The Qur’an

TEXT, HISTORY AND CULTURE

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SOAS
Structure and Composition

Chair: Mustansir Mir

[Mustansir Mir is Professor of Islamic Studies and Director of the Center for Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, Ohio. He has previously taught at colleges in Lahore, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and at the International Islamic University, Malaysia. Publications include Verbal Idioms of the Qur’an (1989); Tulip in the Desert: A Selection of the Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (2000) and Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur’an (2008).]

Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of Nazm of the Qur’anic Text

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[M. Cuypers obtained his PhD in Persian Literature from Tehran University in 1983. He published Aux sources de la nouvelle persane, on the narrative structures of Djamalzadeh’s short stories ‘Yeki bud yeki nabud’ (Once upon a time), in 1983. Since 1990 he has collaborated as researcher at the IDEO institute (Institut Dominicain d’Etudes Orientales) in Cairo. He specialises in the rhetorical analysis of the composition (nazm) of the Qur’an. Publications include articles analysing the composition of the last thirty suras of the Qur’an and Surat Yusuf in MIDEO vols 22; 23; 25–26 and Annales Islamologiques (IFAO) vols 33; 34; 35; 37. In a recent book, he analysed in detail the composition of the Fifth Sura: Le Festin - Une lecture de la sourate al-Ma’ida (2007) which has been translated into English as ‘The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur’an’ (2009). M. Cuypers is presently working on the writing of a theoretical book on the rhetorical analysis of the Qur’an, to be published in French in 2010, in which he investigates the existence of Semitic rhetoric in texts other than those of the Bible or the Qur’an.]

The matter of the composition (nazm) of the Qur’anic text has raised questions since the beginning of the Islamic culture, and has never been satisfactorily resolved. Since the end of the twentieth century, several researches appeared (Islahi, M. Mir, A. Haleem, A. Neuwirth, N. Robinson, A.H.M. Zahniser, S. El-Awa) opening new perspectives. Since 1995 I have been applying the rules of Semitic rhetoric rediscovered in the field of Biblical studies to the Qur’anic text. As a result, I have been able to show that the composition of the Qur’an is based on the same rhetorical-compositional rules as the Bible.

In this paper those rules will be explained, all based on symmetry (parallelism, chiasmus, circle composition), at different levels of the text. Two examples will be given: the short Sura 101 ‘The Calamity,’ and an extract of the long Sura 5 ‘al-Ma’ida’, which I analysed at length in Le Festin, Une lecture de la sourate al-Ma’ida (2007). This ‘rhetorical analysis’ shows the real (although unapparent) coherence of the text, puts each verse in its literary context
(usually ignored by the traditional ‘atomistic’ exegesis), and underlines some meanings which would otherwise not appear so clearly.

**Nazm, I‘jaz, Discontinuous Kerygma: Approaching Qur’anic Voice on the Other Side of the Poetic**

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[Dr Ayman Ahmed El-Desouky is a Lecturer in Modern Arabic and Comparative Literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London, and Chair of The SOAS Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies (CCLPS). His most recent relevant publication is a study of kerygmatic voice, ‘Ego eimi: Kerygma or Existential Metaphor? Frye, Bultmann and the Problem of Demythologizing’, in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 34:2 (2007). He is currently preparing a study on the conception and practice of sacred discourse in modern Arabic literature for Edinburgh University Press.]

The possibility of a more uniquely Islamic hermeneutics of proclamation at work ultimately on the level of the ‘discontinuous verse’ will be explored. This modality of a kerygmatic single standing utterance may be initially viewed as comparable to the commandments of Genesis and the call to discipleship in the Gospels (or the ego eimi of the Johanine Gospel). These modes of speech are historically distinctive and share a few intrinsic features: their address to a unique individuality, the call to an other that is fundamentally not-other, the response that is an entering into an already-interpreted space that demands more interpretation (Levinas’s ‘beyond the verse’) - the monotheistic second-person address that is premised on an inhering ontological relation between the divine and the human.

Frye’s late turn in the *Late Notebook’s* is perhaps most illuminating here: ‘In descriptive writing the verbal content (not what we usually think of as content in that connection) is syntactic prose. When this content turns into form, a content of metaphor reveals itself within. When that becomes form, myth (order, narrative, time, quid agas) becomes the content. When myth becomes form, kerygma becomes the content’ (*Late Notebook’s* 1:269). This insight may help toward understanding the force of sacred language – as, for example, explored by al-Jurjani (d. 1078?) and the modern poet-theorist Adonis after him – on the levels of syntax and metaphorical operations. But it may also help toward approaching and presenting a modality for the singular verse unit in the Qur’anic text.

**From the Chaotic to the Chaordic: Rethinking Chaos and Qur’an**

Thomas Hoffmann

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[Thomas Hoffmann (PhD) is associate professor at the Unit for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Aarhus University. Research topics include the Qur’an and literary theory and Islamic/Qur’anic Studies in Western Academia. He has published among others: ‘Concordia Discors or Teach the Conflicts’ in *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*, 2 (2008); *The Poetic Qur’an: Studies on Qur’anic Poeticity* (2007); ‘Agonistic Poetics in the The Qur’an: Self-referentialities, Refutations, and the Development of a Qur’anic Self,’ in Stefan Wild (ed.)]
The paper argues for the high relevance of chaos-notions in regard to the Qur’an. First, it sketches out the semantics of the Qur’anic chaotic. How is this usually anomic notion instantiated semantically and rhetorically in realms as diverse as the cosmological, the societal, the psychological, the epistemological, and the ritual? Various approaches are taken up in the analysis of the material, most notably comparison with other canonical ‘chaosologies’ (e.g., Hesiod’s Theogony, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Bible) as well as selected readings of Qur’anic ayat. The paper will argue that the notion of chaos is indispensable in a semantic and rhetorical analysis of the Qur’an.

Second, the paper ventures beyond the strictly semantic dimension and proposes a radical rethinking of the Qur’anic chaotic, one that appreciates the chaotic as a salutary conceptualisation and exegetical tool. To contextualise: in the past couple of decades it has become somewhat of a truism to state that the Qur’an is a difficult text to grasp, yet one that is in fact well-ordered and coherent. What seems arbitrary and disorganized on the surface is in fact an intricate and well-ordered in-depth scheme. This claim – having time-honoured precursors within the i‘jaz-paradigm – is often contrasted with obsolete and pejorative Orientalist notions of an incoherent and messy Qur’an (e.g., Wansbrough, Luxenberg). Unfortunately, this has led to an exegetical exorcism of the notion of chaos, despite the fact that Qur’anic scholars often apply associated notions like complexity and intricacy without demur. However, chaos can be stunningly beautiful – just think of the images of the Mandelbrot set and other fractal phenomena explored by the natural sciences. In addition to the aesthetic claim, we will argue that the (semi)chaotic may betray hidden benefits that is neglected by those favouring a neat and tidy conception of the Qur’an. Perhaps we will be more attentive to the qualities of the Qur’anic text if we allow ourselves to develop an exegetical gaze that is able to accommodate the ordered and the chaotic simultaneously. We have devised the portmanteau word chaordic (chaos + order) in order to call attention to this neglected issue.
Lunchtime Presentation

Documenting the Textual History of the Qur’an: The Approach of the Corpus Coranicum Project

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Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences

In this lunchtime presentation the approach of the research centre ‘Corpus Coranicum’ at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences will be discussed. One part of the project covers a documentation of the various sources and material evidence, both from the texts of Islamic scholarship as well as from the manuscript tradition. By documenting these two strands of transmission (written and oral) the project, to a large degree, is following the approach of the German scholar Gotthelf Bergsträßer (1886–1933) who in the late twenties of the 20th Century laid grounds for a new scholarly perspective towards the description of the Qur’anic texts in history.
The Qur’an and Medieval Philosophy
Chair: Ayman Shihadeh

[Dr Ayman Shihadeh, BA (SOAS), MSt DPhil (Oxon), is an intellectual historian specialising in medieval Arabic philosophy and Islamic theology. He is the author of The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (2006), and the editor of Sufism and Theology (2007). He is currently completing a monograph on the twelfth-century figure Sharaf al-Din al-Mas’udi, entitled Doubts on Avicenna.]

Abu Bakr al-Razi on Prophecy
Peter Adamson
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[Peter Adamson is Professor of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy at King’s College London. He has published on topics in Arabic philosophy, especially al-Kindi’s circle and philosophy in the 4th century AH (10th century AD). He is currently writing a book about Abu Bakr al-Razi.]

The well-known doctor and philosopher Abu Bakr al-Razi is notorious for his views on prophecy: several texts, especially by the Isma’ili author Abu Hatim al-Razi, report that he categorically denied the validity of prophecy and revealed religion in general. But this portrayal of his views has been questioned recently by Marwan Rashed, who has introduced new evidence from Fakhr al-Din al-Razi to undermine the evidence of Abu al-Hatim. In this paper I return to the report of Abu al-Hatim and suggest that, when read carefully and critically, it betrays signs that Abu Bakr al-Razi’s position was in fact much more nuanced than it seems. Rather than attacking prophecy as a whole, he was attacking schismatic groups within Islam, especially those who denied the efficacy of individual rational reflection and endorsed taqlid (uncritical acceptance of authority). I argue that al-Razi should, then, be taken to have attacked views like those put forward by Isma’ilis; but not necessarily the Qur’an, even if he did also attack the doctrine of its inimitability.
Avicenna’s Philosophical Approach to the Qur’an in the Light of his

*Tafsir Surat al-Ikhlas*

Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebti

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris)

[Daniel De Smet is Director of Research at the CNRS (Paris). His current projects revolve around his research interests which include the history of Isma‘ili philosophy; the ‘Sabaeans’ of Harran and Arabic philosophy; the theories on the Intellect and the Soul in Arabic philosophy (‘Noétique et théorie de la connaissance dans la philosophie arabo-musulmane des IXe - XVIe siècles’ with Meryem Sebti) as well as the Philosophical interpretation of the Qur’an (‘L’exégèse philosophique du Coran’ also with Meryem Sebti). His publications include *La Quiétude de l’Intellect. Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l’œuvre de Hamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī* (Xe/Xle s.) (1995); *Empedocles Arabus. Une lecture néoplatonicienne tardive* (1998); *Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes. Rasā’il al-Hikma. Volumes 1 et 2. Introduction, édition critique et traduction annotée des traités attribués à Hamza b. ‘Ali et à Ismā‘īl at-Tamīnī* (2007) and with Meryem Sebti & Godefroid de Callataÿ *Miroir et Savoir. La transmission d’un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane* (2008).]

[Meryem Sebti is chargée de recherché at the CNRS. Her interests include Arabic philosophy, noetics and ethics. She has published *Avicenne. L’âme humaine* (2001) and *Miroir et Savoir. La transmission d’un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane* (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. De Wulf-Mansion Centre. Series 1 / XXXVIII), Louvain 2008 with Daniel de Smet & Godefroid de Callataÿ. Current projects include a systematic list of the philosophical manuscripts from the Moroccan’s libraries; an edited translation of Lawkari’s *Mudkhal* to his metaphysics (with Jules Janssens); theories on the Intellect and the Soul in Arabic Philosophy (‘Noétique et théorie de la connaissance dans la philosophie arabo-musulmane des IXe - XVIe siècles’ with Daniel de Smet) as well as the philosophical interpretation of the Qur’an (‘L’exégèse philosophique du Coran’ also with Daniel de Smet).]

Avicenna has shown a great interest in the Qur’an and Islamic religion. In many of his writings he quotes Qur’anic verses, but often they only serve as an illustration of his philosophical doctrines. Nevertheless, he developed a genuine philosophical exegesis in a collection of small treatises exclusively devoted to tafsir, one of the most interesting being *Tafsir Surat al-Ikhlas* also known as *Tafsir al-Samadiya* [Q. 112]. Taking the form of classical scriptural exegesis, Avicenna deduces in this text some basic principles of his metaphysics (*wajib al-wujud* / *mumkin al-wujud*; *lawazim* / *muqawwimat*; *sudur*) from the words of Q. 112, such as *huwa*, *Allah*, *ahad* and *samad*. Is his Tafsir a mere attempt to justify his own philosophical system by showing that it is in agreement with revelation, as he does in many of his other writings? Or, on the contrary, was Avicenna’s metaphysics despite its deep roots in Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian tradition, influenced in some way by the Qur’an? The equivalence established between key notions such as uncaused necessary existence in itself and caused necessary existence through another and the very words of Q. 112 could suggest this. The aim of our contribution is to show the importance of this little studied treatise for a more complete understanding of Avicenna’s philosophical approach to the Qur’an.
The Hermeneutics of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s Qur’an Commentary: A Link between Philosophy and Sufism

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[Heidrun Eichner (Free University, Berlin) is specialising in Islamic intellectual history, in particular in the history of philosophy and theology and its role in the context of Islamic religious sciences. She has authored a monograph on the reception of Aristotle’s natural philosophy in the Arabic tradition Averroes’ mittlerer Kommentar zu Aristoteles’ De Generatione et corruptione. Mit einer einleitenden Studie versehen, herausgegeben und kommentiert (2005) and has written a study on the interactions between philosophical and theological teaching traditions in the Post-Avicennian period The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy: Philosophical and Theological summae in Context (forthcoming)].

Together with Sahl al-Din al-Tustari’s commentary, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s Mafatih al-ghayb is one of the most important sources for Nizam al-Din al-Nishaburi’s Tafsir Gharā’ib al-Qur’an. Al-Nishaburi’s remarks on the notion of ishara as a hermeneutical principle ultimately may be traced back to the importance which this term had for the earlier and earliest Sufi tradition. However, the relevant sections from the introduction to the Tafsir gharā’ib al-Qur’an paste long quotations from al-Razi’s commentary which provide a theoretical foundation for the hermeneutics of al-Nishaburi’s exegesis. In the context of al-Razi’s commentary, the importance of the concept of ishara likewise can be traced back to a tradition of religious spirituality (to which Fakhr al-Din refers on behalf of his father Diya’ al-Din ‘Umar). However, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s detailed explanations of how we are to apply this notion in order to understand the ‘problems’ (masa’il) in which a specific Qur’anic passage is to be contextualised point to yet another conceptual background, i.e. his philosophical writings. The classification to which al-Razi refers is identical to that used for structuring his systematical philosophical writings, i.e. the al-Mabahith al-mashriqiyya and the al-Mulakhkhas fi’l-hikma.

Thus his Qur’an Commentary does not only attest to a shared methodological background which he uses in analysing textual units of the various works he comments on, rather it also establishes an immediate connection on the level of contents.
Theological Approaches to the Qur’an

Chair: Elsaid Badawi

[Professor Elsaid Badawi (BA Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Cairo; PhD University of London) is currently the Director of the Centre for Arabic Studies Abroad at AUC in Cairo, and is a Professorial Research Associate at the Centre of Islamic Studies, SOAS. He has written numerous articles on the Arabic language and the Qur’an. His major publications include Mustawayat al-lugha al-mu’asira fi Misr (1973); the Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic (1986) with Martin Hinds; he is one of the authors of Modern Written Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar (2004), which has become a standard reference grammar, as well as his Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage, with Professor Abdel Haleem (2007).]

The Transfiguration of the Spoken Word: A Humanistic Approach to ʿIjaz

Anthony H. Johns

Australian National University

[Emeritus Professor Anthony H (Tony) Johns, who held a chair in the Faculty of Asian Studies of the ANU from 1963–93 is currently Visiting Fellow (without grant) in the College of Asia and the Pacificat, the Australian National University. His publications include papers on the spiritual and literary dynamics of the Qur’an, Qur’anic exegesis, the presentation of the prophetic figures in the Qur’an shared with the Judaic tradition, and the vernacularisation of the foundation texts of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. A recent book is Nelly Lahoud and A.H. Johns (eds), Islam in World Politics (2005). A major project is a translation of al-Ghazali’s Kitab adab al-sama’ wa’l-wajd. He is a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Qur’anic Studies. Tony Johns was awarded a Centennial Medal in 2001 for his contribution to Asian Studies in Australia, and has recently been honored by a Felicitation Volume, presented by the Hamdard Foundation of Pakistan, for his contributions to Qur’anic Studies].

The Qur’an is a sequence of Locutions addressed to the Prophet. Muhammad is a human messenger, and God speaks to him as such. Each of these Locutions has its distinctive sense, intent, mood and tonal colour, suited to the situation of the Prophet at the moment of revelation. It may come to him in a gentle whisper, with a ringing sonority, or in whatever other mode the divine wisdom deems fitting. The dramatis personae – human or otherwise – of the narrations within these Locutions likewise use human language in a variety of styles and registers appropriate to mood and circumstance. The literary ‘frame’ in which their words are set transforms even minutiae of discourse into phrases laden with meaning. They
appropriate many registers, ranging from the personal to the public, the demotic to the radiantly inspirational, setting the naturalistic within the formulaic, blending the simplest of utterances with those of a resounding orotundity of cadence. In doing so it offers a transfiguration of human speech as a vehicle of divine revelation.

The paper reflects on the *i'jaz* of the Qur’an from this perspective on modes of direct speech occurring in a number of Qur’anic locutions, including the words of God addressed directly to Muhammad, and those spoken by the varied assembly of actors in the scenes and encounters that it presents.

**Argumentation of the Qur’an through al-Muzaffar al-Razi’s *Hujaj al-Qur’an* and al-Tufi’s *‘Alam al-Jadhal’***

Abdessamad Belhaj

Pázmány Péter Catholic University


In the recent years, some insightful studies have been dedicated to the argumentation of the Qur’an. J. Waardenburg, R. W. Gwynne and J. Dammen McAuliffe helped improving our knowledge of the arguments of the Qur’an from the perspectives of logic, Arabic rhetoric and Qur’anic studies. Nevertheless, many areas are still to be explored. Both commentaries of the Qur’an and classical Qur’anic studies (*‘ulūm al-Qur’an*) provide a rich literature on the argumentative sequences in the Qur’an. In my contribution, I suggest to analyse two major works in this regard. The first, *‘Alam al-jadhal fi ‘ilm al-jadal* has been written by Najm al-Din al-Tufi (d. 716/1316). Its author offers valuable discussions on the legal and categorical arguments of the Qur’an. The second is *Hujaj al-Qur’an* by al-Muzaffar al-Razi (d. 630/1232) who made his task to back up systematically the theological doctrines of the major theological sects in Islam by arguments in the Qur’an. The highly technical vocabulary of these two books reflects the development made in the field of rhetorical, dialectical and Qur’anic studies. Al-Zarkashi (d. 794/1392) expressed this development in his *Burhan* where he calls against considering the Qur’an as a dialectical text, but rather as an argumentative one.
Al-Zamakhshari’s Unique Hermeneutics of Anthropomorphic Verses in the Qur’an: Majaz Based on Kinaya and Takhyil
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It is well known that al-Zamakhshari absorbed the theories of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani in Asrar al-balagha and Dala’il al-i’jaz and utilised them in his commentary on the Qur’an al-Kashshaf. This paper argues that al-Zamakhshari used al-Jurjani’s theory of majaz as a base to develop two unique hermeneutical tools to interpret anthropomorphic verses. The first hermeneutical tool used by al-Zamakhshari is based on his deployment of a new trope which can be called: majaz based on kinaya. Al-Jurjani used the concept of the meaning of the meaning to analyse figurative language, by using a similar concept; I propose that al-Zamakhshari’s new trope can be characterised as meaning of the meaning of the meaning.

Al-Zamakhshari was the first to introduce and develop takhyil as a hermeneutical tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. For him, takhyil is the depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient in a meaningful and effective way. In other words, takhyil is an analogy in which the analogue is considered as hypothesised thing.

Al-Zamakhshari believes that since God is transcendent and cannot be perceived by any of the senses, then the best way of conveying to human beings something about Himself that makes sense to them is by using analogies based on sensory perception thus they could imagine His might and grandeur.

God Created Adam in His Image
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A well-attested hadith (Medinese in its upper reaches) tells us that God created Adam in His image. In one form, the hadith report stops here; in other forms, it goes on to describe his
giant stature (sixty cubits) or to prohibit striking (alternatively insulting) someone’s face. The connection with striking the face hardly makes sense unless the transmitters of this version thought that Adam was created in God’s image, so that striking the face was tantamount to striking God. The interpretation of this declaration was the subject of some controversy in the mid-ninth century CE, as Ahmad ibn Hanbal and his followers insisted that it be interpreted in its obvious sense, without antianthropomorphic intellectualising, whereas others, notably the Baghdadi jurisprudent Abu Thawr, explained that ‘in His image’ (‘ala suratih) meant only ‘in Adam’s image’.

The argument seems to have been soon won by the middle Sunni party to which Abu Thawr and later most famously Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari adhered. Adam’s image is not discussed in al-Tabari’s commentary, perhaps because he did not wish to provoke Hanbali ire; neither is it discussed in later commentaries, such as those of al-Mawardi and al-Qurtubi, presumably because it had not become established in the commentary of tradition and because the argument had been settled long before.
Tafsir

Chair: Toby Mayer

[Since 2003 Toby Mayer has held a research position in the Qur’anic Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, where he conducts work on esoteric Tafsir traditions, both Sufi and Shi’i. He was previously Lecturer in Islamic Studies at SOAS where he taught a variety of courses including MA Sufism and Islamic Philosophical Theology. He received his DPhil from the University of Oxford in 2002 for a thesis on the commentaries on the Metaphysics of Ibn Sina’s Al-Isharat wa’l-tanbihat. In 2001, in conjunction with Professor Wilferd Madelung, he published a critical edition and translation of Shahrastani’s Kitab musara’at al-falasifa, entitled Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna’s Metaphysics (2001). His work Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastani’s Esoteric Commentary on the Qur’an, with a fully annotated English translation, an edition of the Arabic text, and an extended introduction, was published in 2009.]

Astrology and Tafsir

Robert Morrison
Bowdoin College in Brunswick (Maine)

[Robert Morrison is Associate Professor of Religion at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. His book, Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi (2007), won a 2009 World Prize for the Book of the Year of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamic studies. He has also published on the history of Islamic science and on Judeo-Arabic scientific texts. His current projects are a study of religious reactions to astrology in early Islamic civilisation and a study of the role of the Jews in the transmission of Islamic science to Renaissance Europe].

Judicial astrology, predicting future events on the basis of celestial positions, has been a fraught topic in Islamic literature. On the one hand, the specter of humans knowing their future with certainty would weaken the principle of human responsibility. On the other hand, given God’s omnipotence, it would be entirely possible that the heavens were a means for God’s control over the earth. Previous research on religious reactions to astrology in Islamic civilisation has used Hadith and Kalam texts to conclude that the prevailing attitude was one of disapproval.

My current research uses Tafsir literature to argue that this attitude of disapproval was far more nuanced. For example, discussions of judicial astrology in Tabari’s Jami’ al-bayan with regard to Abraham’s birth and the Battle of Badr attach validity to astrological predictions. Later tafsir such as Razi’s Mafatih al-ghayb and Nisaburi’s Ghara’ib al-Qur’an consider celestial.
Sufi Tafsir Reconsidered: Exploring of the Development of a Genre

Jamal J. Elias
University of Pennsylvania

[Jamal J. Elias is the Class of 1965 Endowed Term Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, USA). He specialises in the study of Islam in western Asia, with particular interest in Sufi thought and history. His most recent publications include Key Themes for the Study of Islam (2010) and On Wings of Diesel: Trucks, Identity and Culture in Pakistan (forthcoming, 2010)].

Sufi tafsir on the Qur’an is widely accepted as a scholarly or literary genre within the wider field of Islamic scholarship. Sufi writers frequently describe themselves as participating within an identifiable tradition when they write commentaries on the Qur’an, and over the last century a number of scholars – writing from within the Muslim tradition and without – not only have accepted the notion of a millennium-long genre of Sufi tafsir, but also have sought to define and catalogue it.

This paper will explore and challenge such assumptions through a direct examination of Sufi tafsir literature from three historical points: the formative or classical period as represented by the Haqa’iq al-tafsir of al-Sulami (d. 412/1021), widely regarded as the first major Sufi commentary on the Qur’an; the medieval period as represented by the corporate tafsir-writing enterprise of al-Kubra (d. 618/1221), Daya al-Razi (d. 654/1256) and al-Simnani (d. 736/1336); and the early modern period as represented by the assimilative, ten-volume Tafsir Ruh al-bayan of Isma’il Haqqi Bursawi (d. 1137/1725). By analysing the wide disparity in the structure and content of these works, I argue that Sufi tafsir does not constitute a literary or even a singular scholarly genre across time. Rather, the writing of Sufi tafsir is motivated by a variety of factors including ritual or aesthetic ones, in which the act of writing – as distinct from what one writes – is the most important element.

Reading the Qur’an with the Bible in Mind

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[Mustansir Mir is Professor of Islamic Studies and Director of the Center for Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, Ohio. He has previously taught at colleges in Lahore, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and at the International Islamic University, Malaysia. Publications include Verbal Idioms of the Qur’an (1989); Tulip in the Desert: A Selection of the Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (2000) and Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur’an (2008)].

The Qur’an’s engagement with the Bible, at several levels, is well known. One can plausibly argue that, in the many cases in which the Qur’an either cites the Bible or refers to it directly or indirectly, one’s understanding of the Biblical material in question can enhance one’s understanding of the Qur’an. This paper makes an analytical study of a number of instances of Qur’anic interaction with the Bible. Furthermore, examining the historical Muslim scholarly attitudes toward the Bible, the paper raises and discusses the larger issue of the use of the Bible as an aid to Qur’anic exegesis. In this connection, the paper will present and discuss the views of two modern Muslim exegetes, Hamid ad-Din al-Farahi (d. 1930) and Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997).
Al-Sharif al-Radi’s Contribution to Qur’anic Exegesis: An Analysis of Talkhis al-Bayan fi Majaz al-Qur’an

Badri N. Zubir
International Islamic University, Malaysia

[Badri Najib Zubir (BA al-Azhar, Cairo; MA & PhD, SOAS) is currently working as senior lecturer at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia, where he is dean of the faculty. His area of expertise is Arabic rhetoric (balagha) but he is equally interested in the teaching of Arabic as a second language. Publications include Balaghah as an Instrument of Qur’an Interpretation (2008); Linguistics Dictionary: English – Arabic / Arabic – English (2003); ‘Reading the surah as a “discourse”: Implications for Qur’anic translation with special reference to translation into Malay’ in Prosiding Persidangan Penterhemahan Antarabangsa ke-7 (1999) and ‘Departure from Communicative Norms in the Qur’an: Insights from al-Jurjani and al-Zamakhshari’ in Journal of Qur’anic Studies, 2:2 (2000). Badri is currently writing on the use of al-Jurjani’s rhetorical ideas in literary critique of Malay poetry.]

This paper aims at examining the contribution of al-Sharif al-Radi’s (d. 1015) to the field of Tafsir through his work, Talkhis al-bayan fi majaz al-Qur’an. In this book, al-Radi deals with verses that contain what he termed as majaz. So the book is not in the form of the regular verse-by-verse commentary of the Qur’an. The earlier part of the book – which presumably includes the introduction – is not extant, and al-Radi may have explained his concept of majaz there. But since this is not available to us, the paper starts with an attempt to figure out al-Radi’s concept of majaz and relates it to its origin. This is done by looking at all the stylistic phenomena that he termed as majaz in his book and examining their features against the backdrop of the semantic development of the concept from the time of al-Jahiz.
Once that has been established, the paper examines al-Radi’s method of interpreting majaz in terms of its value and the extent to which it is attributable to his own original thinking. Finally, the paper considers the significance of al-Radi’s work in the context of the development of the field of Tafsir, especially in the area of metaphor interpretation.

Fatimid Legal Hermeneutics: The Da‘a‘im al-Islam of al-Qadi al-Nu‘man (d.363/974)

Husain Qutbuddin
Academy of Advanced Studies in South-Asian Islam and Arabic (AASSIA), Mumbai.

[Husain Qutbuddin (PhD, Cambridge) is co-founding member of the AASSIA, which is currently in the process of being established in Mumbai, India. The focus of this academy will be the study of Islam and Arabic in the South-Asian countries. As part of this focus, the academy will publish an annual journal and provide fellowships to scholars to perform research in South-Asia. His book Analysing Qur’anic Quotations in Arabic Texts: A Pragmatic Methodology, with a Case-Study of Fatimid Works is under consideration. He is also co-editing Language and Knowledge in Middle-Eastern Societies (forthcoming 2010). Husain Qutbuddin was fellow of Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in their ‘Europe in the Middle East - the Middle in Europe’ program (08/09), where he worked on the study of Qur’anic interpretation in the modern period by the Tayyibi Isma‘ili sect, he is currently preparing an article on this.]

This paper will outline the essential hermeneutical techniques used in the interpretation of the Qur’an by the eminent Fatimid da‘i and qadi al-Nu‘man ibn Muhammad in his foundational fiqh text, Da‘a‘im al-Islam. It will show that even though the hermeneutics and interpretations furnished by al-Nu‘man are largely similar to those found in earlier and contemporary texts of Sunni schools of law, hermeneutics for him play a secondary role in legitimising interpretation as compared to the primary role played by them in this regard in Sunni derivations.

Al-Nu‘man employs common techniques such as linguistic, phonetic, and syntactic analysis, variant readings, and ‘tafsir al-Qur’an bi‘l-Qur’an’ in supporting his Qur’anic interpretations. These, however, are not presented in relation to formalised categories such as khass aw ‘amm, mafhum al-muwafaqa aw al-mukhalafa, and taqyid al-mutlaq, which were – as pointed out by scholars such as Dutton, Hallaq and Weiss – legal strategies, purposefully defined in Sunni usul texts as determiners of legitimacy. For al-Nu‘man, legitimacy could not be derived solely from hermeneutical techniques or formalisations that were for him often speculative and indeterminate in terms of their definitions and outcomes, and led to widespread ikhtilaf, but rather from the decisive authority of the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet. This culminates in his daring assertion that the Qur’an on its own, without a designated accompanying interpreter in each period, is not a guide.
الدالة اللغوية بين الأفراد المعيشي والتنويعي

تامم حسن
جامعة القاهرة


ينطلق البحث من مبدأ أن اللغة نظام كلي يتكون من نظام فرعية بينها علاقة التكافل، أي أن كل نظام منها ينتفع بعطاء الآخر. ومن ثم نناقش البحث بشكل نفدي ما أطبق عليه عامة أهل اللغة من أن المعجم لا يتضمن نظاماً من أنظمة اللغة، بل هو في رأيهم سجل لمفرداتها، وهذه المفردات لا تتجمع على صورة منظمة يمكن أن ينشأ عنها علم مضبوط ذو قواعد تميزه عن غيره من الأنظمة اللغوية. لكن الباحث يقرر أن هؤلاء اللغويين هم أنفسهم الذين لا يحترمون وجود ظاهرة الحقول المعجمية التي تنتمي إليها مفردات المعجم وأن كل مفردات مختلفى الحقق قد تصلحان أو لاتصلحان أن تضم إحداهما الأخرى، وهذا ما عبر عنه البيانيون بقولهم: اسند إلى من هو له أو لم يسند إلى ذلك.
Ethics in the Qur’an
Chair: Anthony Johns

[Emeritus Professor Anthony H. (Tony) Johns, who held a chair in the Faculty of Asian Studies of the ANU from 1963–93 is currently Visiting Fellow (without grant) in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. His publications include papers on the spiritual and literary dynamics of the Qur’an, Qur’anic exegesis, the presentation of the prophetic figures in the Qur’an shared with the Judaic tradition, and the vernacularisation of the foundation texts of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. A recent book is Nelly Lahoud and A.H. Johns (eds), Islam in World Politics (2005) and his major recent project involves the translation of al-Ghazali’s Kitab adab al-sama’ wa’l-wajd. He is a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Qur’anic Studies. Tony Johns was awarded a Centennial Medal in 2001 for his contribution to Asian Studies in Australia, and has recently been honored by a Felicitation Volume, presented by the Hamdard Foundation of Pakistan, for his contributions to Qur’anic Studies.]

Defining Good in the Qur’an: A Semantic Inquiry in Qur’anic Ethics
Ahmad Z. Obeidat
McGill University

[Ahmad Z. Obeidat is PhD Candidate of Philosophy of Religion at McGill University where he is focusing on philosophy of the Arabic language and classical legal hermeneutics. He is currently lecturer of Arabic language and culture at the department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Virginia and Director of the Shea Languages House. He has presented papers on ‘Life in Accordance with Nature: A Brief Semantic Interpretation of Surat Luqman’ (2008) and ‘Knowing the Good and Doing the Right (2008).]

The study of laws enacted in the Qur’an, ayat al-ahkam, and their theological basis, ‘aqidah, might have been the dominant approach for justifying Qur’anic imperatives and judgements. In contrast, the contemporary study of ‘value theory’ as goals and motivations that determine the nature of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ of human action remains unexplored. While Muhammad Diraz’s Dustur al-akhlaq fi’l-Qur’an (1947) is rightly one of the most important contributions to a theory of Qur’anic ethics, the proposed analysis aspires to engage critically beyond his work by paying particular attention to conceptual coherence in a number of highly relevant Qur’anic verses. I shall argue for the existence of three major value-types in the Qur’an: authoritarian, utilitarian, and naturalist. The authoritarian value justifies its norms by the status of the divine, the utilitarian by the worldly or afterworldly reward, and the naturalist by the nature of things, i.e., fitrah and sunnat Allah. Moreover, I wish to propose a way to reconcile between the evident contradictions between these three notions by synthesising them in a single coherent conceptual system, namely, the ethical maxim ‘act by
what gives you life’. This examination will include a critical survey of theological and usuli contributions to the definition of good in the Qur’an.

Islamic Morality in the Making: The Sexual Ethics of the Qur’an and its Late Antique Context

Patrick Franke

Universität Bamberg


More than a hundred verses of the Qur’an contain norms and regulations pertaining to sex and sexuality. They touch subjects like chastity, the covering of the female body, marital and extra-marital sexual relations, slave concubinage, homosexuality, and sexual restrictions bound to certain times and persons etc. Whereas these verses play an important role in current polemics against Islam and also in the apologetical responses to them by Muslims, a more balanced appraisal of these verses based on historical research is still lacking. The specific character of Qur’anic sexual ethics can only be grasped by comparing it to the morality of its milieu of origin, the mixed culture of Late Antiquity. Many of the Qur’anic sexual norms continued older norms prevalent in the environment of the emerging Muslim community, other ones disrupted them. The paper, based on the first results of an ongoing research project, attempts to demonstrate, by some examples, how a parallel reading of late antique texts (Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Pagan etc.) pertaining to sexuality may contribute to a better understanding of the Qur’anic sexual ethics.

Conceptions of Trust in the Qur’an: The case of Amana

Nora S. Eggen

University of Oslo

[Nora S. Eggen is PhD candidate at the University of Oslo where is currently completing her PhD in ‘Ethics and Epistemics of Trust: A Conceptual Study of Amana, Thiqa and Related Notions within the Normative Disciplines in the Islamic Traditions of Knowledge.’ Publications Koranen. Innføring i en tekst- og tolkningstradisjon (2007); Translation of al-Nawawi’s Riyad al-Salihin into Norwegian as De rettvises hager. Al-Nawawi’s samling overleveringer om profeten Muhammad (2008).]
Ethical concepts in the Qur’an fall in different categories, or pertain to different layers of moral discourse. Thus moral obligations on human beings towards God are discernable from moral obligations towards fellow human beings. Yet these discourses converge in some key notions, some of which are single words holding a variety of meanings (polysems, homonyms and autoantonyms) while others are different words holding the same or near-to-same meaning (synonyms). That the Qur’anic discourse is enriched by these linguistic means was maintained by the scholars of tafsir and ‘ulum al-Qur’an, and a specific genre in the Qur’anic disciplines developed, namely ‘ilm al-wujuh wa’l-naza’ir.

The concept of trust is expressed in different notions in the Qur’an. The ethical obligation on man to trust God (tawakkul) is emphasised. Several researchers have observed that all law and all moral values are deeply rooted in the covenant between God and man, this being a relationship of trust. Hence when it is enjoined upon man to return whatever is entrusted to him (amanat) the moral obligation towards fellow human beings is mirroring the moral obligations towards God. Informed by the literature on wujuh wa-naza’ir as well as other sources I will, in this paper, analyse the key notion of amana and discuss how trust, trustfulness and trustworthiness is conceptualised in different discourses through and in association with this notion. I suggest that the concept of amana makes up an intersecting point between various Qur’anic discourses on trust.
The Qur’an in the Contemporary World

Chair: Sebastian Guenther

[Sebastian Günther is professor and chair of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Göttingen, Germany. He is also the director of the newly established Göttingen research centre ‘Education and Religion: From Early Imperial Roman Times to the Classical Period of Islam’ (EDRIS). His research focuses on the classical intellectual heritage of Islam, in particular the Qur’an, religious and philosophical thought, and Arabic belles-lettres. One of his current book projects is devoted to medieval Islamic educational philosophies; another explores the concepts of ‘orthodoxy’ in early Islam. His recent publications include: Al-Farabi’s (d. 950) Philosophical and al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) Spiritual Approaches to Learning, in: Trajectories of Education in the Arab World (2009); ‘Al-Nawfali’s ‘Lost History:’ The Issue of a 9th Century Shiite Source used by al-Tabari and Abu l-Faraj’ in BJMES 36 (2009); ‘Al-Khattabi’s Critique of the State of Religious Learning in 10th Century Islam’ in AJISS 25 (2008); and the edited volume Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam (2005).]

Whither Averroism: Does Ibn Rushd’s Interpretation of the Qur’an Provide the Basis for a Modernist Rereading of Islamic Law?

A. David K. Owen
Harvard University

[David Owen studied at Columbia University, the University of Toronto, and in Morocco and Syria. He is now PhD Candidate in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University, with a Secondary Field in Classical Philosophy. David’s interests are primarily in the history of philosophy, and specifically the introduction and use of Aristotelian logic in Maliki law. At Harvard, he has been Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Fellow of Islamic Studies, and is currently working on a translation of Ibn Rushd’s theory of law.]

When looking to reinterpret the Qur’an, Ibn Rushd is frequently singled out by modernists as a model of ‘reason’ and anti-literalism, or by postmodernists as an apologist for interpretive license. This essay investigates the claim that Ibn Rushd’s manner of interpreting the Qur’an provides a basis for rereading revelation in order to bring Islamic law into line with ‘reason’ and changed circumstances.

To be sure, the Cordoban jurist’s theory of interpretation in Fasl al-maqal emphasises the importance of philosophical training for the analogical reading of problematic passages in revelation. At the same time, in the chapter on esoteric interpretation (al-ta’wil) in Kitab al-kashf ‘an manahij al-adilla, Ibn Rushd distinguishes between the kinds of people to whom differing levels of interpretation ought to be addressed, and expresses his (never fulfilled)
wish to write a thorough commentary. However, absent such a commentary, neither of the works mentioned above offer a reliable indication in practice of how to derive law from the commands and prohibitions of sacred text, or even the best way to modify such law. Rather, for legal norms we must turn to Ibn Rushd’s al-Daruri fi usul al-fiqh, the neglected epitome of Ghazali’s Mustasfa, which helped to introduce Aristotelian logic into the methodology of Islamic law. Through a close reading of his citations from the Qur’an in al-Daruri, it is evident that Ibn Rushd was a firm believer in the careful use of analogy in interpretation. Indeed, this maliki jurist’s classic work on differences of legal opinion, Bidayat al-Mujahid, essentially shows how to triangulate between the opinions of the madhahib, and is if anything the work of a gradualist, not a revolutionary. Contextual evidence and Ibn Rushd’s own legal writings demonstrate his commitment to the Qur’an as a source of law, and to the indispensable role of the religious and intellectual sciences in creating jurists capable of justifiable interpretations of scripture.

While his basic traditionalism in law should be stressed, this essay concludes by pointing out the complementary in Ibn Rushd’s legal writings between philosophical ethics derived from Aristotle and legal norms derived from the Qur’an.

**A Typology of Contemporary Sunni Tafsir: Sources, Methods and Aims of Qur’anic Commentaries from the Arabic World, Indonesia and Turkey since 1967**

Johanna Pink

Freie Universität, Berlin

[Johanna Pink is a lecturer at the Institute for Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin. She has recently finished a monograph on contemporary Sunni Qur’anic commentaries from the Arab World, Indonesia and Turkey and is currently preparing research projects on Muslim translations of the Qur’an and the ‘salafiyya’ concept in Qur’anic exegesis. Other interests include the evolution of Islamic law since the 19th century, the influence of new media on Islamic thought, and the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Her publications include the monograph *New religious communities in Egypt: Minorities between Freedom of Belief, Public Order and Islam* (2003), and numerous articles in anthologies and refereed journals, among them *Islamic Law and Society; Welt des Islams and Culture and Religion*. She is the editor of the anthologies *From Chatroom to Cyberjihad: Muslim Internet Use in Global and Local Perspective* (2009) and *Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption: Politics, Culture and Identity between the Local and the Global* (forthcoming).]

Based on a survey of around 25 post World War II Qur’anic commentaries and the in-depth analysis of 11 extensive works of Tafsir that have appeared since 1967 in the Arab World, Indonesia and Turkey, the paper seeks to develop a typology of contemporary Tafsir in different regions and languages of the Islamic World, exploring the common ground and the differences between them. The material has not been selected on the basis of ‘modernity’ or ‘originality’; rather, the aim is to gain an insight into the methods and sources of Sunni mainstream exegesis, including works that have often been dismissed as unoriginal and imitative. While the paper will discuss obvious new developments in authorship, style and content, it argues that even traditionalist exegetes, who at first glance seem to offer nothing new, select their sources in a highly conscious manner that is driven by clear methodological, sometimes also ideological concerns which are worth studying. It will provide a close look at the exegetical controversies around selected words or phrases in the Qur’an and analyse the contemporary exegetes’ opinions, sources and methods, especially with respect to the role of
Hadith and the historicity of the Qur’an, but also taking into account the problem of translation. From this, it will derive analytical categories that contribute to our understanding of Qur’anic exegesis in present times and of the way in which an exegete’s personal, educational and ideological background, the language in which he writes and the political, religious and social context in which he works shape the results of his work.

Qawa‘id al-‘aqida fi’l-Qur’an
Hassan al-Shafie
University of Cairo

[Professor Hassan M. Abdel-Latif al-Shafie (PhD, SOAS) is Professor of Islamic philosophy at the Faculty of Dar al-‘Ulum, University of Cairo. He was formerly president of the Islamic International University of Islamabad and is a member of the Arabic Language academy in Cairo. Publications include Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and his Tajrid al-i’tiqad (1977); al-Mubin fi sharh ma’ani alfaz al-hukama wa’l-mutakallimin (1993); al-Amidi wa-ara’uhu al-kalamiyya (1998) and A Treatise on Mystical Love (2005).]

ABSTRACT FORTHCOMING
Early Manuscritps
Chair: Abdul-Hakeem al-Matroudi

[Professor Abdul-Hakeem al-Matroudi, visiting professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, specialises in Islamic law, the Islamic Judicial system and Qur'anic Law. He has a specialist interest in Hanbali law and Ibn Taymiyyah. Recently published works include The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation; ‘Ibn Taymiyyah’s Evaluation of Istihsan in the Hanbali School of Law’ in Islamic Studies, ‘Circumstantial Evidence and Legal Strategies in Surat Yusuf’ in JQS and a study, annotation and translation of Ibn Taymiyyah’s treatise ‘Raf ‘al-malam’.

On Chronology and Provenance in Early Qur’ans
Alain George
University of Edinburgh

[Alain George (PhD, Oxon) is Lecturer in Islamic Art at the University of Edinburgh. He has published several articles on this subject including ‘The geometry of the Qur’an of Amajur. A preliminary study of proportion in early Islamic calligraphy’ in Muqarnas 20 (2003); ‘The geometry of early Qur’anic manuscripts’ in Journal of Qur’anic Studies 9:1 (2007) and ‘Calligraphy, colour and light in the Blue Qur’an’ (forthcoming). His book The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy is due to come out in early 2010. Among his current research interests are early manuscripts of the Qur’an, Umayyad art and architecture, artistic exchange between China and the Islamic world in the 8th to 9th centuries and the Arabic illustrated book in the 13th century.]

Early Qur’ans are key documents in the history of Islamic art and of the Qur’anic text, yet for over two hundred years, their study has been hampered by the general lack of information about their date and provenance. The present paper explores new pathways that might enhance our understanding of these crucial issues. First of all, on the basis of recent advances in research, we will outline a broad chronology of early Arabic calligraphy, from the primitive phase represented by Hijazi to the rise, growth and eventual decline of Kufic. Having established this time frame, we will turn to the question of provenance, approached from the perspective of the coloured dots and other orthographic signs that appear in early Qur’ans. By confronting the conventions observed in a manuscript sample with those described by al-Dani (982–1053), our main written source on this subject, we will seek to assess whether this text can yield insights about regional variations in the craft.]
One More ‘Abbasid Qur’an: *IFAO, Edfou 73*’

Anne Regourd

*The Louvre*

[Dr Anne Regourd is currently Scientific collaborator at the Louvre and the CNRS (Paris). Since 2001, she is the Academic supervisor of the Zabid Programme for Safeguarding the manuscripts of the private libraries in Zabid (Yemen). From 2003 to 2005, she was Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Arabic, AHRC–RQAD Project (Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Leeds) and was in charge of the publication of the 1999–2003 Quseiri documents on paper.]

A single folio of parchment, bearing verses 33–41 (42?) of *Surat Al-Imran* was found during the excavations of Edfou by French archaeologists in the nineteen-twenties (Cairo, French Institute for Oriental Archaeology, Edfou 73). A palaeographic enquiry brings us to the conclusion that it belongs to the beginning of the 3rd/9th Century.

After a look at the excavation reports aiming to link this folio to its archaeological context, it will be compared with two fragmentary parchments of the Qur’an stored in the French national Library. According to the catalogue, both were bought in middle and upper Egypt and could well be finds from excavations somewhere in the area. All these Qur’ans are unpublished.

Precious Blood, Sacred Text: The Legacy of the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an

Shannon Wearing

*New York University*

[Shannon Wearing is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, where she is specialising in the art and architecture of western Europe in the high middle ages. She is particularly interested in interactions between the Islamic and Christian worlds in the medieval Mediterranean, and above all in Spain, which is her primary focus of academic research. She is currently conducting research for her dissertation, a study of royal patronage in Aragon and Catalonia, with an emphasis on illuminated manuscripts.]

This paper explores the legacy of the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an in Islamic history and material culture. The caliph ‘Uthman, third successor to the Prophet, was assassinated by a rebellious mob in the year 35 AH (656 CE). Arab historians describe him reading from a codex of the Qur’an until the moment of his death. This narrative detail is particularly resonant since ‘Uthman himself was responsible for codifying the revelation into a standardised text, eliminating oral variations. Over the intervening centuries, certain manuscripts have been claimed to be the very Qur’an belonging to ‘Uthman, purportedly stained with drops of his blood. Each of these manuscripts—including extant examples in Tashkent, Cairo, and Istanbul—has functioned as a kind of Islamic relic. A lost example from Córdoba even played a liturgical role in the Great Mosque; a twelfth-century source describes it being paraded back and forth from its niche in the *qibla* wall every Friday, perhaps in imitation of processions with Bibles in neighboring churches. The ‘Uthmanic Qur’an of Damascus, meanwhile, served as a propagandistic device under the Burids in the wake of the city’s
Fatimid occupation. The codex’s association with the last of the Rashidun – or ‘rightly-guided’ caliphs prior to ‘Ali – made it a powerful symbol of Sunni orthodoxy. In this paper I survey the surviving codices claimed to be ‘Uthmanic, discuss how extant and lost examples have been utilised in the practice of Islam, and consider the role of the ‘Uthmanic Qur’an as an Islamic relic and a politically loaded object.
Early Qur’anic Text

Chair: Mustafa Shah

[Mustafa Shah is a lecturer in the Near and Middle East Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, where he completed both his BA and PhD degrees in the field of Arabic linguistics and Islamic Studies. His principal research and teaching interests include early Arabic linguistic thought; classical Islamic theology and jurisprudence; and Qur’anic hermeneutics and exegesis. He has recently edited a collection of published articles on the Prophetic traditions entitled Hadith: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies (2009). Previously, he has published articles on the subject of Qur’anic readings, the early Arabic linguistic tradition, and aspects of theological thought. More recently, as well as contributing to various projects such as the Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, Kees Versteegh (ed.), vol. IV (2009) and the Oxford Bibliographies Online: Arabic and Islam: an annotated introduction and bibliography (2009), he has been working on a number of monographs and articles including, Religious Dogma and the Synthesis of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought, Library of Arabic Linguistics Series (2010); Interpreting the Qur’an: Classical Hermeneutics (2010); and, ‘Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language: Cultural Memory and the Defence of Orthodoxy’. He will also be editing the recently commissioned I.B. Tauris Biographical Dictionary of Islamic Civilization.]

The Sanaa Palimpsest: Introductory Remarks to Philological and Literary Aspects

Asma Helali
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris)

[Asma Helali completed her PhD in the ‘Theory of Authenticity in Hadith Sciences’ (2005). She then completed a post-doc scholarship on ‘Authority and transmission of religious texts in Islam’ at the University of Halle/Wittenberg (Germany, 2008). She is currently affiliated to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris), UMR ‘Orient et Mediterranée’ (2009) where her current project involves the critical edition of four old manuscripts of the Qur’an. Asma Helali’s principal publications include La quete du savoir en Islam: Aux origines de la science du hadith (forthcoming) and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Ramahurmuzi (m. 360/971) a l’origine de la reflexion sur l’autenticite du hadith’ in Annales Islamologiques 39 (2006).]

My research within the French CNRS-project ‘Materials for a critical edition of the Qur’an’ concerns some of the oldest Qur’an manuscripts found in Sanaa, among others the palimpsest discovered during the 1970s. Based on the datation of the physical object, the parchment (C14: calibrated range 657–690) and aspects of its handwriting, we safely assume that the palimpsest belongs to the oldest testimonies of Qur’anic writing: the Hijazi writing of the superior script represents an early stage and the palimpsest writing may well be older.
In my paper I present some textual aspects of the palimpsest and their importance for Qur'anic studies. Some examples illustrating the phenomenon of variants will be analysed from two angles: firstly, the differences between the palimpsest and two other old Qur'an manuscripts, and secondly, the difference between the palimpsest and the official text of the Qur'an, the Cairo edition of the 20th century.

The aim of the paper is to underline the project’s importance for the actual state of Qur'anic studies, its new methodological aspects and the new material it provides. The paper will focus on the textual perspective and will be based on different photos of the palimpsest.

The Qur’an according to Agfa: The Gotthelf-Bergsträßer-Photoarchive of Qur’anic Manuscripts and the question of material evidence for the study of the textual history of the Qur’an

Michael Marx
Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences

[Michael Marx studied Oriental languages and Islamic Studies at the Universities of Berlin, Paris, Bonn, and Tehran. From 2003 to 2006 he taught at the Freie Universität (Berlin) in the department of Arabic Studies. Since 2007 he has served as director of the research centre ‘Corpus Coranicum’ at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.]

During the 1920s and until his tragic death in 1933, Gotthelf Bergsträßer was pursuing the idea to establish an apparatus criticus to the text of the Qur’an. Travelling through Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, Gotthelf Bergsträßer had the chance to take photos from more than 10,000 folios of Qur’anic manuscripts and literature related to the variant readings of the Qur’an. His pupil Otto Pretzl continued Bergsträßer’s work for another decade until he himself died in World War II. The Archive was believed to have been destroyed in 1944, but in fact survived the war because it was brought to a safe place by Anton Spitaler, professor of Oriental studies at the University of Munich. Spitaler, however, seemed to be less interested in continuing Bergsträßer’s approach in Qur’anic studies. Today more than 450 film rolls (Agfa black and white film) are digitalised and analysed in the framework of the Corpus-Coranicum project at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences where they serve, together with the manuscripts discovered in Sanaa in 1972, as the main source material for the early textual history of the Holy Text of Islam.

In this paper, the following points will be presented:

(1) Gotthelf Bergsträßer and his approach to Qur’anic Studies
(2) Overview of the Photoarchive
(3) How to analyse the oldest manuscripts of the Qur’an? What kind of information are scholars expected to find in these oldest sources for the Qur’an?
(4) Why material evidence on the history of the Qur’an has been neglected for such a long period? What kind of material sources (papyri, inscriptions, coins etc.), other than manuscripts on parchment, are available for the textual history of the Qur’an?

In a time where the Qur’an is often subjected to hypotheses that date the development of the text to the 8th or even the 9th century CE (Wansbrough 1977, Crone 1977, Lüling 1982, Luxenberg 2000, Ohlig 2008), material evidence should be especially consulted extensively and systematically. Inscriptions, coins, and the earliest manuscripts (Déroche 2008) bear testimony to the existence of the Qur’an in the 7th century, even though a complete copy
seems not to have come to us through the ages (a very early near-complete codex of 204 parchment folios covering 95% of the text dating perhaps to the 8th century is stored at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin). Qur’anic studies, especially the study of textual history, will benefit from a ‘material turn’; i.e. referring to physical evidence viz. manuscripts, inscriptions, coins etc. in order to develop a more precise view on the textual history. The German scholar, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, who has left us a unique archive of black-and-white photographs of Qur’anic manuscripts, can be seen as a pioneer in this field.

A Neglected Aspect of the History of the Qur’an: The Waqf Rules and the Redaction of the Qur’anic Text

Amr Osman
Princeton University

[Amr Osman is PhD candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, where he is completing his dissertation on the ‘History and Doctrine of the Zahiri Madhhab.’]

Muslims regard the Qur’an as divine speech; therefore, scope of human intervention in shaping and interpreting it is often downplayed. One hitherto neglected aspect of the history of the Qur’an and the redaction of the Qur’anic text is introducing waqf categories to the Qur’anic text – which dictate where a Qur’an reciter must or ought to pause or resume while reading the Qur’an – and how this affects understanding it. This paper deals with part of the history of these waqf categories: how and on what basis they were determined by Muslim scholars and what these scholars sought to accomplish by introducing them. It will be argued that while Muslim scholars were keen to show that at least some instances of waqf were part of the divine revelation that the Prophet Muhammad received from Gabriel, their theological and legal views played an obvious role in this process. In this regard, waqf was a form of tafsir, although it may be regarded as a more serious form of tafsir since, unlike regular tafsir, it is inserted in the very text of the Qur’an itself. The paper will demonstrate the significance of this subject by discussing how pausing at certain points in the Qur’an text fundamentally affects the meaning.
Cultural Expressions
Chair: Sebastian Guenther

[Sebastian Günther is professor and chair of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Göttingen, Germany. He is also the director of the newly established Göttingen research centre ‘Education and Religion: From Early Imperial Roman Times to the Classical Period of Islam’ (EDRIS). His research focuses on the classical intellectual heritage of Islam, in particular the Qur’an, religious and philosophical thought, and Arabic belles-lettres. One of his current book projects is devoted to medieval Islamic educational philosophies; another explores the concepts of ‘orthodoxy’ in early Islam. His recent publications include: Al-Farabi’s (d. 950) Philosophical and al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) Spiritual Approaches to Learning, in: Trajectories of Education in the Arab World (2009); ‘Al-Nawfali’s ‘Lost History.’ The Issue of a 9th Century Shiite Source used by al-Tabari and Abu I-Faraj’ in BJMES 36 (2009); ‘Al-Khattabi’s Critique of the State of Religious Learning in 10th Century Islam’ in AJISS 25 (2008); and the edited volume Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam (2005).]

West African Qur’ans: Codicological Features of the Sudani Style
Natalia Viola
The Islamic Manuscript Association, Cambridge, UK

[Natalia Viola is an independent Italian researcher. She completed her PhD in Philology at the Istituto Orientale (Naples) in 1998, and earned a Diploma in Codicology from the École des Hautes Études (Paris), studying with Prof Francois Deroche. Her ongoing research is based on the study of codicological features of manuscripts from West Africa, especially of Qur’ans, and she situates the investigation of Sudani scripts within the wider context of Islamic paleography. Dr. Viola’s most recent publications include the online Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale of France (Paris), http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/cdc.html. She currently holds the position of Research Activities Coordinator at The Islamic Manuscript Association, Cambridge, UK.]

This presentation sets out to explore the writing style and aesthetic traits of the West African Qur’anic tradition. Through a carefully chosen selection of images of Qur’ans dating from the 18th–20th century which originate from different countries of West Africa, the local sub-varieties of calligraphic traits represented in the Sudani style will be shown, as well as the geometric ornamentation used for rub’ divisions, sajda, hizb and juz’ markers.

The aim is to prove that despite the basic decorative principles derived from the Arab tradition, West African Qur’ans display unique features carrying a predominant native style which reflect traditional pre-Islamic African culture. Because West African writing tradition is better reflected in the pages of Qur’ans more than in any other subject, palaeographers
today are using copies of this text as a point of departure in defining the history of this tradition and setting the archetype of the different styles of West African scripts. This material is important, for it will serve as a vital resource for historians and other specialists of the region but it may also be a useful tool for those who wish to better understand the Qur’anic tradition of West Africa with respect to better-established traditions. This paper will also include description of the codicological features of the above-mentioned West African Qur’ans.

Qur’anic Recitation and Audience Rhythm: The case of the Egyptian Reciter, Mustafa Isma‘il (1905–78)

Elsaid Badawi
The American University in Cairo

[Professor Elsaid Badawi (BA Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Cairo; PhD University of London) is currently the Director of the Centre for Arabic Studies Abroad at AUC in Cairo, and is a Professorial Research Associate at the Centre of Islamic Studies, SOAS. He has written numerous articles on the Arabic language and the Qur’an. His major publications include Mustawayat al-lugha al-mu’asira fi Misr (1973); the Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic (1986) with Martin Hinds; he is one of the authors of Modern Written Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar (2004), which has become a standard reference grammar, as well as his Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage, with Professor Abdel Haleem (2007)]

The scanty descriptions of the genius of the hundreds of Qur’anic readers who carved for themselves places in history as ‘the great ones’ seems to point to the possession of such readers of an uncanny ability that enabled them to exercise complete control over the emotions and even the actions of their audiences. The nature of this ability, however, has not been satisfactorily explained. The advent of the magnetic tape recorder permitted such live performances to be recorded for our benefit. This paper will discuss a number of recorded performances of one of the greatest Qur’anic readers of our time, Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il. The unique feature of these recordings is that they preserved, for our scrutiny, not only the reader’s performance but also the live spontaneous reactions of the audience. Later, when these tapes were duplicated by the family for public release as much of the reactions of the public as could be removed without injury to the reading were omitted, since they were considered disrespectful if not outright blasphemous (!)

The genius of Sheikh Mustapha Isma‘il manifested itself in a style of recitation in which reciter and audience each played a definite role. A relation of interdependency held reciter and audience together. Analysis of dozens of tape-recorded live performances by the Shaykh clearly reveals a definite pattern was followed.
The Early American Qur’an: Islamic Scripture and U.S Canon

Jeffrey Einboden
Northern Illinois University

[Jeffrey Einboden is a graduate of Magdalene College, Cambridge where he completed a doctorate concerning Ralph Waldo Emerson’s translation of Islamic verse (2005). Currently an Assistant Professor at Northern Illinois University, Einboden’s recent publications include ‘A Qur’anic Milton: From Paradise to al-Firdaws’ Milton Quarterly, 43:3 (2009); ‘Washington Irving in Muslim Translation: Revising the American Mahomet’ in Translation & Literature, 18:1 (2009); and ‘Stoicism or Sufism?: Hammer-Purgstall’s Persian Meditations’ in Middle Eastern Literatures, 13:1 (2010). Einboden’s ‘The Genesis of Weltliteratur: Goethe’s West-östlicher Divan and Kerygmatic Pluralism’ in Literature & Theology (2005) – an essay treating Goethe’s engagement with Arabic and Persian traditions – was selected by Oxford as one of the 100 seminal articles published by OUP during the past century.]

The pioneering scholarship of Allan D. Austin has recently exposed the prevalence of Qur’anic quotation within U.S. Muslim slave narratives (1984; 1997). Yet to be explored, however, is the formative influence exercised by Islamic scripture upon the canon of early American literature more broadly, with Qur’anic echoes permeating the classic works of literary patriarchs such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman. The present paper will survey receptions, adaptations and translations of the Qur’an during the ‘American Renaissance’ (1830–1860), examining the linguistic, literary and religious problems raised by Antebellum importations of this holy text. We will interrogate, in particular, how the aesthetic contours and theological parameters of the Qur’an serve both to attract and obstruct early American readings, mapping the diverse responses to the Muslim sacred generated by Unitarians, Transcendentalists and Romantics. In tracing these scriptural appropriations within the private papers and public works of American literati, the present study will not only demonstrate Islamic influence upon U.S. canonical beginnings, but also question the implications of such historical transmission: to what extent do early national receptions of the Qur’an prompt revision to our understanding of American cultural and religious foundations?]
Literary Perspectives
Chair: Stefan Sperl

[Stefan Sperl (BA, Oxon; PhD, London) is Senior Lecturer in Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies and member of the Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies. He specialises in Classical Arabic literature; medieval Arabic popular literature; court poetry and oral literature as well as refugee studies and refugee-related issues. His works include ‘Reflections on the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad’ in Sarwar-Youof, G. (ed.), Reflections on Asian-European Epics (2004); ‘Man’s “Hollow Core”: Ethics and Aesthetics in Hadith Literature and Classical Arabic adab’ in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 70:3 (2007); ‘Epic and Exile: Comparative Reflections on the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad, Virgil’s Aeneid, and Valmiki’s Ramayana’ in Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East, 26:1 (2006) and ‘Stabat Mater - Reflections on a Theme in German-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab Poetry’ in Comparative Criticism, 22 (2000).]

The Qur’an as Epic: A Consideration of Formal and Thematic Elements
Todd Lawson
University of Toronto

[Todd Lawson, Associate Professor in Islamic Thought at the University of Toronto, teaches courses on the Qur’an, Shi’ism and Mysticism in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. His Crucifixion and the Qur’an (2009) closely examines the understanding of Q. 4:157–8 in a wide variety of Muslim and other exegetical contexts. His Festschrift for Hermann Landolt, Reason and Inspiration in Islam (2005) gathers thirty-six studies of various aspects of Islamic religious, philosophical and mystical culture. He has published many articles on aspects of Qur’an commentary, especially the Shi’i Twelver tradition and related developments. He is currently researching the various apocalyptic literary substrata of the Qur’an.

While the textual flow of the Qur’an is notoriously challenging and complex, it is also the case that in the process of reading or listening, the centre of narrative gravity is never lost. This powerful focus may be thought the epic journey and struggle from a barbarism to one of civilisation, from ignorance to enlightenment. The hero of this epic is of course the prophet or messenger, for whom history told through the Qur’an provides many examples. In this paper we will examine basic, sometimes disputed, features of the epic as they may be recognised in a series of such works (e.g. The Odyssey, Gilgamesh, Shah-Nameh, The Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost, Milton, Four Quartets). Such reflection is useful for scholarship in a world where the Qur’an is so obviously a part of the shared, if not always recognised, literary heritage of humanity. Among the subsidiary themes to be tested against the notion of epic are: humanity, community, apocalypse, and the path or road. In addition to such thematic]
questions, other compositional and stylistic features of the epic will be studied: orality, rhetoric, figure, metonymy, metre, rhyme and voice. Finally, the question of audience and performance will be broached to further delineate similarities and differences amongst various theories of the epic, as they can or cannot be applied to the Qur’an.

(Absent) Fathers in the Qur’an
Shawkat Toorawa
Cornell University

[Shawkat M. Toorawa is Associate Professor of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies at Cornell University. He is the author of a book on ninth-century writerly culture, and has also recently translated a work by Gregor Schoeler. Articles on hapax legomena in the Qur’an, and on word choice in Sura Maryam are forthcoming. His newest project looks at Mutanabbi in India.]

When the Prophet Muhammad was born, his father was already deceased. In a celebrated Qur’anic passage, God says to Muhammad, ‘Did we not find you an orphan and guide you aright?’ (Q. 93:6). But Muhammad is not the only character in the Qur’an with no father. Adam, Eve and Jesus do not have biological fathers; and the fathers of many other major Qur’anic figures go completely unmentioned. Indeed, we never meet or hear about the fathers of most prophets. In several important instances, however, such as Noah and his son, Abraham and Azar, Lot and his daughters, or Jacob and Joseph, the father figure is critical to the narrative and moral lesson. In Abraham’s case, son repudiates father, effectively rendering the latter ‘absent’. In two prominent cases, Moses and Jesus, mother figures play decisive roles. In this paper, by focusing in particular (though not exclusively) on the characters of Nouh, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, I explore and analyse ‘absent’, repudiated, and ‘surrogate’ fathers in the Qur’anic text and tie these motifs to the larger Qur’anic (and Islamic) narrative.

The Fantastic in the Qur’an: A Structural Approach to Study the Story of Moses and al-Khidr (Q. 18:60–82)
Hanadi M. Behairi
Umm al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia

[Hanadi Behairi (MA, PhD, SOAS) is currently assistance professor at Umm al-Qura University in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, where she serves as head of department of Rhetoric and Criticism in the Women’s section. Hanadi Behairi completed her masters dissertation on dialogue in the story of Moses and Pharaoh in Surat Ta-Ha and Surat al-Shu’ara. Her PhD focused on ‘Dialogism in the Qur’an: A literary Analysis of the story of Abraham in the Qur’an’. She has a major interest in comparative rhetoric in literary theories and analysis approaches.]

It is possible to understand the text of the Qur’an through the use of different approaches. Each approach has the potential to uncover single or multiple dimensions of the Qur’an and common characteristics represented include syntactic and thematic dimensions.
The fantastic is a structural approach to a literary text which reveals both of the above dimensions. The term ‘fantastic’ is used to describe any event that happens in our world that seems to be supernatural. In literature, the term ‘fantastic’ originated in the structuralist theory of Tzvetan Todorov. A truly fantastic work is subtle and leaves the reader with a sense of confusion as to whether or not a particular phenomenon is real. Todorov compares this with two other ideas; the ‘uncanny’ and the ‘marvelous’. The uncanny involves a phenomenon that turns out to have a rational explanation such as in the gothic works of Ann Radcliffe; while the marvelous describes a truly supernatural explanation for a phenomenon.

The aim of this paper is to look at the fantastic in one of the Qur’anic stories using the fantastic theory of Todorov. This kind of study has the potential to shed light on the composition of the Qur’an in order to produce new meaningful readings of its stories. Moreover, exploring the uniqueness of the Qur’anic composition by means of such a theory could offer another aspect for proving the inimitability of the Qur’an.

In order to consider these ideas, I have chosen for the following reasons the story of Moses and al-Khidr in Surat al-Kahf (Q. 18:60–82). This story is particularly suited to this purpose for several reasons. Most importantly it consists of intensive truly uncanny events. The text of these events is characterised by a certain composition and style. The reader looking at the paradigm of the story hesitates between natural or supernatural explanations of the events described. This hesitation is also experienced by Moses in the text. A closer scrutiny of the workings of language and the fantastic elements in the text will reveal not only the fantastic context, as I shall demonstrate, but also the value of the specific composition, or structure, of this text in the context of the fantastic.