

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Sunday 4th September 2011

Conference Participants arrive

Monday 5th September 2011

09.30 Opening Remarks: István Kristó-Nagy and Robert Gleave

09.50 PANEL 1 "*EXECUTIONS*": Chair: Robert Gleave

09.50 Iván Szántó (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), "Old images in new skins: the visual tradition of flaying in Iran"

10.25 François de Blois (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), "Stoning as punishment for fornication in Islam and other Near Eastern Cultures"

11.10 Andrew Marsham (University of Edinburgh), "Attitudes to Public Execution with fire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam"

11.45 John Nawas (Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven), "Abbasid state violence and the execution of Ibn 'A'isha"

12.20 *Lunch*

13.30 PANEL 2 "*JIHAD*": Chair: Gerard Hawting

13.30 Christopher Melchert (University of Oxford), "Ibn al-Mubarak's *Kitab al-Jihad*"

14.05 Andrew Rippin (University of Victoria), "Reading the Qur'an on *jihad*: two early exegetical texts"

14.40 Andras Hamori (Princeton University), "Jihadi Poetry" (read by Robert Gleave)

15.00 *Tea/Coffee*

15.30 PANEL 3 "*ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE*" Chair: Hugh Kennedy

15.30 David Thomas (University of Birmingham), "The minimalisation of Christianity under early Islamic rule"

16.05 Stephen Humphreys (University of California, Santa Barbara), "Anti-Christian Violence in the Jazira during the Early Ninth Century (810-833): Was It an Infringement of Islamic Norms?"

16.40 Close

17.15 A Stroll through Exeter City (optional).

19.30 Evening Meal: Hour Glass Restaurant [See Map]

Tuesday 6th September 2011

09.30 PANEL 4 "*FRONTIER VIOLENCE*". Chair: Hugh Kennedy

09.30 Sarah Bowen Savant (Agha Khan University, London), "The Conquest of Tustar: Site of Memory, Site of Forgetting"

10.05 Michael Bonner (University of Michigan), "Violence and the frontier in the ninth-century Mediterranean: A comparative view of the ideology of the Aghlabid and Tulunid dynastic states"

10.40 Tea/Coffee

11.10 PANEL 5 "*REVOLT OR QUIETISM?*" Chair: Gerard Hawting

11.10 Hayrettin Yucesoy (Saint Louis University), "Political Resistance and Nonviolence in Medieval Islam"

11.45 Saud Al-Sarhan (University of Exeter), "'Patience is better than sedition': The political thought of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal"

12.20 Robert Gleave (University of Exeter), "*Taqiyya* and the limits of legitimate violence in early Shi'i *fiqh*"

12.55 Lunch

14.00 PANEL 6 "*FLESH OF BEASTS AND MEN*". Chair: Barbara Roberson

14.00 Sarra Tlili (University of Florida), "Animals Would Follow Shafi'ism. Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence Done to Animals in Islamic Legal Literature"

14.35 Zoltán Szombathy (Eötvös Lóránd University, ELTE, Budapest),
“Eating People Is Wrong: Some Eyewitness Accounts of
Cannibalism in Mediaeval Arabic Literature”

15.10 Tea/Coffee

15.10 PANEL 7 “*BANDITS AND RAPISTS*”. Chair: Monique Bernards

15.10 Michael Cooperson (University of California, Los Angeles),
“Bandits”

15.45 Geert Jan van Gelder (University of Oxford), “Sexual Violence in
Verse: Jarir and Ji`thin, al-Farazdaq's Sister”

16.20 Closing Remarks: Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy

19.00 Conference Dinner: Rendez-Vous Restaurant [See Map]

Wednesday 7th September 2011

AM: Conference participants depart

Conference Programme With Abstracts

Sunday 4th September 2011

Conference Participants arrive

19.30 onwards: Informal Meal at the Imperial Pub.

Monday 5th September 2011

09.30 Opening Remarks: István Kristó-Nagy and Robert Gleave

09.50 PANEL 1 “*EXECUTIONS*”: Chair: Robert Gleave

09.50 Iván Szántó (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), “Old images in new skins: the visual tradition of flaying in Iran”

Persian painting abounds in violent imagery. From the grim and monotonous sequence of scenes depicting hanging, stabbing, beheading, stoning, dismemberment, etc., this presentation picks a rare example in which the convicted is flayed alive and then his or her skin is put on display as a memento. Flaying as a punishment is Pre-Islamic in origin and a Sasanian heritage in Islamic legislation. Regardless of time and space it was widely employed across the Islamic world, although its occurrence remained rare, used as an exemplary punishment of extreme crimes. The selected examples suggest that in addition to the practice of flaying itself, the displaying of the stuffed skin can also be observed in Pre-Islamic as well as Islamic times. It is obvious that this form of execution was meant to be more than just a deterrent. Many of those who were flayed and then exhibited must have been punished in this particular way in order to mock their promulgation of idolatry, or *shirk*.

10.25 François de Blois (School of Oriental and African Studies, London),
“Stoning as punishment for fornication in Islam and other Near Eastern
Cultures”

Death by lapidation as a punishment for sexual offences is a well-known prescript both in Judaism and in Islam, but it is unknown in the other cultures of the ancient Near East. There is no evidence for it in the very rich corpus of Babylonian and Assyrian juridical literature, nor in the epigraphic material from North and South Arabia. But even in Islam, lapidation of sexual offenders is not mentioned anywhere in the Qurʾān, but it is stipulated as the punishment for *zināʾ* (with certain restrictions and conditions) by all law schools both of the Sunnite and the Shiʿites, who adduce various traditions in support of this punishment. In my presentation I will address two questions: First, the origin and source of the Islamic law for the punishment of *zināʾ*, and second, the elaboration of the relevant legal norms, including the law of evidence, in the various law schools. The result of the investigation is that, although it recognises in principle the rule that sexual offenders must be punished by stoning, the *sharīʿah* has made this punishment dependant on such an elaborate set of conditions that it cannot ever actually be carried out without violating the very principles of the law.

11.10 Andrew Marsham (University of Edinburgh), “Attitudes to Public Execution with fire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam”

Although immolation and the destruction of bodies by fire were generally considered unacceptable in classical Islamic law, these methods of execution have been used quite widely throughout Islamic history. This paper examines accounts of executions using fire in the first two centuries of Islam in order to understand what they can tell us about pre-classical attitudes to this practice. It argues that executions should be viewed as rituals (i.e. as occasions of symbolic communication) and that, as such, accounts are often unreliable as straightforward evidence of “what really happened” but do provide insight into the highly-contested meaning of public executions. Further, this early Islamic discourse about executions using fire is best understood as a development of an existing discourse in the late antique Middle East.

11.45 John Nawas (Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven), “Abbasid state violence and the execution of Ibn ‘Aī’sha”

The reign of the seventh Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn (813-833 AD) is generally considered part of the Golden Age of Islam. Despite this image, the caliph had to deal with much political turbulence and even created some himself: a Civil War fought with his brother, the sixth Abbasid caliph al-Amīn, or his appointment in 817 of a non-Abbasid (‘Alī al-Riḍā) as his heir. Amongst these events, in the year 825, an uncle of the caliph, called Ibn ‘Ā’isha—like al-Amīn and unlike al-Ma’mūn, an Abbasid on both parental sides—was executed by al-Ma’mūn. Ibn ‘Ā’isha’s primary crime had been to call for allegiance to a cousin of his, another uncle of al-Ma’mūn, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. The last-mentioned man had been appointed in 817 by the Abbasids as anti-caliph to al-Ma’mūn after he had appointed ‘Alī al-Riḍā as heir to the caliphate. However, support for this anti-caliphate did not last very long, especially not after al-Ma’mūn returned to the capital Baghdad in 819. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī went into hiding for a number of years before he was captured in Baghdad, dressed as a women, in the very year – 825 AD – in which Ibn ‘Ā’isha was arrested and executed.

This presentation deals with the events surrounding the execution of Ibn ‘Ā’isha and how this deed relates to al-Ma’mūn’s vision of the caliph and the caliphal institution. As such, its aim is to help define “legitimate” state violence in the early Abbasid period.

12.20 *Lunch*

13.30 PANEL 2 “*JIHAD*”: Chair: Gerard Hawting

13.30 Christopher Melchert (University of Oxford), “Ibn al-Mubarak’s *Kitab al-Jihad*”

The *Kitāb al-Jihād* of ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. Hit, 181/797) is widely reputed to be the earliest extant book about *jihād*. Actually, as with his other extant works *al-Zuhd* and *al-Musnad*, it appears that Ibn al-Mubārak did not assemble it himself but rather a disciple assembled it from notes of his dictation. It would be as accurate to call it ‘the book of martyrdom’ as ‘the book of holy warfare’. Some items connect *jihād* to other forms of renunciation, while others are not connected at all to *jihād*. The predominant qur’anic word for the holy war is *qitāl*, but it is predominantly *jihād* or *siyar* in the legal tradition. The renunciatory tradition is probably in part responsible for this shift.

14.05 Andrew Rippin (University of Victoria), “Reading the Qur'an on *jihad*: two early exegetical texts”

Two exegetical texts from the pre-classical period of *tafsīr* provide a glimpse at early Muslim understandings of *jihād* in the Qurʾān. One work is by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān who died in 150/767: *Tafsīr al-khams miʿat āya min al-Qurʾān*. While the work may have achieved its final form later in the second century, it represents some of the earliest Quranic exegetical material we have available. The second work is by Abū ʿUbayd who died in 224/838 and is devoted to abrogation in the Qurʾān: *Kitāb al-nāsikh waʾl-mansūkh*. What unites these works and makes them suitable for a specific and distinctive analysis in light of the question of understandings of *jihād* is their focus on the Qurʾān as a legal source and as a justification for the legal structures and practices of Islam. This distinguishes them from other early works that have been tapped by scholars previously for views on the subject. Both works are organized according to legal topics and are devoted to assembling the relevant verses of the Qurʾān under those topical headings (*muṣannaḥ*-style). Both texts aim to explain Muslim notions of *jihād* as found in scripture and may be said to argue that Islamic law and practice can be (and implicitly must be) established on the basis of the Quranic references. Overall, Muqātil’s approach is a moralistic-ethical one, Abū ʿUbayd’s more juridical; both, however, display the rudimentary nature of the discussions as shown in their differing topics of concern, their differences in Quranic verse citations, and their silences on various important aspects of *jihād*. Overall, *jihād* was conceived of as a concern related centrally to “conquest, booty and martyrdom” (in the words of Muqātil).

14.40 Andras Hamori (Princeton University), “Jihadi Poetry” (read by Robert Gleave)

My remarks are addressed to a few poems from the first part of an online collection of Saudi jihadist poetry called *Da'wat al-'izza*. Mainly I am interested in how profoundly their technique and certain of their themes are rooted in the classical tradition. Rhetorical figures, conventional figures, traditional tropes, quotations or adaptations of well known classical verses, and conventional structures display an educated literary conservatism. The anthology contains 22 poems in classical Arabic, followed by 12 in Saudi dialect. The poems are by militants, several of them now killed, and date from the last 15 years or so. All but one of the poems in *fushā* are in classical meters. The language is elevated in tone, straightforward in vocabulary. The texts range from tracts in verse to a well crafted traditional eloquence.

15.00 Tea/Coffee

15.30 PANEL 3 “*ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE*” Chair: Hugh Kennedy

15.30 David Thomas (University of Birmingham), “The minimalisation of Christianity under early Islamic rule”

Christian and other communities living under Islamic rule in the early centuries of Islam were governed by detailed regulations of a potentially punitive kind. While they were rarely implemented systematically, they represented and possibly helped generate an atmosphere in which non-Muslims might feel dehumanised and marginalised. In the same way, Muslim theological writings from this period typically represented Christianity and other faiths as decayed or deviant versions of a perennial truth that they regarded as embodied in its full form in Islam itself. They applied measures of judgement according to which these other faiths appeared as examples of error, the outcomes of misreading of scriptures that themselves had been corrupted, and the product of confused reasoning. They pointed to the conclusion that any non-Muslim who did not convert was intellectually absurd and morally blameworthy. This paper will show how Muslim theological writings from the early period supported legal measures, giving Muslims confidence to scorn Christianity and other faiths, and helping to create conditions in which non-Muslims were treated with suspicion and dislike and targeted as the butt of communal resentment.

16.05 Stephen Humphreys (University of California, Santa Barbara), “Anti-Christian Violence in the Jazira during the Early Ninth Century (810-833): Was It an Infringement of Islamic Norms?”

The revolt of Nasr ibn Shabath al-‘Uqayli in the upper Euphrates basin in 811-825 attracted considerable attention from both Muslim and Christian writers, but they treated it very differently. Our chief Muslim source (Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur) regarded it as a challenge to caliphal supremacy, and more broadly as a threat to the political and religious unity and integrity of the Islamic community. He says nothing about Nasr’s impact on the territories and peoples that fell under his control. In contrast, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahré, portrayed the revolt as a exceptionally violent assault on the Christian communities of North Syria and the Jazira. He is predictably indifferent to the ideology of caliphal authority. However, a close examination of Dionysius’ narrative reveals that the criteria which he uses to condemn Nasr’s violence are precisely those articulated by contemporary Muslim writers (Abu Yusuf, and the epistle of Tahir ibn al-Husayn) in their discussions of just rulership and of the rights and disabilities of the caliph’s non-Muslim subjects.

16.40 Close

17.15 A Stroll through Exeter City (optional).

19.30 Evening Meal: Hour Glass Restaurant [See Map]

Tuesday 6th September 2011

09.30 PANEL 4 “*FRONTIER VIOLENCE*”: Chair: Hugh Kennedy

09.30 Sarah Bowen Savant (Agha Khan University, London), “The
Conquest of Tustar: Site of Memory, Site of Forgetting”

This paper focuses on the conquest of Tustar in western Iran as a focus for generations of Muslims’ memories about their community’s origins and expansion beyond Arabia. It makes liberal use of a Nestorian work known as the Khuzistan Chronicle, which was completed at the latest by the 680s and is widely recognized as providing a rare window into events only a generation after their occurrence. Comparing the Chronicle to the somewhat later Arabic sources allows us to discern patterns in the Arabic sources, and also a will to remember violence in particular ways. Most notably, Christians are generally absent in the Arabic reports and later events are anticipated, especially the murder of the caliph ‘Umar. The result is a record that deepens the grooves of some memories, but effaces others.

10.05 Michael Bonner (University of Michigan), “Violence and the frontier in the ninth-century Mediterranean: A comparative view of the ideology of the Aghlabid and Tulunid dynastic states”

A comparative perspective on the Aghlabid and Tulunid ideologies proves elusive for several reasons, including differences in the available historical sources, differences in the roles these actors played within the Caliphate more broadly, and because of that fact that a single actor dominated the short-lived Tulunid polity (both during his lifetime and in subsequent memory), whereas the Aghlabids held on for a span of several generations. However, the contrast proves instructive. In both cases a frontier became the crucible of the dynastic state, in places (Egypt and Ifriqiya) that faced relatively little danger from external enemies. Furthermore, the Tulunids and Aghlabids both looked abroad, across the Mediterranean, in search of their frontier. The ninth century provides similar examples, especially in the Islamic East. This paper asks how much continuity these phenomena show with late antique and (earlier) Islamic precedent; what was the nature of frontier society and politics at the time; and precisely how and in what sense we may consider the Mediterranean to have constituted a frontier in this period. With this problematic in mind, the paper concludes with another look at Tulunid and Aghlabid historiography.

10.40 Tea/Coffee

11.10 PANEL 5 “*REVOLT OR QUIETISM?*” Chair: Gerard Hawting

11.10 Hayrettin Yucesoy (Saint Louis University), “Political Resistance and Nonviolence in Medieval Islam”

In a widely circulated hadith attributed to the prophet Muhammad “*ikhtilaf ummati rahma,*” medieval Muslim scholarly and popular discourse seems to have recognized dissent as a condition of civil society. The medieval literature of jurisprudence, theology, and hadith discussed subjects pertaining to political dissent under various chapters and topics. Historiography, poetry, hagiography, and biographical dictionaries are full of material that can be productively studied to elaborate on the nature and forms of political dissent. Political tracts, mirrors for princes, manuals of statecraft discuss this topic from the perspective of imperial notion of justice and of social equilibrium. A wealth of critical practices from the Umayyad and Abbasids periods can be examined productively as forms of dissent. Political dissent was expressed in variety of subtle and open ways. These ranged from pacifist attitudes such as renunciation, withdrawal from politics, unvoiced deviation, and quietism to openly activist behavior, which included the tradition of *al-amr bi-al-ma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, but certainly was not limited to it: poetry, political speeches, abstention, noncooperation, and various acts of open disobedience constituted other forms of dissent. Pursuing scholarly and historical knowledge, in fact knowledge itself, can be said to have functioned both as dissent and a kind of protection and umbrella for the expression of dissent. In my paper, I will examine the critiques of the caliphate by the Sufis of the Mu’tazila as such a discourse that refused compliance with existing political practice and ideologies supporting it.

11.45 Saud Al-Sarhan (University of Exeter), “‘Patience is better than sedition’:
The political thought of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal”

Many scholars have noted that political quietism lies at the heart of Sunnī political doctrine and particularly that of the Hanbalīs. However, it is argued in this presentation that both activism and quietism were trends among the people of the Sunnah, and that it was thanks to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal that quietism became a dominant over activism as a doctrine of the Sunnīs. To this end, four points will be addressed in this presentation: 1- how did quietism become a formal doctrine of Sunnism and what role did Ahmad play in making this the case; 2- what were Ahmad's methods for supporting quietism and rejecting activism; 3- how did Ahmad understand the relationship between the individual and the state?; and 4- why did Ahmad supported quietism?

12.20 Robert Gleave (University of Exeter), “*Taqiyya* and the limits of legitimate violence in early Shi‘i *fiqh*”

In this paper, I examine the emergence of the Shi‘i doctrine of pious dissimulation (*taqiyya*) which permitted a believer to act at variance with the demands of Islam in order to prevent “harm”, broadly conceived. The doctrine was not exclusively Shi‘i, but was perhaps best developed within Shi‘ism. My argument here is that the Shi‘i doctrine of *taqiyya* during the period of the Imams' presence developed alongside a doctrine of legitimate and illegitimate violence. The question of whether or not minor acts of violence can be carried out under *taqiyya* in order to prevent more serious consequences appears as a question in early Imami *fiqh* literature, perhaps growing out of the statements by the Imams but also as a natural consequence of the perceived need for a rationalised, coherent juristic system.

12.55 Lunch

14.00 PANEL 6 “*FLESH OF BEASTS AND MEN*”: Chair: Barbara Roberson

14.00 Sarra Tlili (University of Florida), “Animals Would Follow Shafi‘ism. Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence Done to Animals in Islamic Legal Literature”

Although Islamic tradition tends to prioritize the interests of human beings over those of other animals, the wellbeing of the latter was still a matter of deep concern to early and medieval Muslims. Islam, for example, permits humans to kill many animal species for food, an act which by almost universal standards is considered violent. On the other hand, the Ḥadīth generally proscribes the killing of animals for reasons other than food consumption and prohibits the mutilation of animals. In spite of this, the mere permissibility of killing animals to satisfy human needs was a source of disconcertment to many Muslim theologians, who attempted to account for it in various ways. It is also notable that at the hands of jurists the Ḥadīth’s teachings on animals were translated in various sets of rules. Whereas Ḥanafīs tended to make any benefit that humans may derive from other animals a legitimate reason to kill them, Shāfi‘īs were keen to restrict human’s privileges to the few permissions expressly stipulated in the Ḥadīth. Since according to Islamic tradition nonhuman animals are considered Muslim, one is inclined to believe that, had they been aware of the debate pertaining to them in Islamic texts and had they cared to follow the example of their human coreligionists in picking a *madhhab*, nonhuman animals would probably follow Shāfi‘ism.

14.35 Zoltán Szombathy (Eötvös Lóránd University, ELTE, Budapest), “Eating People Is Wrong: Some Eyewitness Accounts of Cannibalism in Mediaeval Arabic Literature”

Cannibalism is a topic that has repulsed and fascinated travellers, ethnologists and ordinary people alike. Representing savagery at its most extreme to members of most cultures, descriptions of this custom often carry a powerful symbolism. William Arens' influential book *The Man-Eating Myth* cast doubt on the existence of customary cannibalism anywhere in human history, and alerted its readers to the need of carefully examining the merits of every account that claims to report instances of anthropophagy.

This paper undertakes to analyse three mediaeval Arabic reports of alleged instances of African cannibalism. After a brief study of the facticity or otherwise of the claims made in the accounts, the main part of the paper explores the ways these reports reflect the attitudes of mediaeval Muslims to the notion of anthropophagy, a form of violence so unlawful and extreme as to be almost beyond imagination. Particular attention is given to the views of certain jurists regarding the eating of human flesh and their attempts at explaining the extreme prohibition of it, which in fact surpasses the prohibition of all other forbidden foods explicitly mentioned in the Quran. In this context, the issue of survival cannibalism – when someone eats part of a human corpse to survive famine conditions – is discussed with reference to the Islamic concept of *darura* (necessity), which is not applicable to the consumption of human flesh. The ideas of Muslim authors concerning cannibalism thus serve to shed light on some of the underlying notions about the limits of lawful violence against a fellow human being.

15.10 Tea/Coffee

15.10 PANEL 7 “*BANDITS AND RAPISTS*”: Chair: Monique Bernards

15.10 Michael Cooperson (University of California, Los Angeles), “Bandits”

This paper considers two kinds of pre-modern Arabic stories about bandits. In stories of the first kind, the bandit spares the narrator’s life and (usually) returns some or all of his property. Often, too, he explains why he is a bandit. One is a soldier who cannot find work; another says that the government is the real thief; a third says that he is merely collecting the alms-tax from merchants who do not pay it. The narrators of such stories cannot or will not refute the arguments the bandits make to justify their activities. Instead, they resort to religious exhortation, which fails to inspire repentance. This failure, I argue, is compensated for by stories of the second type, in which bandits repent as a result of divine intervention. Such stories are less persuasive than stories of the first type. Strikingly, though, they appear in the biographies of several well-known second- and third century figures. From our consideration of this material it emerges that some (but only some) of what Eric Hobsbawm has to say about banditry holds true for early Abbasid Iraq. It also emerges that our sources, having no ready refutation for the arguments made in favor of banditry, responded in some cases by transposing the problem into the realm of hagiography.

15.45 Geert Jan van Gelder (University of Oxford), “Sexual Violence in Verse:
Jarir and Ji`thin, al-Farazdaq's Sister”

In many of his *naqā'id* (poems that are part of a “flyting” or exchange of verbal abuse), addressed to his opponent al-Farazdaq (d. c. 110/728), Jarīr (d. c. 111/729) mentions an incident involving the latter’s sister Ji‘thin, who by all accounts was a decent woman. An innocent scuffle is blown up grotesquely into a violent rape, even a “gang bang”, which is described in obscene, graphic detail. The aim is to hurt the opponent through his female relatives, and to amuse an audience through pornography and often inventive imagery. This kind of verbal violence was sometimes condemned by literary and other critics, but not as often and as strongly as one might imagine, even though such verbal abuse and untrue accusations of illicit fornication are obviously forbidden by Islamic (and other) standards. Obscene passages (there are many others in the poetry of both Jarīr and al-Farazdaq) are expurgated in some—not all—modern editions but not in premodern times. In studies in western languages the pornographic elements in the poetry of the great Umayyad poets are often mentioned but almost never discussed in detail or translated, for obvious reasons. To understand and analyse the phenomenon some illustrations will have to be given, using the passages on Ji‘thin as a case study.

16.20 Closing Remarks: Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy

19.00 Conference Dinner: Rendez-Vous Restaurant [See Map]

Wednesday 7th September 2011

AM: Conference participants depart