

Nūr ("Light") نور

The Newsletter of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

From the Director's Desk

In the second week of September this year, more than two million Muslims from around the world converged in the holy city of Mecca to perform the *Hajj*, an essential practice of the Islamic faith (See *Nūr* 1. 1, Fall 2015). It is an international, intercultural, multi-ethnic and multi-racial gathering *extraordinaire*. In 1964, the African-American civil rights leader, Malcolm X, made the *Hajj* and saw in the rite the hope for peace among the races:

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity & brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white & the non-white. (*The Autobiography of Malcom X*)

The subject of diversity — racial and religious particularly — has become a central and contentious issue in political, social, educational discourse around the world. This issue of *Nūr* ("Light") focuses on the issue of diversity within the Muslim community. It comes at a time when political pundits, Islamists, and Christian fundamentalists alike are attempting to "homogenize" Islam, each one painting the faith with broad, inaccurate and erroneous strokes, as part of a larger agenda and ideology. As will be seen in the contents of this issue, the Islamic faith and the community of the faithful have always been characterized by diversity — a diversity that, for the greater part of a 1400-year old history, comfortably accommodated differences in Qur'anic interpretation, theological and legal opinions, religious practice, social customs, artistic traditions, and intellectual influences.

In this issue St. Bonaventure's former President Sr. Margaret Carney, O.S.F., S.T.D. addresses the role of Catholic

and Franciscan Institutions in offering programs in Islamic Studies. We also hear from two faculty members from the St. Bonaventure School of Business, Drs. Zahid and Durriya Khairullah who describe their experiences growing up as Muslims among Christians in a predominantly Hindu India, and teaching in a Catholic-Franciscan university in the United States. The review of the Metropolitan Museum's exhibit *Court and Cosmos* discusses the diversity embraced by the Seljuq Empire in the 12th and 13th centuries CE. *Arts of Islamic Lands*, an exhibit from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, on exhibit at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, also vividly displays the unique synthesis of cultures represented by Islamic art. The new English translation of the Qur'an, titled *The Study Qur'an*, and reviewed below reflects the theological and intellectual diversity of Muslim scholars both past and present. Fawaz Gerges' book *A History of ISIS*, reviewed below, presents a gripping and disturbing account of the terrorist group that is attempting to silence every voice of opposition — Muslim and other - to its own violent ideology.

I hope you will enjoy these and other features in this third issue of *Nūr*.

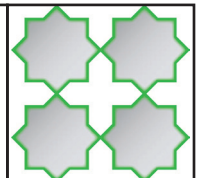
Fr. Michael D. Calabria, O.F.M.
Director, Center of Arab and Islamic Studies

السلام عليكم



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Islamic Studies in a Catholic University

By Margaret Carney, O.S.F., S.T.D.

Shortly before her retirement at the end of July 2016, President Sr. Margaret Carney, O.S.F., S.T.D., addressed the vital importance of Islamic Studies at Catholic Institutions, particularly at a Franciscan University like St. Bonaventure.

Last fall, St. Bonaventure University announced the establishment of a new Center for Arab and Islamic Studies. This center had been in the planning stages for several years, during which Fr. Michael Calabria, O.F.M., a faculty member of SBU was completing his doctorate in Islamic Studies. As conflicts in the Middle East and beyond continued to mount in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, as the rise of ISIS filled us with revulsion and dread, as new atrocities multiplied, we continued to see the critical importance of finding a way to bring our educational resources to address the pressing issues facing us as global citizens. It appeared clear to us that a Catholic and Franciscan university had an important role to play in helping a new generation of citizens find adequate answers.

Sadly, the establishment of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies stimulated a negative reaction to our new program from many persons, including a number of our own alumni. Questions about why we have taken this step, about whether it signals some devaluation of our emphasis on Catholic mission, whether we are being naïve about prospects for peace with Islamic nations — all of these questions have been posed in recent months.

The tensions this decision created are real and must be recognized and addressed. However, that very tension must inspire educators to search for ways to prepare students to take needed steps to solve these apparently unsolvable problems. Can St. Bonaventure University really say that it is preparing global citizens and have no concern for the intellectual preparation needed to be fully engaged in international affairs? Can we say that we will be “instruments of peace” but remain ignorant of the roots of sectarian and socio-political conflict that we must study, analyze, critique, and solve?

Catholic higher education insists on grounding a curriculum in the social concerns that provide foundations for a fully Catholic life. When Pope Benedict XVI met with the presidents of Catholic colleges during his visit to the United States, he reminded us clearly that Catholic identity in our schools does not stop with providing for attendance at Mass, options for Catholic volunteer service, promotion of religious vocations. All of these are important but the presentation of the ethical and theological underpinnings of social justice must also be part of a Catholic education. To embed these concerns in curriculum is to further the Church’s mission in the modern world.

And there is one additional dramatic reason for St. Bonaventure to host such a center.

Francis of Assisi was the courageous Christian who went on a peace mission of evangelization into the camp of the Islamic leader of his time at the height of a crusading series of battles. While he did not succeed in ending the conflict, he left with a deep impression of the Sultan’s fidelity to his own religion that shares Abrahamic roots with Judaism and Christianity. That encounter has inspired Franciscans ever since to seek the truth that abides in the great world religions and to befriend the followers of



Margaret Carney, O.S.F., S.T.D.

justice and peace wherever they are found. It is for this reason that modern popes, beginning with St. John Paul II, have invited the world’s religious leaders to several meetings in Assisi. It is there, in the shadow of the tomb of St. Francis, that all can feel that profound call to universal *fraternitas* that St. Francis preached.

At St. Bonaventure University, we seek to continue that search for a future peace. It is a long way off. But we can be part of bringing forth a light in place of cursing the darkness. As we have made our humble beginnings in this work, we have been deeply inspired by the leaders of the local Islamic community of our small town of Olean, New York. Not only have they welcomed our initiative, they have made financial sacrifices to provide us with early donations to support the center. They have partnered with us to lift up the voices of Muslims who are citizens of this nation and who are horrified that their identity is being so distorted by the extremists who take center stage in the media. They understand that our Catholic university is a center for encounter, dialogue, respectful debate, scholarly consideration of the issues. And they are committed to building bridges with us in true solidarity.

As the Center grows and develops we will strive to find ways to engage many groups in the work to be done. We will hope to give good answers to those who are uncertain about this program and its outcomes. We will link arms with those who wish to collaborate to meet these goals. We will keep faith with the prayer so many identify as the essence of St. Francis’ spirit: Where there is hatred, may we sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. The prayer is easy to say. Hard to live. We will give it our best. We hope that many in our vast network will join us to keep us honest, cultivate our common commitments, and carry forward the modern tasks of Franciscan peacemakers.

From South Asia to the Southern Tier:

The Good Journey of Two St. Bonaventure Faculty Members

By Durriya H. Z. Khairullah, Ph.D. and Zahid Y. Khairullah, Ph.D.

Over the past year, there has much public debate about the presence of Muslims in the United States, and if they can “fit into” American life. Below, two Muslim professors in St. Bonaventure’s School of Business discuss their personal and professional journeys in and among the Christians of India and the United States. Their stories exemplify the diversity within the worldwide Muslim community, and the many contributions Muslim Americans make to American life and education.

I was born and brought up in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), one of the metropolitan cities of India. The city is very cosmopolitan where people of diverse religious backgrounds live and work side by side. This religious diversity is found across India. For my elementary and junior high education I went to Gloria Convent Girl High School. The school was run by nuns. As a student I had friends who were Christians. I occasionally went with them to the church located on the school compound. There I was welcomed by the priests and also knelt down for prayers along with my friends. At my friends’ houses before dinner was served all the family members would kneel down and offer Grace.

At my work place in India (before coming to the U.S.) I had Catholic friends. We would take lunch breaks together and visit each other’s homes. They would invite me and my husband over for Christmas. Christmas is not as commercialized in India as in the U.S. On one occasion, my husband and I were invited to the wedding reception for one of our friend’s sisters. At the reception, wine was served in a very small cup to all the guests to drink it as a symbol of wishing good luck to the newlyweds. Being Muslims we do not drink alcohol but we were told that if we did not drink, it would bring bad luck to the married couple. To respect our Catholic friend’s ritual we both took a sip!

I joined the Saint Bonaventure University as a faculty member in 1980. My husband Zahid had already joined in 1977. As faculty members we developed a cordial and professional relationship with our colleagues. With some we have developed social friendship as well. Both of us have been requested by several of the Administrative Staff of the University to participate in the religious and spiritual activities that the University organizes. For examples: recitation of Islamic prayers at the memorial ceremonies of 9/11 tragedy; Feast of Saint Francis Interfaith Prayer Service for Peace; inauguration ceremony of the President of the University, Sister Margaret Carney, O.S.F.; and discussions on Islam during the Joint-Prayers Sessions (Islamic and Christian/Franciscan Traditions) held by the University Ministries Center. These

sessions were open to all students and to the community as well. Several of the faculty members teaching classes in Clare College Courses at St. Bonaventure have invited us to talk about Islam in their classes each semester since last several years. I have also been invited to give presentations about “Women in Islam” for students majoring in Women’s Studies. These talks were meaningful in understanding both the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity. When we were introduced to Fr. Michael Calabria, O.F.M. we could not believe it that a Franciscan Friar was so well versed in Islam, spoke fluent Arabic, and could read the Qur’an in Arabic with better pronunciation than us. The recent establishment of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies headed by Father Calabria at St. Bonaventure University and the offering of courses in Islamic studies further exemplify the University’s support. We take pride in telling our friends how supportive St. Bonaventure is about Islam.

On September 14, 2001, just days after the 9/11 tragedy, I was teaching a graduate class at Hilbert College in Hamburg, NY. The students and I were distressed by the tragic event and so we started talking about it in class. I remember students asking me to talk about Islam, and Jihad in particular. The word Jihad does not mean war, it actually means striving to improve human conditions and against our own base nature. During the conversation, I happened to mention that my husband and my-self were going to go to Toronto on Saturday after class to attend a prayer meeting for our relative who had passed away. Several of my students expressed concern about us crossing the border because we were Muslims. One of the students told me that he had heard over the radio just before coming to class that a mosque in Saint Catherine, Canada had been attacked. I was very touched by their concern for both of us. I have not heard any negative comments about Islam from my students.

My life has had a remarkably close link with Catholic Institutions. It started with St. Xavier’s Elementary School through High School and then two years at Saint Xavier’s College, both in Bombay, India. Science classes were my favorite but I was also interested in learning about different religions. I often used to meet with the Jesuit priests in order to learn about Christianity and Catholicism in particular. I would engage them in what I consider are age-old but difficult questions about life and God, for which there are no satisfactory answers, at least in my opinion. I even went on a four-day retreat with a Jesuit priest. I had persuaded a friend

to go to the retreat with me and his presence helped us both in completing this novel experience.

In Bombay, now called Mumbai, I was blessed with good friends from several faith traditions: Catholics, Hindus, Muslims and Parsees. A few close friends from each of these four religions would engage in discussions about our faiths, learn from each other about our different beliefs and traditions.

After completing my baccalaureate in engineering, I got married to an exceptional woman, Durriya. After working as a Junior Officer in a large manufacturing organization, with a “push” from Durriya, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in engineering in U.S.A. While working as a design engineer I entered a doctoral program in the School of Management at the State University of New York in Buffalo, and while working on my dissertation in Management Science, I applied for a faculty position in the School of Business at Saint Bonaventure University. So after wandering all over the place, I was back at a Catholic Institution, this time as an Assistant Professor.

A majority of my life has been spent at Saint Bonaventure University. It has been good. Once again I had the opportunity to get into discussions with Catholic priests, this time with Franciscan Friars who are a little different from the Jesuits. I used to enjoy chatting with Father Joseph Doyno and Father Francis Storms and now more recently with Father Michael Calabria. In 1983 some of the local Muslim physicians and I got together to form the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier. We wanted to start a ‘Sunday School’ for teaching basics of Islam to our children. So I approached Father Francis Storms who graciously offered to let us use a couple of classrooms on campus every Sunday, which we did for several years. Eventually the Islamic Society bought land and built the Islamic Center on Buffalo Road in Allegany, New York. As years went by, the Muslim community felt the need to have a cemetery for burial. Again I approached Father Francis Storms who was one of the Trustees of the Saint Bonaventure Cemetery. He was most helpful and a legal agreement was

executed to set aside a small area in the Saint Bonaventure Cemetery for burial of Muslims. Sister Margaret Carney’s establishment of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS) at Saint Bonaventure under the direction of Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM is a venture that will promote greater understanding and harmony.

The social circles we have developed in the United States include individuals and families of several different faith traditions. We all meet together in friendship. After the tragic events of terrorism on September 11, 2001 the local people in the Olean-Allegany area formed an Interfaith Group called the United Faiths Community that meets periodically every few months in an effort to promote mutual understanding and respect. On several occasions pastors of churches in the area have invited me to talk about Islam, which leads to questions and discussion that promotes understanding. On one occasion I was invited to give a talk about the status of the Virgin Mary in Islam and the chapter in the Quran about her. In addition to members of the congregation there were a number of nuns who said they were unaware and surprised to learn about the high esteem Mary was held by Muslims.

As I come close to retirement, I reflect fondly on the long, friendly relationships I have had with Catholic friends, with lay people, Jesuits and Franciscans. It is through engaging each other, talking and discussing, we can all achieve peace and harmony through greater appreciation of and respect for one another.



Durriya H. Z. Khairullah, Ph.D.



Zahid Y. Khairullah, Ph.D.

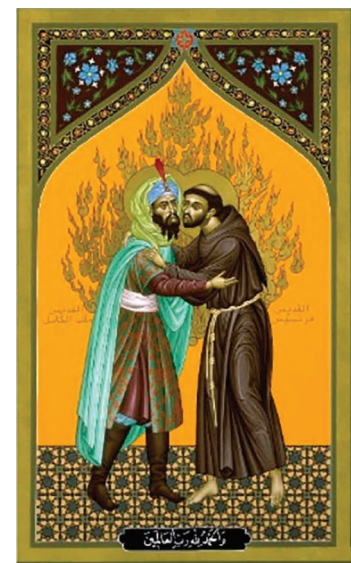
The Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

Our mission:

Inspired by the historical encounter between Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219, the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University seeks to promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures, an appreciation of both their historical and contemporary significance in the global community, and respectful relations between Muslim and Christian people.

The mission of CAIS comprises four main areas:

- ♦ On-campus instruction
- ♦ Community outreach/engagement
- ♦ Off-campus instruction
- ♦ Scholarship



“St. Francis and the Sultan”
by Robert Lentz, O.F.M.

From the Bookshelf:

ISIS: a History

by Fawaz A. Gerges, Princeton UP, 2016

The Study Qur'an

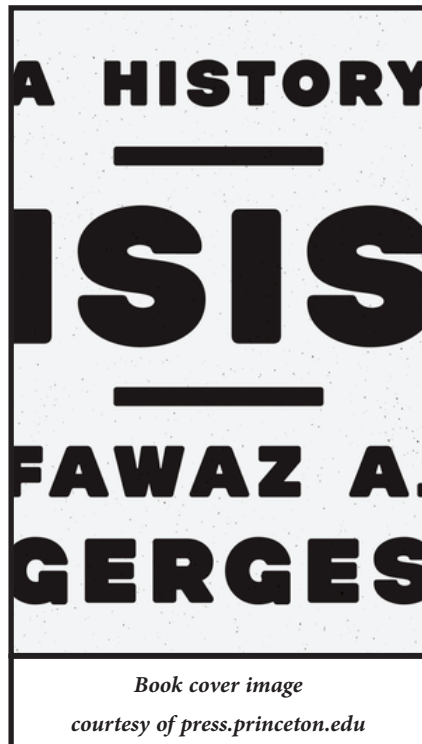
Edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, HarperOne, 2015

Reviewed by Michael Calabria, O.F.M.

Books on the contemporary Middle East published since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011 have quickly gone out of date since the political landscape has changed and continues to change so rapidly. Although Gerges' latest book will in time require some updating, it presently serves as an authoritative history of the origins and development of the so-called "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" – ISIS – or *Da'esh* in Arabic. Regardless of the presidential election, every American should read it, and the book should be required reading in the White House, State Department, Pentagon, and CIA.

Gerges is eminently qualified to tackle the subject at hand, having already authored and co-authored eleven other books on the Middle East and Political Islam, including most recently: *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World* (Cambridge, 2014) and *Obama and the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Now professor of internal relations and Emirates Professor in Contemporary Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Gerges approaches his subject with cool-headed academic objectivity. He presents a clear and cogent account of the emergence of ISIS from the chaos of post-war Iraq.

Due to a recent spate of terrorist attacks in Europe and



the United States perpetrated by ISIS-operatives or by those pledging allegiance to ISIS, many perhaps see ISIS as merely another manifestation of Islamic extremism bent on the destruction of "western civilization." Gerges clearly shows, however, that ISIS' first target was and continues to be *Shia Muslims*, perhaps as many in 10,000 in 2014 alone, a brutal carnage that even al-Qaeda leaders have consistently rejected. He explains the genesis of the organization in the years following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the oppressive Shia government of Nouri al-Maliki, not only failed to unite the country, but exacerbated political and sectarian tensions. Baathists (the nationalists of the Hussein era) and Sunnis were further marginalized by the humiliating disbandment of the Iraqi army, and were radicalized by the use of torture perpetrated by US and British forces (p. 68). By 2006, the year ISIS-ideologue Abu Masab al-Zarqawi was killed by US-forces, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) had formed under the shadow of al-Qaeda; seven years later in 2013, ISIS had emerged from the shadows.

The Syrian Arab Spring of 2011 facilitated the group's growth and expansion. In that year, politically disempowered and economically impoverished Syrians had hoped to oust Bashar al-Assad through peaceful protests as the Egyptians had done with Hosni Mubarak. When the Alawite regime responded with deadly force, and the US and Russians argued about whether Assad should go or stay, the protests rapidly became violent and participants radicalized. Maliki's open support for Assad "poured gasoline on a raging fire in Iraq and intensified Sunni misgivings and fears" (123). The Islamic State of Iraq now annexed parts of Syria to the Caliphate.

The combination of a disruptive and incoherent US policy along with incompetent and authoritarian governments in Iraq and Syria explain the historical foundations of ISIS. But what of its appeal and endurance? Why would someone risk his life for such an organization that perpetrates such heinous acts of violence? Gerges addresses these questions as well. While the violence perpetrated by ISIS members is shockingly barbaric to most, for the disempowered, disillusioned and disenfranchised poor – the bulk of those attracted to ISIS' ranks – violence serves to perpetuate the myth of ISIS' invincibility, while serving to excise religious heresy and political corruption – personified by the Iraqi and Syrian

governments. To the marginalized and uneducated lacking clear political, social, and religious identities, ISIS offers the illusion of simple clarity in a seventh-century inspired caliphate. In Gerges' words, ISIS accomplishes "a triple feat of salvation, security, and empowerment" (168).

Moreover, as with other successful Islamist organizations, ISIS succeeds where corrupt and ineffective governments in Iraq and Syria fail: by providing services, employment, and a living wage. While western media has focused on beheadings of prisoners, ISIS has nevertheless filled a "governance void" with "improved security and law and order – though harsh – and provided jobs in decimated economies" (265), including bakeries, garbage collection, day-care centers, schools, and clean and well-run hospitals. The dark side of this allegedly religious state is that, in addition to revenues from oil sales and taxes, ISIS derives income from drug-trafficking, kidnapping, theft, the sale of cultural artifacts, and tens of million of US dollars in ransom for hostages.

ISIS's claim to being an "Islamic" caliphate in light of such criminal activity and human rights abuses is thus a glaring absurdity, as its propagandists ignore the centuries of Islamic scriptural, legal and ethical scholarship that obviated such turns to extremism. Instead, ISIS adherents have turned to a narrow, harsh and selective reading of the Qur'an and tradition that is drastically out of step with the vast majority of the religious community – historical and contemporary - and *al-Islam al-Sha'ibi*, that is lived Islam.

Gerges concludes his volume with a chapter titled "The Future of ISIS." While his conclusions are beyond the scope of this review, much of what the author predicted at the end of 2015 is already coming to pass. If I could ask one question of the presidential candidates who promise to defeat ISIS, I would ask: "Have you read Fawaz Gerges' book on ISIS?"

One of the most questions I receive most frequently from people interested in Islam is which translation of the Qur'an they should use. The answer is more complicated than referring someone to a good translation of the Bible. It's not that there aren't good translations of the Qur'an; it's just that for those who know the Qur'an in Arabic, all translations are ultimately inadequate in capturing the depth of meaning, let alone the aural beauty of the text. Moreover, as with the Bible, good, authorita-

tive explanatory notes are *sine qua non*.

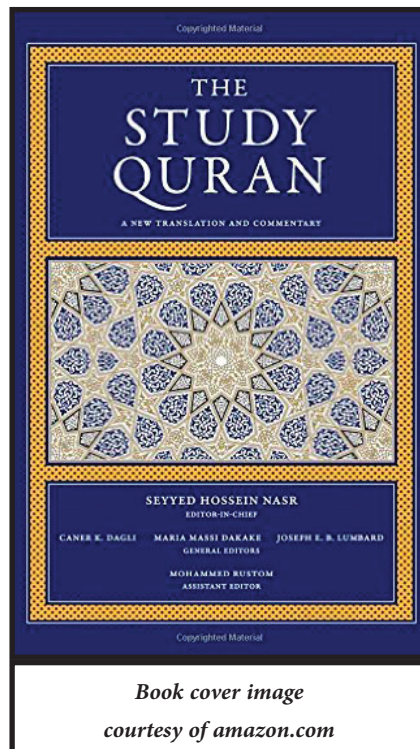
Seyyed Hossein Nasr and his editorial team have made a major advance in Qur'an translations with *The Study Qur'an*. Nasr, University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, is a prominent scholar, with particular expertise in Sufism, a specialization shared by all of the general editors. Moreover, all of the translators are Muslim, three Americans – two of whom are converts from Christianity – and a Canadian. Excluding "modernistic or fundamentalist interpretations," Nasr endeavored "to produce a text that reflects how Muslims have understood the Quran during their long history and how those Muslims who remain traditional, which means most of them, do so today" (p. xi).

The translation of the text is clearly a good and accurate rendering and one that I am likely to use with English-speaking audiences. My only reservation is the use of English archaisms (e.g. "Thou hast," etc.), which is an attempt to capture the text's elevated tone and syntax, but one that can also make it sound stilted to modern readers.

The most significant and laudable feature of *The Study Quran* is undoubtedly the copious explanatory notes drawn from over forty major Qur'anic commentaries (*tafsir*) dating from the eighth- to the twentieth centuries, many of which are not available in English translation, as well from the *hadith*. The notes show quite clearly the richness and variety in Qur'anic exegesis over the centuries. Thus, within this single volume, readers have good and vital summaries of how Muslims scholars, both past and present, have understood the Qur'anic verses. This makes *The Study Qur'an* the best choice for the classroom or serious individual study and scholarship. Moreover, perhaps reflecting the editors' Sufi affinities, their commentary is meant to "take readers beyond the literal meaning of the text when necessary, to clarify difficult passages, to reveal the inner meanings of verses when called for..." (p. xliii). The volume includes a thorough index of the Qur'anic verses and the accompanying commentary.

In addition to these invaluable features, the volume includes fifteen essays that further explicate the Qur'anic texts. Timely and informative essays by Islamic scholars, both Sunni and Shiite, include: "Qur'anic Ethics, Human Rights and Society" by Maria Massi Dakake, and "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran" by Caner K. Dagli.

My one disappointment with *The Study Quran* is that it does not include the Arabic text of the Qur'an, something I would have expected in a publication of this quality. Perhaps it was felt that the volume would become unwieldy as it amounts to nearly two thousand pages without the Arabic text. For serious students and scholars, however, this necessitates having another volume: either an Arabic Qur'an or a bi-lingual translation such as Yusuf 'Abdullah 'Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (10th ed. 1997), M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's *The Qur'an* (2010), or Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* (2012). One can only hope that subsequent editions of *The Study Qur'an* will include the Arabic text.



Book cover image
courtesy of amazon.com

Exhibit Reviews:

Court and Cosmos: the Great Age of the Seljuqs,
Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 27- July 24

Arts of Islamic Lands: Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait
Houston Museum of Fine Arts, through Jan. 29, 2017

Reviewed by Michael Calabria, O.F.M.

Court and Cosmos: the Great Age of the Seljuqs

Comprising some 250 objects and manuscripts drawn from over fifty museums and libraries worldwide, *Court and Cosmos* celebrated beautifully the creativity and diversity of the Seljuq Empire of the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE. From their humble origins in the steppes of Central Asia, the Seljuq Turks quickly went from living as nomadic pastoralists and serving as mercenaries to commanding an empire (1040-1157 CE) that reached from the borders of modern western China to the eastern Mediterranean. It was under *Seljuq*, the dynasty's founder, that the Turkic tribe migrated to the eastern edge of the Islamic world in search of security and pastureland, and embraced the Islamic faith.

Under Seljuq's grandsons Tughril and Chagri, the Seljuq domain expanded to incorporate great commercial and cultural cities along the Silk Road – cities such as Rayy, Nishapur, Merv, Balkh and Samarqand, the artistic riches of which are on display in the exhibit. Although renowned for their military prowess, the Seljuqs generally expanded their realms through a process of gradual infiltration by taking advantage of political discontent and disunity. With Tughril's (r. 1037-1063) capture of Baghdad in 1055, the Seljuqs entered the power struggles of the medieval Middle East, eventually defeating Byzantine forces at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, and seizing Jerusalem (temporarily) from the Cairo-based Fatimid Caliphate in 1072. These two events provided the immediate justification for the First Crusade.

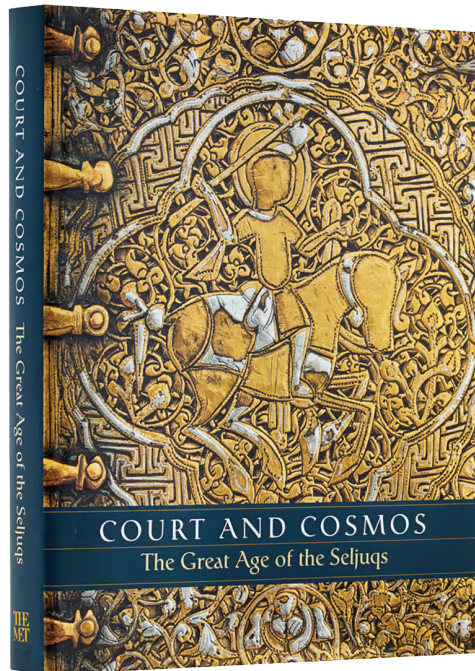
Yet, as *Court and Cosmos* well illustrates, in spite of the conflicts of the 12th and 13th centuries, the Seljuq Empire was characterized by religious diversity, and indeed was born from it. While some Seljuqs converted from shamanism

to Islam, others converted from Judaism, even as others were converting to Christianity. The continued existence of Jewish and Christian communities in Seljuq lands was demonstrated in the exhibit by a wine vessel (Georgia, 12th/13th century) with a Hebrew inscription, and by Christian lectionaries. One such lectionary (ca. 1220) from a monastery near Mosul, Iraq includes a representation of Emperor Constantine & Helena. As the exhibit explained: "The style of their robes and crowns, similar to those found in Arabic illustrated manuscripts of this period, indicates the shared material culture of Christians and Muslims in the Seljuq successor states of Mosul."

Although the Seljuqs adopted Sunni Islam for the most part, Shiite Muslims were also part of the religious fabric of Seljuq society, with some occupying positions of great power and influence. Sufism ("mystical Islam"), too, played an important role in this period, exemplified by the works of Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), both of whom resided in the city of Konya under the Anatolian Seljuqs. The cultural diversity of Seljuq society is seen in the decoration of objects that combine elements of Eastern and Central Asian cultures with figures and mythological animals from ancient Mesopotamian and pre-Islamic Persian culture, and motifs borrowed from Byzantine and

Buddhist iconography. The intellectual legacy of this era is particularly highlighted with works by al-Biruni (973-1048) who wrote 180 treatises on subjects ranging from mathematics, astronomy, and astrology to geography, history and comparative religion.

From the *Franciscan* perspective, it was thrilling to recall that many of these objects dated to the very period when Francis of Assisi met with the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in Egypt (1219). Although the Seljuq lands lay





*Figurine of "Sultan Tughril II"
Iran, late 13th century (?)
(Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London)*

further east (primarily Iraq and Iran), there was a connection between Ayyubid Egypt and the Seljuq Empire: Salah al-Din (1138-1193), who established the Ayyubid Sultanate in Egypt, first rose to power serving the Zangid dynasty, a Seljuq successor state in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, as the Seljuq Empire collapsed, many bureaucrats fled from the east to the Ayyubid court. Thus, when Francis stood before the Sultan, he looked upon a Muslim ruler who was Kurdish by heritage, an Arab by language and culture, and who conferred with Seljuq courtiers among others.

A sad reminder of the current turmoil in lands that were formerly part of the Seljuq Empire was a photograph of the minaret (1090-95 CE) that was once part of the Great Mosque in Aleppo. The minaret was noted especially for its sophisticated stone carving and historical inscriptions until its destruction during the Syrian civil war in April 2013. As the accompanying text noted: "From Mosul to Raqqa and Damascus, Syrian and Iraqi monuments – many dating from the eleventh to the thirteenth century – have met a similar fate since the eruption of the recent conflicts, while the unspeakable harm to the population has caused an appalling humanitarian crisis."

Further reading: Sheila R. Canby et al. *Court and Cosmos: the Great Age of the Seljuqs*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.

Arts of Islamic Lands: Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait

Comprising more than 30,000 objects from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Indian subcontinent, the al-Sabah Collection is considered to be the most comprehensive collection of Islamic art in private hands. Assembled by Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah and his wife Sheikha Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, their collection has been on long-term loan to the Kuwait National Museum since 1983. A portion of this opulent collection, some 200 objects, is on loan to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts until 2017, a beautiful assembly of carved woodwork, carpets and textiles, ceramics, calligraphy, illustrated manuscripts, glass, metalwork, glass, jewelry, and coins. As stated at the entrance to the galleries:

The present exhibition has the ambitious goal of providing...an idea of the history of Islamic cultures, which spans many centuries and vast areas of land – from Spain to China – where that civilization has grown and witnessed numerous cross-cultural artistic encounters, exchanges, and influences.

The exhibit reflects what is aptly described as "an array of cultural encounters" – a synthesis of artistic traditions inspired by the Islamic faith, with styles and



Marble column capital. Greater Syria, 12th century. Inscribed with verses from the Qur'an 96.5-7. (26 x 32 cm).

forms derived from classical Greece and Rome, Coptic Egypt and Byzantium, as well as Central, South and East Asia. Yet, as the exhibit demonstrates, this does not mean that Islamic art was simply a “jigsaw composed of pieces picked up here and there, or just replicated.” Instead, “we witness the characteristic Islamic tendency to harmonize and reorganize disparate elements through a fresh process of remodeling and amalgamation.”

A 12th-century marble column capital from Greater Syria on display bears elements of classical and Byzantine decoration, but these are now combined on four sides with an ornate Qur'anic inscription (92.5-7): “As for the one who gives (charity) and *is conscious of God*, and trusts in the (final) reward, We will usher him into (eternal) ease.” This unobtrusive piece succinctly expresses fundamental teachings of Islam: the importance of charity, an awareness of God, faith, and life eternal.

Among the many different objects from every day life are three pen boxes: inlaid bronze and brass examples from 13th-century Iran and 14th century Egypt, as well as a 17th-century Mughal version rendered in jade inlaid with rubies and emeralds – reminders not only of the importance of calligraphy in Islamic arts of the book, but also of the extensive intellectual tradition of Islamic civilization: religious, scientific, historical, and literary. The very first revelation of the Qur'an (96.1-5) establishes a divine purpose to human intellectual pursuits:

Read, in the name of your Lord, who created,
created humanity from a clot. Read, for your Lord
is most Generous, who taught humanity by means
of the pen, taught humanity what it knows not.

Indeed the Islamic religious and intellectual traditions are well represented by Qur'ans of different calligraphic styles, and by pages drawn from herbals based on classical Greek works, books of engineering, geometry, cartography, history and poetry in Arabic and Persian.

After galleries featuring works from the early and medieval periods, and then from the Ottoman and Safavid (Persian) Empires, the exhibit concludes with objects and manuscripts from Mughal India (1526-1857 CE), unquestionably some of the most opulent in the entire history of Islamic art. Prominent among these is a gold, 100-mohur coin, dated 1048 AH (1638-9 CE), a single object which reflects a dazzling diversity of ethnicity, culture and faith.

Nearly four inches in diameter, the coin bears the name and titles of the emperor Shah Jahan on the obverse, and the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith on the reverse: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” Shah Jahan is best known as the builder of the *Taj Mahal*. His patrilineal line was traced back to the Turkic conqueror Timur and the Mongol Genghis Khan. Yet, he was born of a Hindu mother, however, as was his father. He

was Sunni Muslim but his wife came from a Persian Shi'ite family. His forefathers spoke Chaghatay-Turkish, but he spoke, read and wrote in Persian. He, however, prayed in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an and the faith he professed, a language that bound him to believers reaching from Morocco to the Moluccas. His coins proclaim the *shahādah* in Arabic to his subjects who were largely Hindu, but also comprised Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrian *Parsis*, Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims (Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi). Shah Jahan believed in one God, but he ruled a diverse people that in some ways reflected his own multicultural heritage.

While politicians, pundits, policy-makers, educators and ordinary citizens wrestle with issues of diversity – racial, cultural, ethnic and religious – an exhibit such as *Arts of Islamic Lands* illustrates well the creative genius – artistic and intellectual – that resulted from the diversity expressed and embraced by Islamic lands for centuries.

Further reading: Giovanni Curatola and Salam Kaoukji. *Arts of Islamic Lands: Selections from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2016.



Gold presentation coin (100 Mohurs) struck in the name of Emperor Shah Jahan at Lahore in 1048 AH/1639 CE. (9.8 x 9.8 x 0.9 cm)



Pen box and inkwell. Mughal dominions, mid-17th century. Jade inlaid with gold and set with rubies and emeralds. (27.5 x 4.1 x 11 cm)

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Dr. John Esposito, PhD

Georgetown University Professor of Religion & International Affairs and of Islamic Studies

Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding
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Author of: *Islam: the Straight Path* (5th ed. 2016)

Speaking on:

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Wednesday, October 5, 2016 - 7-8:30pm

Location: TBA

For location information, see: www.sbu.edu/CAIS "events"

John L. Esposito is University Professor, Professor of Religion & International Affairs and of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. He has served as consultant to the U.S. Department of State and other agencies, European and Asian governments, corporations, universities, and the media worldwide. His more than 45 books and 100 articles have been translated into 35 languages.

Course Offerings: Fall 2016

FALL 2016

ARBC 101	Elementary Arabic I	MWF 8:30 — 9:20 a.m.
ARBC 201	Intermediate Arabic I	MWF 8:30 — 9:20 a.m.
WS 330	Women in the Ancient & Modern Middle East	T/Th 1:00 — 2:15 p.m.
THEO 203	Islam: Religion and Culture	T/Th 2:30 — 3:45 p.m.

SPRING 2017

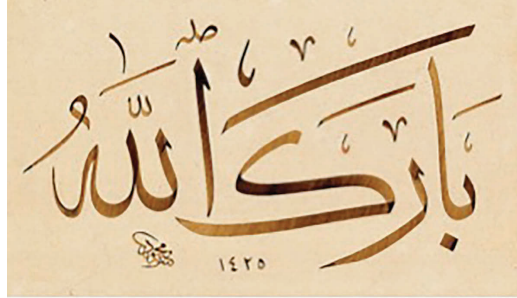
ARBC 102	Elementary Arabic II	TBA
ARBC 202	Intermediate Arabic II	TBA
ARTH 333	Intro. to Islamic Art & Architecture	T/Th 1:00 — 2:15 p.m.
HIST 365	History of the Modern Middle East	T/Th 2:30 — 3:45 p.m.

Our supporters

Since being inaugurated in August 2015, the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies has received generous support from a number of individuals and groups who continue to make the activities and programs of CAIS possible. We wish to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to the following:

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Mission of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

Inspired by the historical encounter between Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219, the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University seeks to promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures, an appreciation of both their historical and contemporary significance in the global community, and respectful relations between Muslim and Christian people.