. The edition challenges a new analysis of Arabic text encoding and forms the basis for a *palaeo-orthographic* approach to the text, allowing a proper research into the al-Azhar-certified digital text and offers interesting new directions of research that combines editing, encoding, and semantics.

**ALBA FEDELI** is a research associate at the Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg, working on the transmission of early Qur'anic manuscripts and their writing system. She received her PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK, at the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing, after studies in Italy with Sergio Noja Nosedà and has first-hand knowledge of manuscript collections scattered all over the world, from Yemen to Ireland, from Russia to Qatar and Egypt. Her works include the edition of the Mingana-Lewis Qur'anic palimpsest. She is the co-PI of InterSaME Project ("The intertwined world of the oral and written transmission of sacred traditions in the Middle East"), a DFG-AHRC joint project in co-operation with Geoffrey Khan at the University of Cambridge.

**ALICIA GONZÁLEZ MARTÍNEZ** is a research associate at the Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg. She has a multidisciplinary profile covering Arabic linguistics, Oriental Studies and software development, with a special focus on Arabic Natural language processing. She worked in COBHUNI project from 2015 to 2020 and now, she is a researcher in the InterSaME project, with Alba Fedeli.

## **7.1. Mushaf Muscat: a New Approach to Arabic Text Editing in the Digital Age**

The official Qur'an edition of the Sultanate of Oman, Mushaf Muscat, new computer technology had to be invented when it was launched in 2017. a) Aesthetically, the text had to be displayed with meticulously researched computer models representative of the naskhi and kufi styles; b) Theologically, the naskhi model had to reconcile strict script grammar with specific orthographic rules prescribed by the 1924 Cairo Qur'an; c) Linguistically, the text had to be consistently encoded and well-structured; d) Digitally, industrial constraints regarding Arabic text encoding, font technology, rendering reliability, and web publishing had to be mitigated; it also had to be easy to navigate and copy. The resulting Azhar-certified digital text, enhanced by a new analysis of Arabic text encoding, forms the basis for a novel palaeo-orthographic reduction of the text. This procedure is the result of original research on the earliest known (fragments of) Qur'an manuscripts, as well as various printed editions. By comparing these texts, Tom Milo has identified the typical common denominators, which creates a tool for new research strategies.

**THOMAS MILO** is a linguist and the founder of DecoType. He has been working to bridge the gap between humanities and digital technology since the 1980s, with a focus on text encoding of Cyrillic and Arabic-scripted languages as well as modelling traditional Islamic scripts. Thomas is one of the contributors to the Corpus Coranicum Project since its beginnings. Presently, he is contributing to the DFG-AHRC project InterSaME at the Universität Hamburg.

## **7.2. Statistical Methods for Identifying Unknown Qur'anic Readings: An Application to Pronominal Variation in Manuscripts and Secondary Literature**

Understanding the similarities and differences between Qur'anic reading traditions is critical to the study of their emergence and proliferation. Existing works comparing the reading traditions have typically relied on the relative number of agreements between readings to establish closeness and draw conclusions. However, this one-dimensional approach does not make full use of the rich information contained within the data. In particular, the patterns of agreement and disagreement among readings can provide evidence of local traditions and reveal a lot about their shared origins. In this paper I present the development of a new quantitative methodology for comparing Qur'anic readings. I leverage Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and other dimensionality reduction techniques to produce visual representations of the similarities between readings. This new approach makes it possible to identify regionality and other characteristics of unknown or indeterminate readings found in manuscripts and the secondary literature. I demonstrate the utility of this methodology through a study of pronominal suffixes in the Qur'an. I also discuss some of the key challenges associated with defining distance metrics which are key to obtaining accurate results.

**HYTHEM SIDKY** is the executive director of IQSA. He is a specialist in Qur’anic manuscripts and reading traditions and holds an M.S. and PhD from the University of Notre Dame. Hythem’s research combines traditional philology and mathematical analysis to study the dynamics and evolution of the Qur’an in early Islam. He has worked on the stemmatics of Qur’anic manuscripts, reconstruction of regional oral traditions, and continues to investigate applications of stylometry to the Qur’an.

### **7.3. Artificial Intelligence and Text Analytics for Understanding the Qur’an**

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning researchers have developed new way to analyse and understand texts in English, Arabic, and other languages. The internet is a huge new source of text data, and we can use the Web to model both Modern and Qur’anic Arabic (Atwell 2019). We can consider the Qur’an as a text data-set or corpus. The Quranic Arabic Corpus is an online text corpus where each verse and every word is annotated with linguistic analyses, as a research resource for linguistics, machine learning, and religious scholars (Dukes et al 2013). Neural Network deep learning can convert each verse into a number-vector, representing the meaning or semantics of the verse; this enables scholars to probe similarities in meanings and teachings across Qur’an verses, and between Qur’an and other religious texts. I ask Religious Scholars to consider working with Artificial Intelligence researchers to broaden understanding of the Qur’an.

**ERIC ATWELL** is Professor of Artificial Intelligence for Language in the School of Computing at the University of Leeds. He has a B.A. in Computing and Linguistics from Lancaster University, and a PhD in Corpus Linguistics from Leeds University. His research interests include corpus linguistics and artificial intelligence applied to analysis and understanding of Qur’an, Hadith and other religious texts.

### **7.4. Doc2vec to Measure Semantic Similarity between Verses of the Qur’an**

NLP helps us perform a wide range of tasks to analyze and penetrate the knowledge with text data. Semantic similarity is one of the main tasks for many NLP applications. Semantic similarity analysis in natural language texts has recently gained a lot of attention. The semantic similarity task is computationally challenging since determining text relatedness does not depend solely on lexical matching methods; it goes beyond that. Hence, we use a recent breakthrough in feature embedding in our work, Doc2vec, enabling machine learning models to have an informative numerical representation of the input text. We exploit the distributed representation of text to capture the semantic properties of the verses of the Qur’an. Therefore, we transformed the Qur’an verses into a numerical form, which can be used as input to ML methods to study the semantic similarity between the text documents/ verses.

**MENWA ALSHAMMERI** is a lecturer at Jouf University in Saudi Arabia. She is a third-year PhD student in the School of Computing at Leeds University. Her research focuses on investigating AI applied to text and exploits NLP methods to analyze and explore texts' underlying knowledge. She uses ML/DL models with NLP techniques to examine the semantic similarity task and extract the meanings and concepts from the Qur'an.

### ***7.5. AraBERT to Measure Semantic Relatedness between Qur'an Verses***

In this paper, I utilize AraBERT language model to binary classify pairs of Qur'an verses provided by the QurSim dataset to either be semantically related or not. The QurSim dataset was pre-processed and three datasets were formed for comparisons. Also, both versions of AraBERT were used to recognize which version performs the best with the given datasets. AraBERT v0.2 performed the best with 92% accuracy score with a dataset comprised of label "2" and label "-1", the latter was generated outside of QurSim dataset.

**ABDULLAH ALSALEH** is an academic staff at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Currently, he is a first-year PhD student in the School of Computing at University of Leeds. His research interest is in semantic similarity between Arabic texts using recent deep learning models.

### ***7.6. Deep Learning to Measure Semantic Relatedness between Qur'an Verses and Hadith***

Transformer-based models showed near-perfect results on several downstream tasks. However, their performance on classical Arabic texts is largely unexplored. To fill this gap, we evaluate monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual state-of-the-art models to detect relatedness between the Qur'an and the Hadith, which are complex classical Arabic texts with underlying meanings that require deep human understanding. The results show that state-of-the-art models still fall short when presented with complex data which calls for the imminent need to explore avenues for improving the quality of these models to capture the semantics in such complex texts.

**SHATHA ALTAMMAMI** is a lecturer at King Saud University and a PhD student at the University of Leeds. Her main research interest is in Arabic Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

## **PANEL 8. Qur'an Translation and its Exegetical Dimension: Transfers and Transformations**

This panel will discuss Qur'an translation in the modern period as an activity that is, on the one hand, affected by exegetical traditions as well as the structures of target languages while, on the other hand, having the potential to transform and redefine these traditions and structures.

Translation is often described as the transfer of meanings from one language to another. More often than not, however, meaning is not simply transferred but, rather, constructed, based on a range of factors that, in the case of the Qur'an, include premodern and modern Qur'an commentaries and other exegetical resources. The resulting translations, in turn, have the potential to influence subsequent exegetical debates within the communities that use them. The structures of any given target language determine many of the translators' choices but, again, the resulting Qur'an translations have the potential of transforming that target language when they are used to contribute to creating a particular semantics of Islam. Reflecting these processes is important, not least because it concerns our own efforts, as scholars, to write about the Qur'an in languages other than Arabic.

The papers presented in this panel will shed light on the ways in which Qur'an translations negotiate and bridge exegetical and linguistic dimensions through concrete case studies. After a conceptual introduction that builds on the study of Qur'an translations into a range of languages (Pink), the subsequent papers will discuss the emergence and expression of exegetical debates in the translation of a particular verse (Saeed), the process of transferring exegetical content from the Arabic and Persian tradition to a "new" language of Islamic scholarship through Qur'an translation (Sibgatullina), and the tension between standardization and pluralizing forces in the activities of a major international player in the field of Qur'an translation (Yakubovych).

### ***8.1. The Construction and Reconstruction of the Qur'an's Meaning through Translation***

Translation is often understood as the transfer of meaning from one language to another. In reality, though, it can be more aptly described as an attempt to reconstruct the source text's meaning in a different linguistic, historical, and cultural context. In the case of the Qur'an, the gap between the milieus of source text and target language is so big that quite frequently, the translator is led to construct new meaning – building on exegetical traditions, interpretive intent, or the perceived needs of the target audience. This paper aims to conceptualize the process of meaning-creation in Qur'an translation, based on a range of case studies from translations in different languages. It shows how Qur'an translations may narrow down the source text's meaning, expand it, or transform it, and what rationales inform their choices. Particular attention will



be paid to the use of interpretive sources from the fields of lexicography and exegesis, setting the stage for the subsequent presentations.

**JOHANNA PINK** is professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Freiburg, Germany. She taught at Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Tübingen. Her main fields of interest are the transregional history of *tafsir* in the modern period and Qur'an translations, with a particular focus on transregional dynamics. She is the Principal Investigator of the research project "GloQur – The Global Qur'an" and general editor of the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Online*. Her most recent monograph is entitled *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today* (Equinox, 2019).

## 8.2. "Inclined to Chop?" Debates over a "Naturalist" Reading of Q. 2:260

The bulk of traditional exegetes have taken Q al-Baqarah 2:260 to say that God commanded Abraham to kill and chop up four birds, then scatter their remains upon some hills to demonstrate how God revives the dead. Some took the word *surhunna* to denote this "chopping", while others took it to mean "incline them" – with the chopping implicit. An alternative interpretation has it that the birds were to be placed on the hills alive, so they are neither killed nor revived: the verse describes a rational demonstration, not a miraculous event. This paper outlines the representation of these competing readings in English translations of the Qur'an, including those which are explicit in adopting one or the other (in text or footnotes), and those which are open to both. It charts the limited reception of the alternative view, which has faced criticism as "naturalist" and the like, from its apparent genesis with an idiosyncratic Mu'tazilite exegete to its revival at the hands of Arab modernists and South Asian messianists. It is seen that the alternative is more strongly represented in the genre of translation than *tafsīr*, despite renewed efforts in the twentieth century to suppress it in favour of the majoritarian, "miraculous" reading.

**SOHAIB SAEED** is a postdoctoral researcher with the ERC-funded project The Global Qur'an, where he focuses on the relationship between Arabic exegesis and English translations of the Qur'an. He completed a B.A. in Tafsir from Al-Azhar University, and his PhD thesis at SOAS is now forthcoming as a monograph with Edinburgh University Press: *Explaining the Qur'an through the Qur'an*. Saeed is the award-winning translator of *The Great Exegesis* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and is working on further translations, digital tools, and original commentaries.

## 8.3. The Birth of an Islamic Language: on the Qur'an Commentary in Türki-Tatar

This paper aims to elaborate on the phenomenon of a linguistic shift in traditions of Qur'anic exegesis. In particular, it focuses on mechanisms that enable the rise of local vernaculars into the function of "Islamic" languages (i.e. tongues that fulfil linguistic needs of Muslim communities) that consequently come to replace cosmopolitan *lin-*

*gua francas*, such as Arabic and Persian, in this role. The discussion commences with a brief analysis of the translation practices in the Persianate cosmopolis, or using Ahmed's (2016) term, "the Balkans-to-Bengal complex". As this cosmopolis by nature constituted an intercultural and multilingual context shaped by a continuous interaction between Persian, Arabic, and variants of Turkic, an act of translation in general between these languages did not mean so much a transfer from one linguistic ecosystem into another, but rather an adaptation of texts to different audiences and their linguistic repertoire. Such porousness of linguistic boundaries, in turn, facilitated the existence of shared semantic fields for key religious terms and notions across multilingual communities, which reduced the need for literal translation. The situation changed as parts of the cosmopolis become incorporated into separate governance systems, which solidified linguistic, geographical, and cultural borders. By centring on the case of Volga Tatars in the Russian empire, the paper discusses the growing separation of a local vernacular, *Türki-Tatar*, from the shared linguistic ecosystems and discourses of the Persianate. The establishment of Russia-specific religious institutions, *madrasa* reform, as well as effects of religious modernisation that swept across the Volga-Urals region in the 18th–early 20th centuries paved the way for the emergence and spread of vernacular *tafsirs* as an important medium of "hermeneutical populism" (Tareen 2020), which further side-lined largely elite scholarship on the Qur'an in Persian and Arabic. The final section looks into how the translation of the Qur'an into a vernacular in the early 20th century was imagined not only as an essential step in the democratisation of religion but also as a tool for engineering an "Islamic" language. Attempts to expand the potential of a yet-unstandardised vernacular to encompass the array of meanings embedded in the Qur'anic text signified tectonic shifts in the Muslim identity (addition of novel national, ethnic, and political connotations), as well as signalled new functions that the Holy Book and religion, in general, came to hold for Russia's Muslims after the 1905 Revolution.

**GULNAZ SIBGATULLINA** is a postdoctoral fellow at Amsterdam School of Historical Studies, the University of Amsterdam, and a member of "The European Qur'an: Islamic Scripture in European Culture and Religion 1150-1850 (EuQu)" synergy team. Her research interests lie in the intersection of several fields: (post)colonial translation studies, sociology of religion and religious language, and nationalism studies. Among her recent publications is *Languages of Islam and Christianity in Post-Soviet Russia* (Brill Rodopi, 2020).

#### **8.4. Standardization and Exegetical Variety in Translations of the Qur'an: Recent Cases from the King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex**

Being one of the leading publishers of the Qur'an and its translation world-wide, the King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex continues to produce new interpretations. The number of languages the Complex is covering has reached around eighty. Operating with the basic hermeneutical approach of the Salafi *tafsīr*, the Centre for Qur'an translation within the Complex developed a translation strategy that is used in most

of its publications. This paper investigates this strategy, starting with an overview of the translations evaluated and approved by the Complex and finishing with a discussion of exegetical variety in translation choices. By comparing selected verses and supplementary materials from five translations especially produced for the Complex (Azerbaijani, Kyrgyz, Macedonian, Russian, and Tajik), the analysis suggests the existence of a specific dynamic in exegetical strategies, according to which typical “Salafi” visions of the text (mostly in terms of theological issues) are combined with “domestic” interpretations of the Qur’an which are popular in local Islamic milieus. Despite a predominantly “static” ideological trend in exegesis, the translations discussed in this presentation show some level of variation, which is linked to the way in which the overall exegetical framing of the translation is relevant to the local Muslim context. Thus, there are differences between individual translations, but that they are underpinned by a common exegetical approach.

**MYKHAYLO YAKUBOVYCH** (PhD 2011) is currently involved in the ERC research project “The Global Qur’an” at the University of Freiburg (Freiburg, Germany). Primarily, he is interested in research on the Qur’an translations produced by the international institutions in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, specially focusing on Central Asian and Eastern European languages. Furthermore, he has conducted several academic projects on the Islamic manuscript heritage, starting from the post-classical intellectual history of the Crimean Khanate (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, USA) and finishing with 16th–17th century Qur’anic interpretations among Lithuanian Tatars (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Poland).

## **PANEL 9. Striking Back at the Empire: Anti-imperialism in Contemporary Qur’anic Exegesis**

The common thread linking the presentations in this panel is the elaboration of anti-imperialism in contemporary Qur’anic exegesis. The aim is to describe how, within the different interpretative communities considered, the various authors have elaborated their own interpretation of selected Qur’anic verses – chosen according to the sensitivity of the exegetes – and have contextualized it, making it a weapon against imperialism (internal and external). The presentations also discuss the target audience of the commentaries and, therefore, the pedagogical and educational function that Qur’anic exegesis came to assume in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The presentations will focus on some of the most important and influential authors and mosques of these centuries: Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966) and his idea, expressed mainly in *Fī zilāl al-Qur’ān* (1951–1959) and then used in *Ma‘ālim fī al-ṭarīq* (1964), of *jihād* against the new *jāhiliyyah* in which Arabic political systems has been influenced by western models imposed by the colonialism; Rāshid al-Ghannūshī (b. 1941) and his struggle against Tunisian dictatorship, seen as a form of internal imperialism and despotism as can be seen in *Al-hurriyāt al-‘amma fī-l-dawla al-islāmiyya* (1993); Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996) and his fight against external imperialism rep-

resented by USA and Europe as can be noticed in his *Tafsīr al-mawḍūʿī* (1995) and *Zalām min al-ġarb* (1978); Bāqir al-Ṣadr's use of thematic Qur'anic exegesis in his book *Iqtisādunā* as a tool to fight cultural imperialism and to build a comprehensive Islamic political theory, conceived as an alternative to capitalism and Marxism; and finally how the interpretive community of Cape Town's Claremont Main Road Mosque has relied on the hermeneutical key of *al-mustaḍ'afun fi-l-ard*, especially as found in Q. 28:5 and Q. 4.75, to legitimize its socio-political mission (*risalah*).

### 9.1. Sayyid Quṭb's Conception of Jihād against the Ṭawāġīt of the New Jāhiliyyah

Colonialism and European nation-state ideology generated a strong cultural dependency that caused the gradual loss of national independency and consciousness, but also the general Islamic radicalization process of society and religion. Sayyid Quṭb's thinking has been developed in a context of retreating colonialism and national identity building; a period of transition from the British protectorate to the building of a new Egyptian modern state. Through Qur'anic exegesis of *jihād* verses as commented in his *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* (1951–9), and then used in *Ma'ālim fī al-ṭarīq* (1964), Quṭb conceptualizes the *jihād* as the instrument intended to eradicate the newly formed Arabic political systems, which he considers non-Islamic and similar to the pre-Islamic idols (*ṭāġūt*, plur. *ṭawāġīt*). This conception is explained for example in his *tafsīr* of *surat al-Baqarah* where two main points are analyzed: the relationship with Jews and the spread of Islamic message (*da'wah*) in Medina. In the Medinan phase, theory becomes practice in a dynamic fashion (*ḥarakiyyah*) where the Book is considered the real soul of the early Islamic community. So, the early *Ummah* moved away (from Mecca) to establish a divine system (*manhaj*) on earth by using *jihād* after a complete detachment (*insilāḥ*) from *jāhiliyyah* system. *Jihād* in Quṭb's view is then considered in the context of a continuous struggle against the cyclic revival of the *jāhiliyyah* period which places the human being in a condition of constant subordination to other humans diverting themselves from the path of establishing the word of Allah and his sovereignty (*ḥākimiyyah*).

**RICCARDO AMERIGO VIGLIERMO** graduated from University of Naples L'Orientale in 2018 with a thesis on the comparison of Sayyid Quṭb and Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī's interpretations of the *jihād* Qur'anic verses. From the beginning of 2020 he focused mainly on the application of Arabic and Persian language to the Machine Learning, NLP, and TR fields. By the end of 2020 he was nominated collaborator at MIM.FSCIRE where he started working on a cataloguing project of non-Latin texts. From January 2021, he became a Junior researcher at Department of Education and Human Sciences of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia where he is working on the project "Catalogation of non-Latin alphabet texts. New approaches between digital humanities and AI", under the broader context of CLUSTER project.

## 9.2. *The Qur'an in the Political Thought of Rāshid al-Ghannūshī*

The paper deals with the political thought of Rachid Ghannushi (1941–present), leader of one of the main currents of the Tunisian Islamist movement and actual president of the political party Harakat al-Nahda. Since Ghannushi was among the founders of the movement in the early 1970s and since he has been among its most influential members, his writings could be read as representing part of the intellectual evolution of the movement. In the '70s this has integrated new goals and practices because of its increasing politicisation, which led it to become a political party by the end of the decade. This change was the result of different factors including the fight with Leftist forces in Tunisia and external influences coming from the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and the Iranian Revolution. In analysing Ghannushi's thought, this paper focuses on his interpretation of Qur'anic passages and how this has changed over the '70s and beginning of the '80s as a result of the politicization of the movement. Special attention is devoted to the concepts of enemy, imperialism, and dictatorship.

**FRANCESCO CARGNELUTTI** started his PhD at the “Giuseppe Alberigo” European School for Advanced Religious Studies of FSCIRE in 2019. He is based at the La Pira Library in Palermo and he works on a research on 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (Aleppo 1855–Cairo 1902) under the supervision of Umar Ryad (KU, Leuven).

## 9.3. *The Anti-imperialism in the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and his Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*

The *Tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*, written by the renowned Azharite scholar Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996), can be placed within the category of popularizing commentaries, given the style and themes dealt with and it is undoubtedly aimed at a wide and non-academic audience. Hence, the themes addressed relate to everyday life: direct attacks on what the author considers to be the ultimate exponents of imperialism, i.e. the USA and Europe, are particularly frequent in the commentary considered. The themes most addressed under the guise of anti-imperialism are the relentless advance of European and American powers in the modern world, homosexuality and adultery as constitutive features of imperialist communities, and the absence of integrity and God within these territories. The collapse of morality and social cohesion is described as a constitutive element of the United States and Europe, which seek to destroy, through their imperialism, even Muslim communities, which can regain their integrity through the study and understanding of the Qur'anic text. Anti-imperialism and educational intent are, therefore, elements which transversally cross the entire *Tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and which links the author to his predecessors (i.e. Muhammad 'Abduh) and to his contemporaries (i.e. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī).



**FRANCESCA BADINI** started the post-graduate specialization period at the “Giuseppe Alberigo” European School for Advanced Religious Studies of FSCIRE in October 2019. Her research project concerns the Contemporary Qur’anic Studies with the focus on *Tafsīr al-mawḍū’ī* written by Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996). Her research project is supervised by Prof. Johanna Pink (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg).

#### **9.4. Bāqir al-Ṣadr’s Fight on Cultural Imperialism: al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū’ī and the Islamic Alternative in Iqtisādunā**

The Lebanese scholar Chibli Mallat, analyzing Bāqir al-Ṣadr’s work, affirms that the Iraqi intellectual proposed a whole new comprehensive theory of the Islamic State, mainly focusing on constitutionalism and economics. Following Mallat’s intuition, this presentation will focus on the second aspect of Bāqir’s work. In particular, it will deal with the use of thematic Qur’anic exegesis in Bāqir’s main work on economics, *Iqtisādunā*. The presentation will argue that al-Ṣadr’s use of this kind of exegesis is determined by his desire to provide a comprehensive understanding of an Islamic vision on economics as a central part of a new Islamic society. Furthermore, the presentation will argue that in Bāqir’s work this new conception of Islamic society is also intended to serve as a valid alternative to capitalism and Marxism, both as economic systems as well as conceptions of society, fighting western’s cultural influences and cultural imperialism. In order to highlight these points, the presentation will provide an overview of the use of *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū’ī* in a short selection of passages from *Iqtisādunā*, drawing on the methodological framework provided by Mallat.

**PIETRO MENGHINI** is a PhD candidate at the Scuola Superiore Meridionale within the program of Global History and Governance. Previously, he received his MA from the University of Naples L’Orientale. He spent several periods of study abroad, in Paris at the INALCO, in Iran at the Kharawzmi University and in Jordan at Ahlan Jordan. His research interests focus on Islamic Political Thought and the history of Social Movements in Political Islam. He has researched the thought of the Syrian philosopher Jawdat Sa’id and is now focusing on the history of the Sadrist Movement of Iraq.

#### **9.5. Siding with the Mustad’afin: Liberation Theology and Decolonial Paradigms in Claremont Main Road Mosque’s Community Tafsir**

*Al-mustad’afun* (*fi-l-ard*) is an expression that recurs multiple times in the Qur’an. A derivative of the tenth form of the root *q-‘-f*, which mainly contains the ideas of “weakness”, *al-mustad’afun* has been variously translated as “the oppressed”, “the down-trodden”, “the weak” or the “ill-treated” (on earth): the word indeed refers to the most vulnerable and marginalized social categories, whom the believers are responsible to protect. In the modern colonial and postcolonial era, the category of the *mustad’afun* has been reinterpreted by anti-imperialist thinkers as a sanction for revolutionary activism. This occurred in two contexts especially: first in revolutionary Iran, where



Ali Shariati translated Franz Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* as *mostadz'afin-i zamin* in the early 60s; and later in South Africa in the late apartheid and post-apartheid periods, where Islamic activists were deeply inspired by the Iranian revolutionary discourse. This paper will focus on the South African context in the post-apartheid period, exploring how the interpretive community of Cape Town's Claremont Main Road Mosque has relied on the hermeneutical key of *al-mustad'afun fi-l-ard*, especially as found in Q. 28:5 and Q. 4:75, to legitimize the mosque's socio-political mission (*risalah*).

**MARGHERITA PICCHI** is a post-doctoral fellow at the La Pira Library and Research Centre in Palermo (FSCIRE), where she is conducting a research project on the development of Islamic liberation theology in South Africa. She obtained her doctoral degree in Women's and Gender History at the University of Naples L'Orientale in 2016, with a dissertation focusing on women's agency in reclaiming religious discourse in contemporary Egypt. Her research interests include: modern Islamic intellectual history, Qur'anic studies, as well as gender and queer studies in Muslim contexts.

## **PANEL 10. Women in the Qur'an and Using the Qur'an: Its Lexicon, Interpretations, Exegesis, History, Geography, and its Use to Demand Women's Rights**

### **10.1. and 10.2. Women in the Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Approach**

The subject of women in the Qur'an has, to date, never been studied in its entirety, taking into account all of the Qur'an's verses on individual women and terms such as "women", "daughters", and "female", while applying a scholarly framework to the whole. These papers (by Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza) present the results of the authors' research, in which they apply a historical-critical approach to a subject usually considered apart from the major trends in the field of Qur'anic studies. The first paper (Karen Bauer) uses the Qur'anic chronology proposed by Nicolai Sinai (*The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*), who in turn draws on the work of Behnam Sadeghi, to show that there is significant development through time from anti-pagan polemic in the early Meccan period to stories of individual women such as Mary, the Queen of Sheba, and Eve in the later Meccan period. Finally, the Medinan period introduces extensive legislation on women. This change is reflected in a shifting Qur'anic lexicon, from "the female" in the early Meccan period to "believing women" and "hypocrite women" in the Medinan period. The second paper (Feras Hamza) addresses the question of the Qur'an's coherence on the subject of women. Much current scholarship takes for granted a tension between the Qur'an's hierarchical and egalitarian verses. Scholars who posit that there is no contradiction usually come down on one side or the other: Asma Barlas asserts that in light of its historical context, the Qur'an must be viewed as egalitarian, while Aysha Hidayatullah questions

whether women and men can ultimately be considered as ontological equals in a text that privileges men. Hamza argues that, while the text must inevitably be situated in its historical late antique context, its eschatological discourse is at the heart of both egalitarian and hierarchical verses and thus provides an overall framework for this apparent contradiction. These papers ultimately propose that a contextualisation of the Qur'anic discourse on women will take into account the text's internal chronological development, its eschatological focus and ethical message, its historical context in late antiquity, and all of its verses on the subject. Perhaps surprisingly, this method shows clear development through time within the text: the structures for women are fluid and evolve against the background of the overall emerging Qur'anic kerygma and the status of women is able to be considered as a part of the fundamental and recurring substratum of eschatology.

**KAREN BAUER** is a Senior Research Associate in the Qur'anic Studies Unit of the Institute of Ismaili Studies. She specialises in Islamic social and intellectual history; her specific interests include the Qur'an and Qur'anic exegesis, the history of emotions in Islam, and gender in Islamic history and thought. Dr Bauer's publications include the book *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis* (OUP/Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013) and *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). With Feras Hamza, she has a volume forthcoming in 2021: *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*, vol. II, *On woman*, which is an anthology of translations of Qur'anic verses and commentaries on the subject of women.

**FERAS HAMZA** is an Associate Professor and Head of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD). Since 2016, he has been Visiting Research Fellow in the Qur'anic Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London and is General Series Editor for the *Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries* Project (IIS and OUP). He co-edited (with Sajjad Rizvi) *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*, vol I, *On the Nature of the Divine* (OUP/Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008) and has forthcoming, with Karen Bauer, *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*, vol. II, *On Women*. His major research interests are Qur'anic studies and hermeneutics. Feras Hamza also co-edits Brill's *Islamic Literatures: Texts and Studies*.

### 10.3. *The Most Controversial Verse in the Qur'an: a New Interpretation*

Qur'an (Q. 4:34) is referred to by many as the most controversial verse in the Qur'an is traditionally interpreted as granting husbands the right to reproach their wives, withhold sex, and even physically discipline them in cases of martial conflicts. This verse as commonly understood provides a justification for the verbal, psychological, and even physical abuse of women's rights in marriage. This dominant interpretation is problematic, if not entirely irreconcilable with the clear gender egalitarianism message of the Qur'an. Efforts were made to soften the tone of the verse and many insisted that additional conditions should be placed on the methods of "correction" suggested in (Q. 4:34). Some tried to suggest meanings of the verb *ḍaraba* other than "to strike". Unfortunately, all these attempts – despite their prominence – have not brought about any noticeable change in the way the verse is still viewed and used,

mainly because of the problematic nature of some of the suggested solutions. In this paper I provide a new interpretation of (Q. 4:34). In my approach to (Q. 4:34), which is a hermeneutical approach, I remain faithful to the text; I do not assume that something is missing from the text and I do not argue for other meanings of *daraba* or use lexical machinations to forcefully extract a more modern meanings from the text. In this paper I provide twenty reasons for rejecting domestic violence (verbal, psychological, and physical) as a Qur'anic argument.

**ABLA HASAN** received a PhD in Philosophy of Language from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013, and an MA in Philosophy as a Fulbright grantee from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2009. Dr. Hasan obtained her BA in Philosophy from Damascus University/Syria in 2000, followed by a Diploma of High Studies from Damascus University in 2001. She is a native speaker of Arabic. She teaches Arabic language and culture at UNL and she is the Program's Coordinator. Her teaching and research focus on Qur'anic Studies, Qur'anic Hermeneutics, Islamic feminism, and Arabic studies. She has published with *Brill*, *Analize*, *Ar-Raniry*, *JIL*, *Disputatio*, *Al-Manarah*, *E-logos* and other peer-review international journals. She is the author of: *Decoding the Egalitarianism of the Qur'an: Retrieving Lost Voices on Gender* (Lexington, 2019).

#### **10.4. Using the Qur'an to Demand Women's Rights in the Late Ottoman Empire and Beyond**

Qāsim Amīn's (1863–1908) *Taḥrīr al-Mar'ah* caused a lot of furore across the Islamic world and provoked a chain of criticism and hostile replies. However, within a few years, his book was fully translated into Ottoman Turkish and Persian and he is often credited as being a leading pioneer of the Muslim women's rights movements that started emerging in the 19th century. Yet, upon a closer look his book shows very strong parallels to previous scholarship published in Ottoman Turkish in Istanbul, especially Albanian Şemseddin Sami [Frashëri]'s *Qādınlār* (1879) and Ottoman women shared their views on Islam, polygyny, education, and commonplace discrimination in their own words e.g. in the magazine *Teraḳḳi-i Muḥadderāt* (1869). This paper will look into the use of Qur'anic quotations in order to demand women's rights in the Late Ottoman Empire and the transnational and translingual spread of the ideas of this movement within a selection of publications in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Albanian, Russian, and Tatar.

**ORHAN ELMAS** holds a PhD from the University of Vienna and is Lecturer in Arabic at the University of St Andrews. Elmas works on Arabic linguistics, Qur'anic exegesis, and comparative and transcultural studies, applying digital methods. He recently published the volume *Endless Inspiration* on adaptations of One Thousand and One Nights (Gorgias Press, 2020) and is currently exploring the transcultural emergence and development of Islamic feminism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## PANEL 11. Medieval Falsafa and the Qur'an: A Changeable Relationship

As Majid Fakhri stated: “Although not a philosophical document in the strict sense, the Qur'an has been at the centre of the most heated philosophical and theological controversies in Islam”. Since the Qur'an is the indispensable reference point in any of the diverse discursive practices within Islam, it is consequential that a variety of different relationships to the text has been developed in different times and fields. Medieval *falsafa*, in its turn, is a complex phenomenon which includes quite different ways to create knowledge, ranging from strict rational discourse, to rational theology, to what has been defined “mystical rationalism”, to esoteric sciences such as alchemy. In this panel, we will take into consideration case studies of these different approaches to the Qur'an in the wide context of the *falsafa*. We will make an attempt to academically understand the gist and framework of the *Mu'tazilah* philosophy in their rationalization of Qur'anic metaphysics. The speech will aim to evaluate the *Mu'tazilah* on the basis of their own philosophy rather than through the lens of the orthodox theology, which attributed it the tag of heresy. We will then take into consideration the case study of al-Bīrūnī (362/973–440?/1048) and his use of the Qur'an as a normative source in his conception of *ijtihād* as a sort “mystic of science”. We will analyse how the Qur'an represented a constant point of reference for al-Bīrūnī by different points of view and through different disciplines: he referred to the Qur'an as a normative source for empirical knowledge, though often in a symbolic way; in his pluralistic approach to different religious traditions; and how he expressed philological abilities in comparing religious expressions in different languages. A textual demonstration of the meaningful links between ancient Greek philosophy and Qur'anic theology in al-Bīrūnī, as well as some suggestions about the translation process of ancient Greek concepts into Qur'anic concepts, will be given. Then, we will move to one of the main figures of the debate about the relationship between philosophy and Islam, al-Ġazālī (450–1058/505–1111). Some of al-Ġazālī's epistemological strategies in approaching the Qur'an will be analysed. We will see how rational and mystical dimensions combine in al-Ġazālī's interpretative effort of the sacred text. Finally, we will turn to the Moroccan alchemist-poet Ibn Arfa' Ra's (d. 593/1197), examine the premises put forward by Ibn Arfa' Ra's in support of an alchemical reading of scripture, and evaluate the extent to which he drew on the esoteric hermeneutics of the Sufis and the Muslim philosophers.

### 11.1. The *Mu'tazilah* Rationalization as a Valid Philosophical System to Islamic Metaphysics of Divine Unity and Divine Justice

The *Mu'tazilah* school of *falsafa* and *kalām* has been vilified and villainized throughout Islamic theological history owing to their overwhelming emphasis upon the rational understanding of divine unity and its direct relation to, and implication for,

order in the universe and justice in the affairs of the world. The complexity of their argument rests upon a simple fundamental premise, namely God's unity is above and beyond any layers of multiplicity. Even though the *Mu'tazilah* philosophers used the Qur'an to both defend and project their position, the orthodox model of theology prevailed at length over philosophical schools and made the rationalizing attempts of the *Mu'tazilah* tradition to bear the tag of heresy. I intend to take a rather positive approach to the *Mu'tazilah* philosophy in this paper in an attempt to academically understand the gist and framework of their rationalization of Qur'anic metaphysics. The *Mu'tazilah*, as I propose, ought to be evaluated objectively on the basis of their own philosophy rather than through the lens of the orthodox theology.

**SYED MUHAMMAD WAQAS** was born and raised in Pakistan in a conventional family. He graduated from Punjab University, Lahore, with a Master's in English Literature and later from Cincinnati Christian University, Ohio, with Master of Arts in Religion (Biblical Studies) and Master of Theological Studies degrees. He has published books and articles on the Qur'an, Hadith, and Judeo-Christian Scriptures in English and Urdu languages. Occasionally he has taught at Cincinnati Christian University, Ohio, and is a public and academic speaker and research contributor to Islam and Christianity. Starting in Fall 2021, he will be a co-teacher of Islamic studies, Department of Theology, Xavier University, Ohio.

## **11.2. "A Clear Proof of the True religion": The Qur'an as a Normative Source in al-Bīrūnī's Studies on Other Religious Traditions**

Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973–1048?), polymath exponent of the Golden Age of Islamic culture, represents a source of extreme interest for Muslim pluralist thought. With a methodology recognised as scientifically modern by several scholars, al-Bīrūnī, who was primarily a renown astronomer, composed two major works on religious traditions: a work dedicated to calendar systems and one dedicated to the Indian Subcontinent in which he compared the philosophical and religious thought of Ancient Greek, Jewish, Christian, and Sufi sources with Sanskrit traditions. In al-Bīrūnī's works, the Qur'an is a primary source for empirical knowledge, as well as a normative source from which he drew an open and pluralistic vision through which he studied different traditions. His effort to search for knowledge is defined by al-Bīrūnī as *ijtihād*, thus as a "religious" commitment equal to the effort of Qur'anic exegetes in the field of law. Al-Bīrūnī's approach to the Islamic sacred text is rational and nuanced, capable of reading the Qur'anic dictates in a symbolic way. In addition, al-Bīrūnī derives from the Qur'an a comprehensive view of humankind, according to which he states, for example, that everyone will be subject to rewards and punishments in the same way, regardless of their religious affiliation.

**ANDREA PINTIMALLI** graduated in Arabic Language and Culture, and he holds a PhD from La Sapienza University in History of Religions. His research interests include definitions of religion, especially in the comparison between Western and Islamic contexts. He analysed the concepts related to "religion" in the case study of al-Bīrūnī's works, both historically and lexically. In the context of Islamic concepts for "religion", he investigates the Qur'an as a normative source.



### 11.3. From Greek ‘Demonology’ to Qur’anic Angelology: Textual Traces in al-Bīrūnī

Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973–1048?), has been thought to have held a universalistic unitary view of humans and different religious traditions. While there is no doubt that he considered the Qur’an to be the supreme source of knowledge, his works show openness to include ideas from a variety of traditions, by translating them in the framework of Islamic thought. In addition, al-Bīrūnī has been shown to have knowledge of several languages and presented linguistic differences as explanations for the apparent contradiction between the Christian concept of “son of God” and the Islamic belief. In this paper, we will consider some evidence of al-Bīrūnī’s openness, giving lexical examples of his translation of concepts. It has been noted how he used linguistic arguments in order to create equivalences among Greek polytheistic views and Islam, for instance. In particular, we will give a textual demonstration of the meaningful links between ancient Greek philosophy and Qur’anic theology in al-Bīrūnī, as well as some suggestions about the translation process of ancient Greek concepts into Qur’anic concepts.

**VINCENZO MUGGITTU** is a high school teacher who graduated from the University of Pisa. His research focuses on the textual reception of Greek philosophy and science (specifically Plato) in the Arab world, and on the development of IT technologies suitable for digitizing texts that are products of crossover among multiple languages and cultures (specifically Greek and Arabic). His publications include *Al-Bīrūnī, India: an Arabic witness of the Phaedo* and “Digital native” critical editions and homemade school text analysis: the HYPER Project.

**ANDREA PINTIMALLI** (see above)

### 11.4. Rational and Mystical Dimensions in al-Ghazālī’s Interpretation of the Qur’an

Al-Ghazālī’s attitude towards rationality, especially philosophy, has always been a central issue for scholars. In the past, al-Ghazālī was commonly assumed to have been a strong adversary of philosophy (Renan 1852, Munk 1859). Nowadays, however, many scholars tend to the opposite view. Richard Frank, for example, has shown the influence of Avicenna on al-Ghazālī’s thought (Frank 1992), Frank Griffel considers him the founder of a new religious philosophy interpreted as a fusion of Avicennism and Aš‘arite theology (Griffel 2009) and Alexander Treiger presents his mysticism itself as grounded in Avicenna’s teachings (Treiger 2012). Hermeneutically speaking, reason, specifically syllogistic logic, lies at the centre of al-Ghazālī’s arguments in *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna ’l-Islām wa ’l-zandaqa*. In this book, he proposed a correspondence between levels of existence and types of interpretation and says that an interpreter can only move from one degree to another if there is a decisive proof (*burhān*) that the previous type of interpretation is untenable. Al-Ghazālī’s references to his earlier books on logic, especially *al-Qiṣṭās al-mustaqīm*, show that he here refers to syllogistic



demonstration. What are the reasons and the implications of al-Ghazālī's decision to resort to *ta'wīl* dependent on syllogistic logic? And what space does it give to interpretations linked to the Sufi's mystical experiences? In more general terms, how the rational and mystical dimensions are intertwined in al-Ghazālī's interpretations of the Qur'an? To answer these questions, I intend to examine the general theory of *ta'wīl* presented by al-Ghazālī in the context of his broader project of revival of the faith as well as some interpretations that he made of the Qur'an, especially related to the concept of *rahma*, where in my opinion the rational and mystical approaches contributed to founding his particular view of the ultimate destiny reserved for humankind, within the more general framework of his fight against *taqlīd*.

**INES PETA** graduated in Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Naples L'Orientale (2005) and holds a PhD in Philosophy, Sciences and Culture in Late Antiquity, Middle Ages and Humanistic Age from the University of Salerno and in Lettres-philosophie from Saint-Joseph University of Beirut (2010). From 2011 to 2019 she was adjunct professor of Arabic Language at Catholic University of Milan. Since October 2019 she is Senior assistant professor in Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Bologna. She participated in several research projects in teams promoted by the Oasis International Foundation. Her researches on Arabic literature and Arab-Islamic culture range from the classical to the contemporary age. In particular, Ines Peta dealt with the theological and philosophical thought of al-Ghazālī, Sufism, and Muslim-Christian polemical literature. Her publications include the two monographs *Le meraviglie del cuore* (Il leone verde, 2006) and *Il Radd pseudo-gazāliano: paternità, contenuti, traduzione* (OSM, 2013).

### 11.5. Alchemical Tafsir in the Works of Ibn Arfa' Ra's

Beside the *decknamen* and symbols inherited from Graeco-Egyptian antiquity, the later Arabic alchemical tradition also adopted motifs drawn from the Qur'an: from the blessed olive tree of the famous Light Verse to the hallowed valley and Moses' staff. This interweaving of scripture and alchemical theory is especially noticeable in one of the major works of the post-Jābirian corpus, the *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (*Shards of Gold*) by the Moroccan alchemist-poet Ibn Arfa' Ra's (d. 593/1197), as well as in his self-penned commentary, the *Ḥall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr* (*Solution to the Obscurities in the Shudhūr*). Focusing on a hitherto unexplored strand of the Islamic exegetical tradition, this paper examines the premises put forward by Ibn Arfa' Ra's in support of an alchemical reading of scripture, and evaluates the extent to which he drew on the esoteric hermeneutics of Sufis and Muslim philosophers.

**RICHARD TODD** has completed his doctorate at the University of Oxford. Since then, he has taught classical Arabic literature and Islamic cultural history at Durham University, the American University of Sharjah, and the University of Edinburgh. In 2017 he joined the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, where he teaches Islamic philosophy. He is the author of *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's metaphysical anthropology* (Brill, 2014) and co-edits the Taylor & Francis journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. His current publication projects include the forthcoming monograph, *A History of Arabic Alchemy*.

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## PUBLISHER CORNER

**MONDAY 5 JULY 2021, 6.15–7.15 PM**

### ***The Exceptional Qurʾān: Flexible and Exeptive Rhetoric in Islam's Holy Book* – Author Talk and Book Preview**

**JOHANNE LOUISE CHRISTIANSEN** and a representative from Gorgias Press

*The Exceptional Qurʾān: Flexible and Exeptive Rhetoric in Islam's Holy Book* is a synchronic, theoretical study of the Qurʾānic complex of exception and flexibility. Through analyses of rhetorical devices, including direct exceptions, recurring standardized arguments with a dispensatory aim, and modifying hypotheticals within the Qurʾān's legal discourse, the author argues that this complex seems to be – if not entirely unique – articulated in a new and deliberate manner as compared to previous scriptures: The Qurʾān continuously negotiates a balance between strictness and leniency, between principle and dispensation. Joining its philological results with the system theoretical framework of anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport, *The Exceptional Qurʾān* considers how such rhetorical strategies contributed to the systemic long-term durability of the Qurʾān, becoming the successful founding document of a religious community and discursive tradition.

**FRIDAY 9 JULY 2021, 4.30–5 PM**

### **Get published! Tips and Tricks from within the Publishing Business**

**SOPHIE WAGENHOFER**, De Gruyter

In 30 minutes, we will address the most pressing issues: How do you find the right publisher? How do you submit a proposal? How does the review process work? This is also chance to meet the De Gruyter editor for Islamic studies and ask your own questions about academic publishing.



# THE EXCEPTIONAL QU'RAN

## Flexible and Exceptive Rhetoric in Islam's Holy Book

*The Exceptional Qur'ān: Flexible and Exceptive Rhetoric in Islam's Holy Book* is a synchronic, theoretical study of the Qur'ānic complex of exception and flexibility. Through analyses of rhetorical devices, including direct exceptions, recurring standardized arguments with a dispensatory aim, and modifying hypotheticals within the Qur'ān's legal discourse, the author argues that this complex seems to be – if not entirely unique – articulated in a new and deliberate manner as compared to previous scriptures: The Qur'ān continuously negotiates a balance between strictness and leniency, between principle and dispensation. Joining its philological results with the system theoretical framework of anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport, *The Exceptional Qur'ān* considers how such rhetorical strategies contributed to the systemic long-term durability of the Qur'ān, becoming the successful founding document of a religious community and discursive tradition.

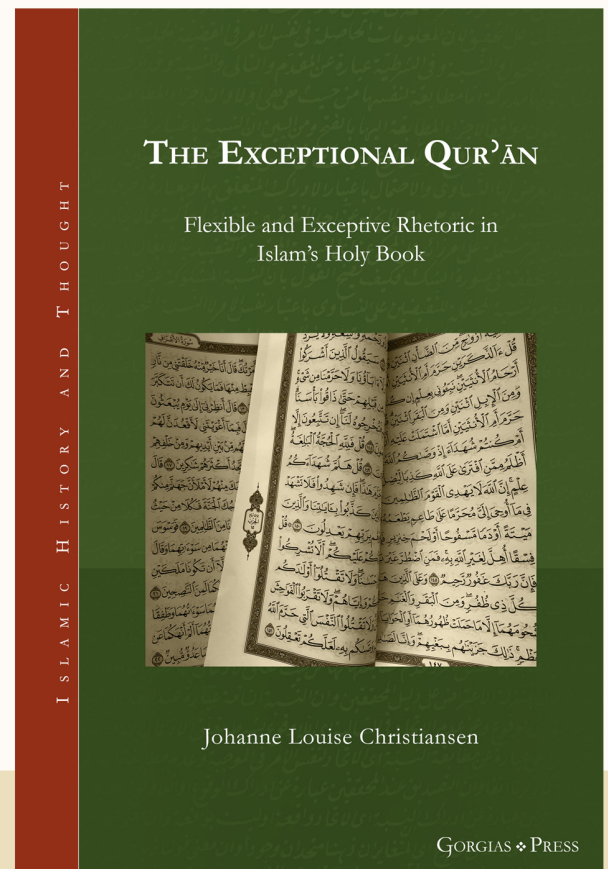
Author Presentation and Book Preview with  
**Dr Johanne Louise Christiansen**  
 and a representative from Gorgias Press  
**July 5 at 6:15-7:15 pm (CEST)**

"*The Exceptional Qur'ān* strikes a rare balance between fine-grained philological scholarship and bold theoretical endeavor. The author, Johanne Louise Christiansen, demonstrates that the Qur'ān has been misrepresented as the binary, dichotomous text par excellence. Subsequently, she reveals that the Qur'ān employs an 'exceptional' rhetoric that allows for legal and ethical flexibility in a stream of discourse that also aims to signal strictness and timeless principles. This work is a great contribution to Qur'ānic studies."

– Dr. Thomas Hoffman, *University of Copenhagen*

"Dr. Christiansen's excellent study offers an unusual but highly revealing window on to the Qur'ān. *The Exceptional Qur'ān* shows convincingly how the Qur'ān, theorized as a living, adaptive system, makes use of exceptions as a strategy for responding to its environment. Her investigation ranges across Qur'ānic vocabulary, processes, and dynamics, and offers a sophisticated theoretical lens for thinking about the Qur'ān as a text and also about the ways it functioned in its original social setting."

– Dr. Joseph E. Lowry, *University of Pennsylvania*



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