

Abstracts

Alkan, Necati, Dr. (Bamberg): “The *Ghuluww* Concept in Historical Perspective: The case of the Nusayris/‘Alawis”

Within Islam, groups outside mainstream Sunnism, the “internal others”, are called “misguided sects” or “sectarians”; labels that refer to “deviant” conceptual trends or sects. Their conflicting viewpoints have been perceived as the origin of “sedition” (*fitna*) and hence as a threat to the unity of Islam. For Islam that bases its beliefs primarily on the Qur’an as a revealed holy text, the Word of God is the “true belief” and the “straight path” is the middle way; anything else outside it is excess or deficiency. Jews and Christians, who are among the recipients of the message of the Qur’an, are accused of corrupting their own teachings. They all had strayed from the “straight path”, not only disobeying the real commandments of God but also exceeded the limits of their religion. Qur’an 4:171 and 5:75-77 refers to the “wrong” beliefs of the Jews who called the prophet Ezra “son of God” and the Christians who regard Jesus also as the “son of God”. Taking lessons from this, Muhammad exhorted his followers not to be excessive in their beliefs and beware of exaggeration (*ghuluww*) in religion. The Qur’an calls the Muslims “midmost/moderate nation” or “community in the middle”, implying moderation in Muslim beliefs and affairs.

Yet, there are examples of groups within the Muslim community who have been accused of exceeding the limits of their beliefs. Here we are concerned with accusations brought forward against groups within Shi’a Islam, called *ghulāt* or “exaggerators”. These were factions who ascribed divinity to the imams (“leaders”), starting from Imam ‘Ali up to the 11th Imam al-‘Askari. *Ghuluww* in the Islamic context related to the imams applies when one ascribes to them divinity, they are defined as partners of God in worship, are regarded as incarnations of God or one thinks that acknowledging the imams gives the right to be absolved from prayers and other religious obligations. These were, however, refuted and condemned by the imams.

The Nusayris/‘Alawis belong to the *ghulāt* and are said to have been persecuted from time to time by Sunni rulers, such as the Mamluks and later the Ottomans, for their deviant beliefs and forced to accept Sunni Islam. By the late 19th century the Ottomans, in a drive to centralize the state and preserve the unity of Islam, tried to “correct the beliefs” of the Nusayris and other “heretical” groups. However, these dynasties also accommodated religious communities with deviant beliefs because of pragmatic reasons such as taxes. Therefore, historically a Sunni-‘Alawi coexistence was possible.

Ackermann, Andreas, Prof. Dr. (Koblenz)

Presentation of a film on the Yezidis: “The Soul in Peril – The Ezidis of Iraq” (72’) by Canadian filmmaker Eric Connor that was chosen for GIEFF 2018 (Koblenz).

This film gives a good introduction and addresses a lot of stereotypes about the Yezidis, which will be discussed during the workshop and are comparable to (outsider) interpretations and stereotypes towards other non-normative Islamicate groups.

Badalanova Geller, Florentina, Prof. Dr. (London/Berlin): “Vernacular Exegesis of Biblical and Quranic Traditions: Parascriptural Ethnohermeneutics of ‘Religions of the Book’”

The paper will analyse some vernacular exegetical templates transmitted among the three Abrahamic religions. Explored will be some *topoi* attested in Judaeo-Christian parabiblical apocryphal writings from Late Antiquity, as well as in Quranic corpus (along with Islamic exegetical sources, e.g. Histories of Prophets and Kings by Al-Tabari, Stories of the Prophets by ath-Thalabi, Rabghuzi, Stories of the Prophets, etc.). Parallels will be provided from contemporary oral traditions documented during field research among non-normative religious communities.

Bauks, Michaela, Prof. Dr. (Koblenz): “Jewish Dietary Restrictions in Multicultural Life Context”

Jewish communities in contemporary Germany are dominated by members of Eastern European provenience. Therefore, not less than three different food traditions (“German”; “Eastern”, “Jewish”) affect the common meals within the (mostly orthodox) communities: how providing (kosher) food when living outside of the Jewish centres with infrastructure (e.g. Frankfurt, Köln, München); how combining indigenous food practices of the members with the common religious restrictions required by an orthodox rabbi? The problem of a multicultural life context is common in the history of Judaism. The paper aims to present compromises transmitted by ancient Jewish literature.

De Jong, Albert, Prof. Dr. (Leiden): “What, if anything, is an ‘ethno-religious community’ in the Middle East?”

Some of the religious communities of the modern Middle East have come to be labelled, in recent years, as separate ‘peoples’ or ‘nations’. The technical term for them that many now seem to prefer is that of an ‘ethno-religious community’ (the Yezidis, the Druze, and the Mandaeans are probably the best-known examples). In an earlier publication, I have argued that this essentially continues earlier interpretations of these communities as remnants or examples of paganism. In this paper I would like to push that argument further by thinking through the mismatch between conventional (or intuitive) Western understandings of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’ and the realities of several Middle Eastern societies.

De Tapia, Aylin, Dr. (Aix-en-Provence): “Which Norm? For Whom? At Which Scale? – The case of the Greek-Orthodox Christians in late-Ottoman Cappadocia”

Orthodox Christians who lived in Anatolia and especially in the region of Cappadocia until the Exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1923 used to speak Turkish as their native tongue. For that reason, especially from the mid-nineteenth century, a period when religious and language became progressively central criteria of the definition of “national” belonging, these Turkish-speaking Orthodox communities of Anatolia – the so-called Karamanlis – were more and more considered and considered themselves in an in-between in terms of religious and national belonging. Not being clearly excluded from the Orthodox church but being regarded with suspicion, their community of language with the neighbouring Muslim communities, their closeness with the Bektashi Order, or yet their beliefs and rituals largely loaded with local “superstitions” put them outside the norms that the Orthodox Church aimed to set and strengthen. This paper will first analyse how the Karamanlı Rums of Cappadocia were perceived by the Orthodox Church and the Ottoman State and how they identified themselves in a period when the “normalization” of identities seemed to become a major issue in the Ottoman context. Secondly, the paper will propose the hypothesis according to which the Karamanlis developed their “own normativity” in terms of religious, linguistic, social and local belonging.

Geller, Mark, Prof. Dr. (London): “Paganism and Monotheism”

A generally effective and multi-faceted system of religion—polytheism—was abandoned over a relatively short period in favour of monotheism, a far more difficult theology to put across. Major differences between the two theologies included the lack of female divine models under a patriarchal monotheism, or the lack of choices of divine patronage, or even the concept of one’s ‘personal god’ or guardian. All these issues were far easier to accommodate under pagan religion. No one has satisfactorily determined why paganism collapsed so dramatically in the West and Near East. This might be a useful discussion to introduce some basic concepts of normative vs. non-normative religion.

Langer, Robert, PD Dr. (Istanbul): “Re-visiting Neo-diffusionist Attempts in Analysing the Ethno-History of ‘Pseudo-Islamische Sektengebilde’”

In 1967, Klaus E. Müller published his Habilitationsschrift *Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien* (appr. ‘Cultural-historical Studies on the Genesis of Pseudo-Islamic Sect-Formations’). Whereas it was mostly disliked by Oriental studies reviewers, it was nevertheless the first and until now almost only attempt to analyse the ethno-history of the Islamic or Islam-related ‘heterodox’ groups based on a comprehensive anthropological theory, i.e. diffusionism. (Only recently (2013), another German anthropologist and one of Müller’s pupils, Bernhard Streck, published a monographic essay on *Sterbendes Heidentum: Die Rekonstruktion der ersten Weltreligion*, which takes up general motives of a presumed ‘non-normative’ Ur-Religion, endangered by institutionalised religion.) As all other attempts to comprehensively analyse the historical phenomenon of non-normative Islam before and after Müller remained either in the framework of text-focussed, historical Oriental studies (e.g. Hodgson) or are rather unscholarly conglomerations (e.g. Moosa), it seems worthwhile to revisit Müller’s neo-diffusionist attempt in order to check whether there is any use for contemporary scholarly endeavours to come up with a theoretical concept of ‘latitudinarian’ forms of Middle Eastern religiosity.

Motika, Raoul, Prof. Dr. (Istanbul): “A New Approach for an Integrative Religious History – Circulation, Adaption, Invention: Religious Change in Anatolia”

Most religious history research focuses either on theological topics or concentrate on anthropological research on certain small groups. In contrast to these approaches during the last years an international team revolved around the Orient-Institut Istanbul developed an innovative initiative for a new way of understanding the historical and contemporary evolution of religiosity. The team chose Anatolia as a unique example for a large region harbouring several religions that developed in neighbouring regions, entered Anatolia and changed their content, practices and appearances. However, for many of them Anatolia only served as a hub for further travel and change. Of utmost importance to understand religious change are non-hegemonic groups as they commonly revolve around religious practices more than on refined theologies and hierarchies. Also, based on the same logic they are much more open to include practices of other groups and show more flexibility in adjusting themselves to changing circumstances. The interdisciplinary project by combining research on manifold groups and their relations with each other is based on a multitude of sources from e.g. archaeological findings, musicology, textual studies to anthropological field work.

Roth, Ulli, Prof. Dr. (Koblenz): “Theological Qualifications and Heterodoxy”

Since the 13th century the Western Church developed a system of rather well-defined qualifications or norms to classify aberrance and aberration in doctrine and/or hierarchy. This system has been valid in the Catholic Church until now, though it is in some way undermined by a more comprehensive view which we can find to be present subcutaneously in former days, but more explicitly in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council (Lumen gentium 8 and 15-16).

Shankland, David, Prof. Dr. (London): “Steps Towards a Sociology of Non-normative Islam”

The question of how we, as scholars of Islam, should consider the role, history and place of groups which, apparently at least, do not fit in to the dominant discourse has long been a very difficult one. The situation is particularly so in terms of a cluster of groups that have been known by different names, such as ‘ghulat’, ‘heterodox’, or even ‘latitudinarian’. Amongst these, for example, are the Alevi Bektashis, the Druze, and the Ahl-i Haqq.

I do not claim that there are any straight forward answers. However, in this paper, I attempt to sketch a framework based on sociological considerations, one that takes as its beginning point the work of Ernest Gellner in *Muslim Society* and the earlier social anthropologists that inspired his writings. It is the hope that such an analysis may be a counter-point to approaches based on tracing historical patterns of the development of these groups, and perhaps in our discussions enable us to reach some kind of synthesis.

A further, and equally important aim is to consider how new empirical research may feed into our current understanding, and in turn contribute to Islamic studies and the wider perception of Islam within our public discourse.

Sievert, Henning, Prof. Dr. (Heidelberg): “Nostalgia for Ibadi glory? A Berber Pan-Islamist Republican between minority and majority”

Sulayman al-Baruni (1870-1940) did not belong to an antinomian group but oscillated between the rather marginal Ibadi/Khariji community of Berbers in his native Libya on the one hand, and the Ottoman elite on the other, before he became a national hero of anticolonial resistance. Hailing from a notable family of Jabal Nafusa, Baruni was suspected of oppositional activities against Abdülhamid II’s regime and went to Cairo to publish his own periodical in Egypt, with Pan-Islamic leanings, continuing his career as a member of the Ottoman parliament and, in 1918, as one of the founders of the first Arab republic. Apart from his journal, he also published his poetry and a local history of North Africa from a slightly nostalgic Khariji point of view.

Despite being considered a national hero of Tripolitania by some, Baruni was never «canonised» as a leading figure of Islamic anticolonialism or of Arab nationalism. Late Ottoman as well as Italian colonial officers, however, were wary of Baruni, believing that he strove to achieve an independent Ibadi Berber emirate. My contribution will try to throw some light on how Baruni manoeuvred between local and imperial politics and how he might have localised his own community within the changing larger context of the early 20th century Middle East.

Talay, Shabo, Prof. Dr. (Berlin): “Popular Belief and the Role of Incantations and Amulets Among the Syriac Christians of Turabdin”

In the area of Turabdin in South-eastern Turkey, adherents of different religions (Muslims, Syriac Christians and Ezidis) to some extent share a common popular belief. Still only little is written about the non-official heterodox beliefs among the Syriac Christians of Turabdin. However, in the whole region the use of amulets and different incantation practices is very popular among all religious groups. My presentation deals with the popular belief in Turabdin from the point of view of the Syriac Christians and sheds light on some officially refused but still widespread customs among them regarding incantations and “magic texts”