

Workshop on Arabic & Islamic Studies (WAIS) – Fall 2016

Unless otherwise noted, all workshops take place at 5:45pm in the Harvard Semitic Museum, room 201. Food & beverage will be provided.

At a Glance

Wed., Sept. 21 Sasson Chahanovich, NELC
Wed., Oct. 5 Shireen Hamza, History of Science
Wed., Oct. 19 Paul Anderson, NELC
Mon., Oct. 31 Jennifer Gordon, CMES/History, PhD '14
Wed, Nov. 2 Caitlyn Olson, NELC
Wed., Nov. 16 Ozzy Gunduz, NELC
Wed., Nov. 30 Farshid Emami, History of Art & Architecture

Date: Wednesday, September 21

Workshoppee: Sasson Chahanovich, NELC

Title: The Quranic Apocalypse – The Function of the Fig and Olive in Sura 95

Abstract: The Quran is generally read two ways. Firstly, for theologians, it is interpreted synchronically, i.e. as a complete and coherent whole. The Quran qua book is herewith foregrounded. Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, historians of religion often examine the mushaf through the lens of its ultimate success as revelation. The religion of Islam and its popularity as a cultural phenomenon is preeminent in this case. If examined diachronically, however, the initial appeal and captivating quality of Muhammad's revelation is not so self-evident. This paper takes Q 95 as a case study in order to determine exactly how figs and olives could capture the attention of 7th-century Arabs and, more importantly, mark Muhammad's ecstatic utterances as distinctly apocalyptic.

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Date: Wednesday, October 5

Workshoppee: Shireen Hamza, History of Science

Title: Sex in the Kitchen: Aphrodisiacs in Tenth-Century Medicine and Cuisine

Abstract: I first presented this material at a conference primarily attended by scholars of Arabic literature, titled *Les mots du désir: la langue de l'érotisme arabe et ses traductions*. In the paper, I delve into medical explanations of sexual desire, primarily through the medical compendium of Ibn al-Jazzār and shorter treatises of sexology (*'ilm al-bāh*) by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. Having foregrounded these humoral explanations, I reevaluate the recipes for aphrodisiacs found in the cookbook of Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq, noting the spread of a humoral understanding of the body into genres not primarily written for physicians. I argue that, by the tenth century, a number of people besides medical practitioners in the Islamicate world knew about, and wanted to read about, the humoral qualities of their foods.

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Date: Wednesday, October 19

Workshoppee: Paul Anderson, NELC

Title: Projections: Gendering the Spiritual in Ismā'īlī Cosmology

Abstract: Islamic theological and metaphysical literature is typically articulated through a primarily masculine lens – it does not help that Arabic grammar has lent its own gendering to the very words themselves, since masculine is typically default and feminine marked. Abstract entities, or intellects, in Ismā'īlī hierarchies are rarely described in anthropomorphic terms. But does this very lack of definition assume a gendering of the spiritual as intertextually masculine and the feminine as a feature of base materiality? Is there a place for "genderless" entities? This paper intends to problematize prevailing preconceptions about the place of gender as articulated in cosmological theorizing and show that the scholars could be far more creative in the construction of their paradigms than may seem apparent at first glance.

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Date: Monday, October 31 – 12:15pm (lunch) – CMES 102

Guest Speaker: Jennifer Gordon, PhD CMES/History '14

Topic: Navigating the alternative/academic job market: how to take your PhD beyond academia

Description: Please join WAIS for a discussion with Jennifer Gordon about what the job market outside of academia can look like. From finding freelancing work to full-time employment, a PhD in Islamic studies (history, religion, philology, etc.) provides a myriad of career options. We will discuss ways of leveraging writing and research skills, your subject matter expertise, and the Harvard network as you think about your next steps on the job market.

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Date: Wednesday, November 2, 2016

Workshoppee: Caitlyn Olson, NELC

Title: Sanūsī's Self-positioning in Relation to Earlier and Later *Kalām* Authorities

Abstract: The observation by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) that later *kalām* had thoroughly mixed with the methods and concerns of *falsafa* appears often in secondary literature. Less known, perhaps, is that the influential Ash'arī scholar of Tilimsān, Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490), lodged a similar complaint against this trend, despite the extensive use of formal logic in his own *'aqā'id*, which is usually seen as a hallmark of the later type of *kalām*. This talk aims to give insight into how al-Sanūsī positioned himself in relation to these various currents by analyzing whom he cites as authorities and how he does so. My hypothesis, based on preliminary reading, is that he privileges earlier representatives of the discipline. Through close examination of al-Sanūsī's writings, I hope to contribute to our thinking about the usefulness and limitations of the distinction between earlier and later forms of *kalām* in the Maghribi context.

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Date: Wednesday, November 16

Workshoppee: Ozzy Gunduz, NELC

Title: Revisiting Karagöz in Light of Ibn Dāniyāl's Trilogy: A Case Study of Language and Sexuality

Abstract: This paper proposes to address the question of language and sexuality in the shadow play tradition as preserved in the Ibn Dāniyāl trilogy and Karagöz plays. The problem herewith assessed is how scholars in the modern period have been confounded by the apparent contradiction these plays present: on the one hand they purport to be moral guides while, on the other hand, they unabashedly deal with 'sexual' material and discuss openly body parts, bodily functions, and the act of coitus, to name a few. This seeming incongruity, I argue, is in fact not contrary when one looks at the shadow puppet genre in light of the Islamic *adab* tradition. To articulate this point, the paper draws on examples from the work of the early ninth century Islamic polymath al-Jāhiz (776-869), in particular by focusing on al-Jāhiz's treatise on *hazl* (seriousness) and *jidd* (jest).

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Date: Wednesday, November 30

Workshoppee: Farshid Emami, History of Art & Architecture

Title: The Grid plan, Tree-lined Avenues, and Gateway Pavilions: Inhabiting the New Isfahan

Abstract: This chapter of my dissertation focuses on the new neighborhoods of Safavid Isfahan. Constructed in the early seventeenth century in the outskirts of the medieval town, these new quarters were inhabited by three communities (Tabrizi, Armenian, and Zoroastrian), which were forcibly settled in Isfahan as part of the grand plan of Shah Abbas (r. 1597-1629) for his new capital. Through a study of physical evidence and contemporary textual descriptions, this chapter analyzes the nature and sources of the urban form of these neighborhoods and their physical components. I show how the spatial structure of the new neighborhoods was entangled with the social practices of the new settlers. The new Safavid developments of Isfahan, I further contend, did not constitute a natural extension of the old Isfahan, but can best understood as "colonies" deliberately positioned in the vicinity of an existing town.