

Nūr (‘‘Light’’) نور

The Newsletter of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

From the Director’s Desk

When speaking to audiences about matters related to Islam, I am frequently asked about women’s rights and roles in Muslim societies. Thus, in this issue of *Nūr* we focus on women and gender both historically and in the current era. The issue begins with a short overview of Women and Gender in Islam. Turning to the historical, we look at the life of a woman who is popularly known more for her funerary monument than her life: the Mughal empress *Mumtaz Mahal* who was the subject of my research in India this past summer. That research took me more than six hundred miles from New Delhi to Burhanpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Turning to the current era, Amina Golden-Arabaty, a student at St. Bonaventure University, relates her experience of ‘‘Hijab Day’’ on campus. Jason Sparkes, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University, reviews a recent book – not about Muslim women – but about a woman *and* Islam, namely Elizabeth I of England.

These are busy days for CAIS as evidenced by the events with which I have been involved at the local, national and international level – from western New York to northern India. These are described below. One of them, particularly relevant for this issue, was a paper that I presented at a conference at Nazareth College on Women and Gender in Religions. That paper documented Muslim women who endowed luxurious Qur’ans to religious and educational institutions, and who served as calligraphers themselves.

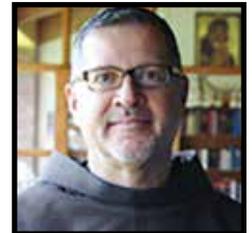
While Bonaventure students were just arriving on campus to begin the new academic year, Muslims from around the world were gathering in Mecca to perform the *hajj*. To commemorate this important

Islamic observance, CAIS had continual viewings of Nat Geo’s documentary ‘‘Inside Mecca’’ throughout the day in the new McGinley-Carney Center for Franciscan Ministry on the St. Bonaventure campus.

Perhaps the most poignant event for me since the last issue of *Nūr* was published was a presentation I gave in New Delhi on Pope Francis and Muslims in July. Speaking about Christian-Muslim relations from a Franciscan perspective in the land of Gandhi was a truly a humbling experience. Soon after returning from India, I learned that the state of Maharashtra, just south of Madhya Pradesh, was eliminating references in school textbooks to India’s Islamic rulers, including the Mughals. St. Francis’ example of respectful engagement with the Islamic world in 1219, mirrored by Pope Francis in the 21st century, remains relevant and timely.

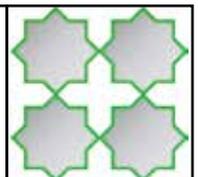
Fr. Michael D. Calabria, OFM, PhD
Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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Women and Gender in Islam: from Revelation to Revolution

by Michael D. Calabria, OFM, PhD

Women in the Early Islamic Period

The story of women in Islam begins with Khadija, the devoted first wife of the Prophet Muhammad. Twice widowed, Khadija operated her own trading company in Mecca, and hired Muhammad to sell goods on her behalf. In time, it was she who proposed marriage to him. For the twenty-five years of their marriage, until her death in 619 CE, she would be his only wife. When Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the agency of the Angel Gabriel, it was to she whom he fled in fear and incredulity. It was she who comforted him, assured him of the authenticity of the revelation, and was the first to believe in his mission as God's prophet.

Fatima, the youngest daughter born to Khadija and Muhammad, also had an enduring impact on the Islamic community and faith although she died just months after her father (633 CE). According to tradition, Muhammad said to her: "You are the highest of the women of the people of Paradise, excepting only the Virgin Mary, the daughter of Imran."¹ Due to her faith and devotion, Fatima is considered a model for all Muslims, and is honored as *al-Zahra*, "the shining/splendid one," and *al-Batul*, "the chaste/pure one," a designation she shares with Mary.² Fatima is also particularly significant for Shi'i Muslims who trace their line of *imams*, the leaders of the Shi'i community, through her sons, Hasan and Husayn, whom she bore to 'Ali (Muhammad's cousin).³

A third important woman of the early Islamic period is A'isha, the daughter of Muhammad's closest friend Abu Bakr, who was betrothed and married to Muhammad in the years following the death of Khadija. Although an adolescent at the time, she became one of the most important and influential figures after Muhammad's death.⁴ When 'Ali was named the fourth caliph in 656

CE, A'isha organized an opposition army to depose him. Their armies met at the Battle of the Camel near Basra in southern Iraq, but A'isha was defeated and sent back to live out her days in Medina. She nevertheless remained an important figure in the life of the Muslim community, narrating over two thousand *hadith* – that is, sayings by Muhammad and anecdotes about him, which are an important (if not frequently debated) source of information about the Prophet.

Women in the Qur'an

As with other sacred texts and faith communities, an imprecise, uncritical, decontextualized and gender-biased reading of the Qur'an has often resulted in the oppression of Muslim women. In recent decades women scholars of the Qur'an have attempted to correct erroneous readings and interpretations. Particularly noteworthy are the works of Fatima Mernissi,⁵ Barbara Freyer Stowasser,⁶ Amina Wadud,⁷ Asma Barlas,⁸ and Kecia Ali⁹ among many others who provide learned correctives to the incendiary views expressed by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.¹⁰

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, views of women as fundamentally flawed and dangerous are often ultimately based on the story of Creation as described in Genesis 3 in which Eve is enticed by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit, gives it to Adam, and then is punished by God with the pains of childbirth and submission to her husband. The Qur'an, on the other hand, emphasizes that the first man and woman both share the blame equally. This is

Man and Prophet, rev. ed. (Markfield, Leicestershire, UK: Islamic Foundation, 2002), 808-819.

5 Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: a Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

6 Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford, 1994).

7 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

8 Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (Austin: University of Texas, 2002).

9 Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

10 *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (2015).

1 Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest*

Sources, 2nd ed. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006), 345.

2 Mary F. Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shi'ite Islam* (Notre Dame, 2007).

3 Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2007), 57.

4 A'isha's young age at the time of her marriage to Muhammad has been the subject of much discussion in recent years, particularly by those wishing to discredit the Prophet Muhammad. For discussion, see: Adil Salahi, *Muhammad:*

achieved linguistically by the use of the dual pronouns *humā* – “them two” – and *kumā* – “you two” as in 7.20-22, often lost in translation:

Then Satan whispered to *them two*... He swore to *them two*: ‘I am a sincere adviser to *you two*!’ He lured *them two* with deceit... Their Lord called out to *them two*: ‘Did I not forbid *you two* from that tree, and say to *you two* that Satan is a clear enemy to *you two*?’

While the Qur’an, like other pre-modern texts, speaks of *functional* differences between women and men in terms of traditional gender roles, it repeatedly declares that women and men are *fundamentally equal* in God’s eyes. They are rewarded equally for their righteousness:

For the men who submit (to God) and the women who submit (to God), and the believing men and the believing women, and devout men and the devout women, and the true men and the true women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity, and the women who guard their chastity, and those men who remember God much and those women who remember, God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward.” (33.35)

Indeed, there are several women mentioned in the Qur’an who are intended to serve as examples as faith to both believing women *and* men. Among them are: the wife of Pharaoh who believed in the one God and recognized her husband’s evil; and, above all, Mary, the mother of Jesus, the most revered of all women in Islam.¹¹ Not only is the Annunciation to Mary recounted twice in the Qur’an (3.42-49 and 19.16-29), but also described are Mary’s own Nativity and Presentation in the Temple (3.36-37). Her house in Ephesus is a place of pilgrimage for Christians *and* Muslims alike, as are sites in Egypt and Palestine associated with her.

For many westerners, however, the veiling of Muslim women is the most visible sign of *inequality* and oppression. It must be noted, first of all, that veiling did not originate with Islam, but was practiced by Persians, Jews and Christians before the advent of Islam. In the early seventh century, an Egyptian bishop wrote:

As for women who go about unabashedly, their eyes staring unashamedly into the faces of every man: don’t go about with uncovered faces – not

¹¹ Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, “The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary,” *Muslim World* 59 (July/Oct. 1989), nos. 3-4, 161-187; Aliah Schleifer, *Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008); Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 543-593.

just here, but also in the streets of your own town...that no woman at all go outside the door of her house with her head uncovered...¹²

Although veiling in various forms – from a simple head covering (*hijab*) to a face covering (*niqāb*) has become increasingly widespread in the contemporary Muslim world, the Qur’an *does not explicitly* require it. What the Qur’an *does* require is modesty in behavior and attire – for *both men and women*:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their privates. That is purer for them. Surely God is aware of all that they do. Say to the believing women that should lower their gaze and guard their privates; and that they should not display their adornment except for what is visible; and that they should draw their kerchiefs over their bosoms & not display their adornment except to their husbands...(24.30-31)

While Muslim women living in more conservative cultures may feel compelled to veil in some form, for others it is a personal choice that serves as an outward expression of their faith and piety, as a statement against the objectification of women, or a rejection of anti-religious secularism.¹³

As with veiling, the practice of polygamy in Muslim societies is often viewed as an injustice against women. Its purpose is, however, quite the contrary. The verse in the Qur’an that gave men the permission to marry up to four wives (4.3) was revealed shortly after the Battle of Uhud in 625 CE that left many Muslim men dead. Consequently, many children and widows were left without means of support. The permission for polygamy was thus intended to protect and provide for vulnerable women and their dependent children. Moreover, the verse makes it clear that if a man cannot deal justly with all the wives he has married and provide for them equally, he should have only *one* wife – and this is what the Qur’an clearly prefers. The historical abuse of this important limitation on polygamous marriages by Muslim rulers who took numerous concubines in addition to legal wives was due to cultural custom, not religious rights *per se*.

Women and Islamic Law

The subject of woman and Islamic law (*sharī‘ah*) is a controversial one as well as a complex one due to the different interpretations offered by the four schools of Islamic law, as well as the differences between *Sunni* and *Shī‘ī* opinions. Although it often assumed that *sharī‘ah* deprives Muslim women of rights, in principal it protects

¹² T.G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2002), 26.

¹³ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: the Veil’s Insurgence, from the Middle East to America* (new Haven: Yale, 2011).

several important rights, including a woman's right to consent to marriage, to receive a dower from her husband at the time of their marriage, to be educated, inherit and sue for divorce.¹⁴

In some Muslim countries today, particularly with the rise of political Islam in the 20th century and militant groups like the Taliban, al-Qaeda, ISIS/ISIL, Boko Haram, etc., *sharī'ah* has been applied in draconian ways that contradict Qur'anic principles of justice and mercy inherent in Islamic law such that both women and men suffer with tragic consequences.

Women and Sufism

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam gave rise to a contemplative and mystical dimension. In Islam, it is called *Sufism* (Ar., *al-taṣawwūf*) and its adherents *Sufis*, terms derived from the Arabic word for wool (*ṣūf*), the material worn by itinerant preachers, not unlike Christian mendicant orders such as the Franciscans. Also like their Jewish and Christian counterparts, Sufism flourished especially in the twelfth- and thirteenth century CE, with poets and authors such as Fariduddin Attar (1145-1221), Mohyuddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), Umar Ibn al-Farid (1181-1235), and Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-73). One of the earliest mystics of Islam, however, was a woman, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyyah (713-801 CE) of Basra. Like the "bridal mysticism" (*Brautmystik*) of medieval Christianity, Rabi'a expressed her desire for God in amorous words:

You have infused my being through and through,
As an intimate friend must always do.
So when I speak, I speak only of You,
And when silent, I yearn for You.¹⁵

Centuries before sufis like Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi expressed the transcendent unity of religions (*wahdat al-adyan*), Rabi'a wrote:

In my soul
There is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church
That dissolve, that dissolve in God.¹⁶

In his discussion of Sufi women, Abu 'abd al-Rahman al-Sulamī (937-1021 CE), noted that the Islamic scholar Sufyan al-Thawri (716-778 CE) sought Rabi'a's "advice on legal matters and referred such issues to her. He also sought her spiritual advice and supplications."¹⁷

Revolutionary Women

14 John Esposito with Natana J. DeLong Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, 2001); Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2008).

15 *Islamic Mystical Poetry: Sufi Verse from the Mystics to Rumi*, ed. Mahmood Jamal (Penguin, 2009), 7.

16 *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, 12.

17 Abū 'Abd ar-Rahmān ās-Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women (Dhikr an-nisaw al-muta 'abbidāt as-sūfiyyāt)*, trans. Rkia E. Cornell (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 74.

As detailed above, since the advent of Islam, Muslim women have played significant roles in the faith life of the community, and subsequently in its political life as well, in spite of the patriarchal cultures in which Islam took root. In the early 20th century, women understood they could not secure women's rights in their countries until both men and women were first free of colonial oppression. In Egypt one of the most significant figures of this period was Huda Sha'rawi (1879- 1947) who formed a women's committee in 1919 dedicated to ending the British occupation. That year she wrote:

We women held our first demonstration on 16 March to protest the repressive acts and intimidation practiced by the British authority... They blocked the streets with machine guns... When I advanced, a British soldier stepped toward me pointing his gun, but I made my way past him.¹⁸

In Syria, Naziq al-Abid (1898-1959) actually fought in battle against the French occupation at the Battle of Maysaloun (1920), earning her the honorary rank of general and the moniker: "The Syrian Joan of Arc." Although the Syrian army was defeated, she continued the fight for Syrian independence during the revolts of 1925-27.

Given this history, it should therefore come as no surprise that in the revolutions of the early 21st century called the "Arab Spring," Muslim women have continued to fight against injustices, whether perpetrated by secular or Islamist governments. It is estimated that a fifth of the young demonstrators in Cairo's Tahrir Square who forced the resignation of President Mubarak in 2011 were women. Subsequently marginalized politically by an Islamist administration, Muslim women also participated in the protests that led to the downfall of President Morsi in 2013.¹⁹

While many myths about women, gender and Islam continue to prevail – that Islam is inherently hostile towards women, that it condones the exploitation and oppression of women, and that it deprives women of social, political and economic activity, modern scholarship in Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic history, as well as current events, present a more complex and positive picture than does the contemporary world.

This article originally appeared in Franciscan Connections: the Cord, 66.1 (March 2016)

18 Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*, trans. Margot Badran (New York: Feminist Press, 1986), 112-113.

19 Juan Cole and Shahin Malik Cole, "Women in Egypt After the Arab Spring: Gains and Losses," *Truthdig*, Oct 7, 2014: http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/women_in_egypt_after_the_arab_spring_gains_and_losses_20141007

Profiles of Muslim Women: Mumtaz Mahal (1593-1631)

by Michael D. Calabria, OFM

Every year some 7-8 million people travel to Agra, India to gaze at the ethereal beauty of the Taj Mahal. Yet, in spite of the popularity and renown of the gleaming white mausoleum, few know about the woman for whom it was built: Mumtaz Mahal (1593-1631), the wife of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. In July 2017, I travelled to India in order to follow in the footsteps of Mumtaz *before* the Taj was built. Sifting the historical sources, we find a rather intriguing, if not extraordinary, woman.

Mumtaz's father, Abu al-Hassan (1572-1641) was not of Indic heritage, but arrived at the Mughal court as a boy in 1577 with his Persian émigré parents. His father, Mirza Ghiyas-ud-din, entered into the emperor Akbar's service (r. 1556-1605) and rose to such prominence that during the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605-27) he was designated *Itimad al-Daula* – the "Pillar of the Government." In time Abu al-Hassan (1572-1641) also rose in status and was designated *Asaf Khan*, the title by which he is most commonly known. Among the children born to Asaf Khan and his wife, Diwanji Begum, (also born of a Persian émigré family) in Agra, the imperial capital, was a daughter called Arjumand Banu Begum (b. 1593), later known as *Mumtaz Mahal*.

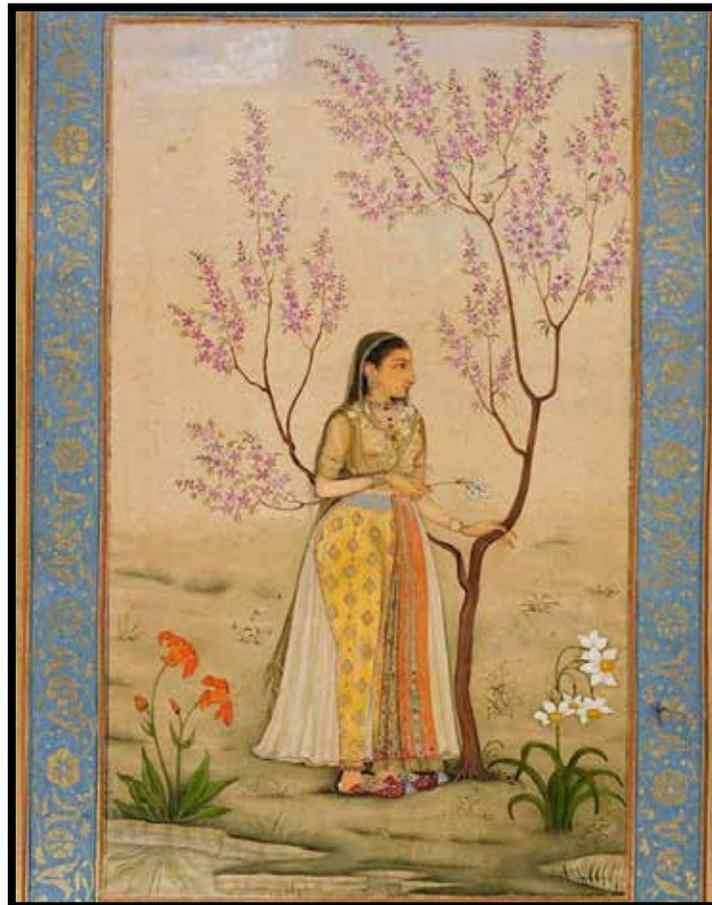
In 1607, the emperor Jahangir and the royal family were resident at Lahore celebrating the New Year's festivities of *Nauroz*. According to tradition, it was at this time that Jahangir's fifteen-year old son, Prince Khurram, met and fell in love with Asaf Khan's fourteen-year old daughter Arjumand. In spite of their young years, their love would mature into the strongest

of bonds. The young couple was soon betrothed, but their marriage would be postponed. Arjumand's family came under suspicion when her grandfather Itimad al-Daula was accused of embezzling funds; but more seriously, it was discovered that her uncle, Muhammad Sharif (brother of Asaf Khan), was involved in a plot to assassinate the emperor. As Itimad al-Daula tried to clear his family's name, Jahangir arranged a political marriage for his son to a Safavid Persian princess.

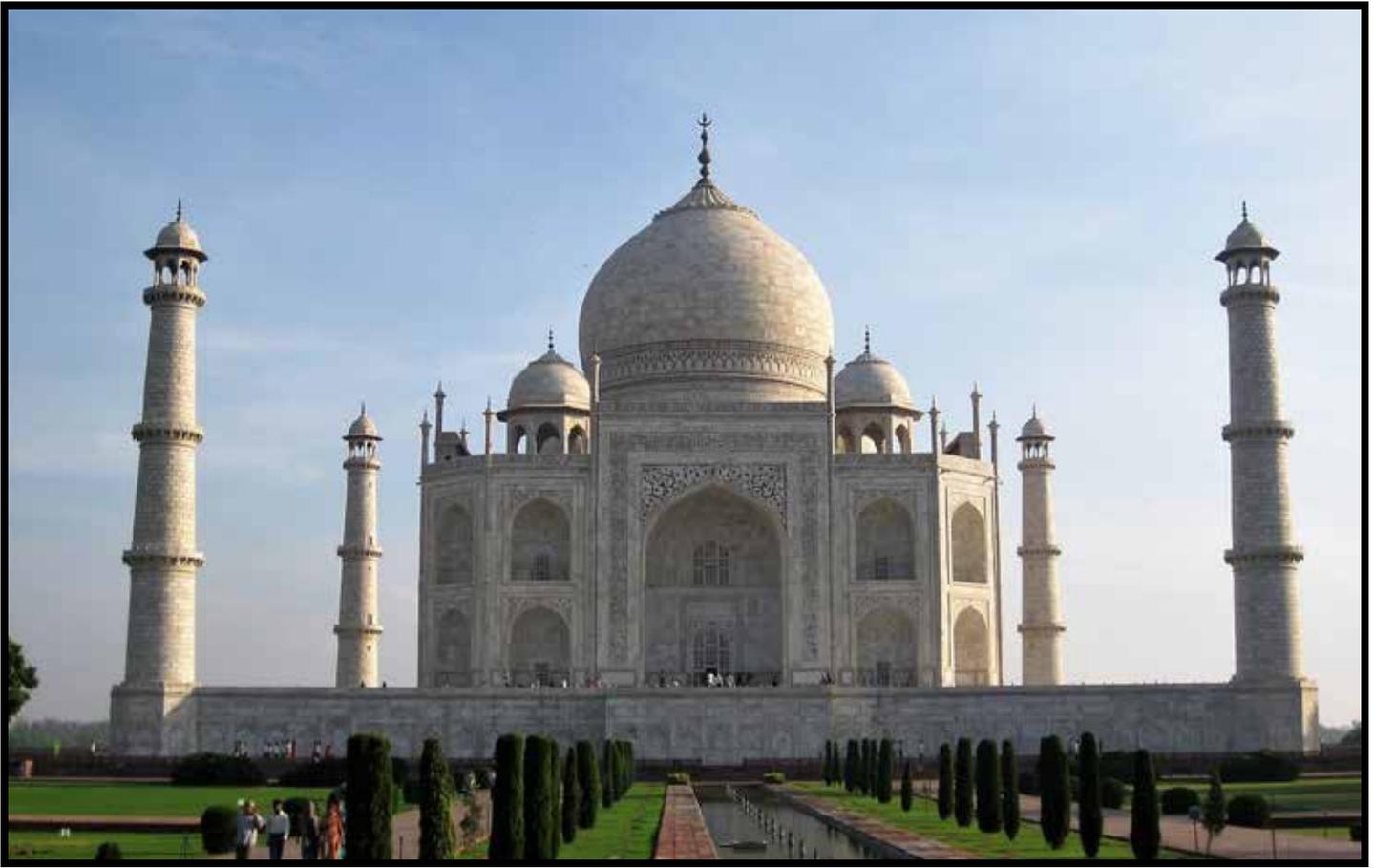
It was not long, however, before Emperor Jahangir took interest in Itimad-al-Daula's widowed daughter Mihrunnisa, and married her in 1611. She would later be designated as *Nur Jahan*, "the light of the world." Itimad-al-Daula was restored to honor and appointed *wazir*, and his son Asaf Khan was made Chief Steward of the Royal Household. With her aunt, grandfather and father in positions of considerable power and influence, Arjumand's path to marriage was clear. In May 1612, five years after her betrothal to Prince Khurram, she was wed to him, and known thereafter as *Mumtaz Mahal*, "the chosen one (or "ornament") of the Palace." The following year, Mumtaz gave birth to the first of the fourteen children she would bear Prince Khurram, whom

the emperor would name *Shah Jahan*, "the king of the world," in recognition of his brilliant successes as military commander. Seven of the children would survive to adulthood.

As the niece of the empress Nur Jahan and the wife



**Painting of Mumtaz,
attributed to Bishn Das, 1631-3 (British Library)**



The Taj Mahal.

of Prince Shah Jahan, Mumtaz enjoyed an exalted status at court. Nur Jahan exerted tremendous administrative and political influence as the wife of Jahangir, and Shah Jahan enjoyed his father's favor above that of his two older brothers – at least for a time. In spite of her virtually annual pregnancies, Mumtaz accompanied Shah Jahan on several of the military campaigns he conducted on behalf of the emperor. Their absence from court, however, provided an opportunity for Nur Jahan to conspire against the growing influence of Shah Jahan, and promote his younger brother Shahriyar. In 1622, when Shah Jahan was at Burhanpur, at the southern reaches of the empire, Jahangir ordered him to lead a campaign against the Safavid Empire in distant Kandahar (present-day Afghanistan). Shah Jahan sensed a plot to replace him as heir-presumptive and rebelled against his father's rule.

For the next six years, Shah Jahan was a fugitive prince, traversing the length and breadth of the Mughal Empire with his troops seeking allies, engaging in battles with imperial forces, and fleeing to avoid capture. At his side, throughout these many difficult years was Mumtaz Mahal, still bearing and rearing children, and separated from her parents. By the spring of 1625, Shah Jahan, facing the inevitability of defeat by imperial forces, sought

reconciliation with his estranged father. Jahangir's terms were unequivocal: Shah Jahan would remain in the Deccan as regional governor, far from the imperial capitals at Agra and Lahore, *and* he demanded that Shah Jahan surrender his sons - Dara Shikoh (age 10), Shah Shuja (age 9) and Aurangzeb (age 7) - as proof of the rebel prince's sincerity. Mumtaz had only recently given birth to their twelfth child, Prince Murad-Bakhsh, but we can only imagine the couple's reaction to the emperor's demand and the subsequent separation from their sons. It would be nearly three years before Mumtaz and Shah Jahan saw them again.

Shah Jahan never again saw his father, however, for the emperor died in November 1627 en route from Kashmir to Lahore. Mumtaz's father, Asaf Khan, quickly dispatched a messenger to Shah Jahan, urging him to proceed to Agra as quickly as possible in order to claim the throne. At Shah Jahan's urging, Asaf Khan executed Shah Jahan's remaining brother Shahriyar (supported by Nur Jahan) and any nephews who might claim the throne. Asaf Khan also removed his sister Nur Jahan from power as empress, a position now to be occupied by his daughter Mumtaz. Nur Jahan would remain in Lahore until her death in 1645.

On February 14, 1628, Shah Jahan formally ascended

the throne in Agra with Mumtaz as his chief consort. A few weeks later, they were reunited with their sons whom Asaf Khan had brought from Lahore. Mumtaz was also reunited with her own parents whom she had not seen in some six years. Although their years as political refugees were now behind them, the royal couple did not enjoy a carefree existence. They would grieve the death of two more of their children (ages 7 and 1) in the spring of 1628. Their twelfth child born that same year died a year later (May 1629).

As with other royal Mughal women, we have evidence that Mumtaz did more than bear and rear children, but was involved in administrative matters as well. An edict issued in her name and bearing her seal in September 1629 demanded that a local ruler who had been deprived of his office be restored to that position. Moreover, the court chronicles indicate that several people who were guilty of capital crimes “and who deserved to be put to death, got their release through her intercession.”

In March 1630, the royal family travelled to Burhanpur, the fortress palace on the River Tapti, five hundred miles south of Agra, so that Shah Jahan could better direct a military campaign underway further south in the Deccan. Although now a hollow ruin, it was quite an opulent and comfortable residence in Mumtaz’s day. A month after arriving at Burhanpur, Mumtaz delivered her thirteenth child but the baby did not survive. A year

later, still at Burhanpur, she was again pregnant. On the evening of June 16, 1631 she went into labor and delivered their fourteenth child, Princess Gauhar Ara Begam, who would live a long life - a fate that Mumtaz was not to enjoy. In the early morning hours of June 17, after summoning Shah Jahan to her bedside, Mumtaz Mahal “passed on to the mercy of God.” She was 38 years old and had been married to Shah Jahan for half of those years. Seven children survived her: three girls and four boys ranging in age from 17 years to hours old.

Several of the royal chronicles poignantly describe the profound grief Shah Jahan experienced at his wife’s passing. For a week he did not show himself to his subjects, and when he did, his beard had whitened “due to the excess of affliction and pain on account of this soul-consuming event.” He wept so profusely that he would thereafter need spectacles to see clearly, and for years after he would involuntarily break into tears. As many as five years later, he bypassed Burhanpur when travelling through the area “on account of the fact that the inevitable event of Her late Majesty the Empress had taken place there.”

As her death had not been anticipated and no funerary monument prepared, Mumtaz was temporarily buried in a walled garden across the river from the Burhanpur fortress, her grave marked perhaps by the small pavilion that survives today. Having “poured oceans of pearls of



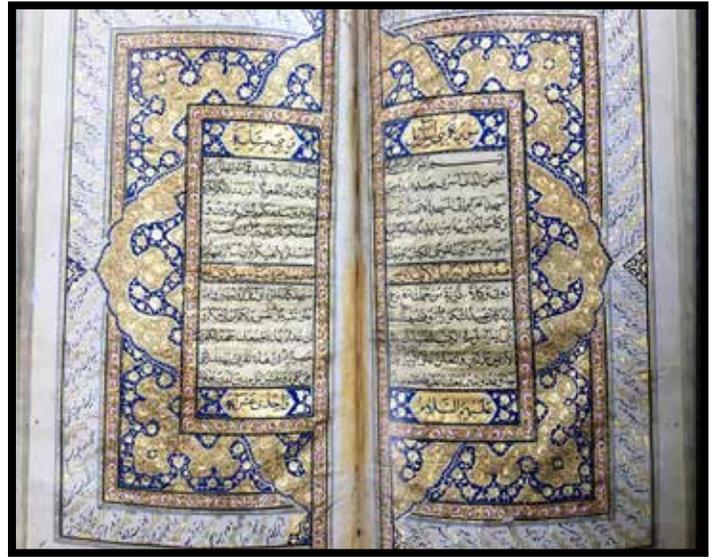
The fortress-palace of Burhanpur.

tears on that holy grave” when she was interred, Shah Jahan returned to her grave every Friday, crossing the river under the veil of night, in order to recite *al-Fatiha* (the first *sūra* of the Qur’an) on her behalf. In spite of the ongoing military campaign in the Deccan, Shah Jahan must have immediately begun planning her funerary monument in Agra because six months after her death, he had her body removed from its burial place and taken to Agra – a month-long journey – where the “Illumined Tomb,” today known as the Taj Mahal was already in its planning stages. Shah Jahan himself arrived back in Agra in June 1632 in time to commemorate the first anniversary (*‘urs*) of her death. For many years after, Shah Jahan annually commemorated her death with gatherings of religious figures and courtiers, recitation of the Qur’an, prayers and distribution of alms. By the twelfth anniversary of her death, in 1643, the funerary complex was substantially complete, the finest sepulcher in all of South Asia and arguably in the world.

Even before the completion of the Taj complex, Shah Jahan had resolved to move the seat of the government to Delhi (Shahjahanabad). Although his move may have been motivated by practicality, it also possible that the Taj Mahal - clearly visible from the Agra Fort and palace - was a constant and painful reminder of Mumtaz’ death. Ironically, he would spend the last eight years of his life gazing upon that very monument, but not by choice. In 1658, Shah Jahan became ill and returned to Agra. Believing his death to be imminent, his sons made competing claims to the throne and a war of succession ensued. Shah Jahan, who had favored Dara Shikoh, the eldest son, was removed from power by his third son, Aurangzeb, and confined to a section of Agra Fort. From his living quarters, Shah Jahan had a clear view of Mumtaz’ final resting place just two kilometers in the distance. No doubt he expressed relief that his wife had not lived to her see her sons at war with one another.

It was not only the Taj Mahal by which Mumtaz was remembered. In May 1659 – twenty-eight years after her death – someone inscribed an ornately illuminated Qur’an indicating that it was formerly used for recitations “in the presence of the empress of the world, Mumtaz Mahal, known as Taj Bibi (Lady Taj).” The Qur’an’s inscription also indicates that she “bestowed it upon her beloved son (Dara Shikoh) with special pleasure” because he greatly admired it. Dara Shikoh had a particular penchant for spiritual matters as a young boy, was later initiated into the Sufi Qadiri order, and wrote spiritual treatises including one on beliefs shared by Islam and Hinduism. Just a few months after the Qur’an was inscribed, Dara Shikoh was captured by his brother Aurangzeb and executed in Delhi. Shah Jahan received the second most devastating blow of his life.

During his eight years under house arrest, Shah



The Qur’an Mumtaz gave to her son Dara Shikoh (Khalili Collection, London)

Jahan’s eldest daughter, Jahanara, cared for her father just as she had tended to her mother during her final hours at Burhanpur. She would have comforted him over her brother’s death as she had comforted him when Mumtaz had passed away. When Shah Jahan died at the end of January 1666, it was Jahanara who arranged for his body to be prepared for burial, and transported by river to Taj Mahal. There she quietly laid him to rest beside that of her mother in the mausoleum’s crypt, the royal couple reunited at last.

Recommended Reading:

- Michael H. Fisher, *A Short History of the Mughal Empire*. I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- J.P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire*. British Library, 2013.
- Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal and Riverfront Gardens of Agra*. Thames & Hudson, 2012.



The first burial place of Mumtaz near Burhanpur.

Hijabs and Headscarves

by Amina Golden-Arabaty

Women in Islam, headscarf (hijab) and oppression are all words that are seemingly synonymous and yet some of the most misunderstood. In an effort to spread the knowledge of our culture myself, Amina Golden-Arabaty, Muslim Students & Allies (MSA) Club President at St. Bonaventure University, and Zayba Chauhdry, Senior at Olean High school (OHS), have taken it upon ourselves to help combat these misunderstandings.

For the first time, women across the St. Bonaventure campus, in addition to OHS students, were given the opportunity to ask, converse, wear and ultimately (and even indirectly) learn about the Hijab and its role within the life of Muslim women. The opportunity that has presented to, not only myself as a Muslim, but to the community as a whole, I will admit has been a little overwhelming. The outpouring of support from my fellow students, professors, administration as well as people I've never met took me for surprise and has enforced my faith and strength in our community.

Attending a Catholic Franciscan University, I will admit I wasn't sure how the event would be received but my doubts were quickly eliminated and so were the scarves. MSA, with the help of all involved, purchased 45 scarves to give away at the event, which at the time seemed too much and I was nervous that too many were purchased. The event, however, which was supposed to last at least 3 hours was forced to conclude over half-way through because we used up each and every one of the scarves.

While this particular event concentrated focus on women (because of the hijab aspect), little "fun facts" about Islam were handed out to observers as well as posters on the table with a colorful display of information for anyone passing by to read. We even received responses from men

who came to show their support and asked to take a picture with scarves around their neck. Seeing the dining hall at St. Bonaventure swarmed with interested and engaged students, faculty, staff and alumni, (men and women alike) was very endearing.

Even with the overwhelming positive and reinforcing responses, negative responses are unfortunate but usually inevitable. Some speculated the event could be categorized as cultural appropriation however, the wonderful thing was that this event opened the floor for dialogue and discussion in a comfortable and facilitated environment—anyone who came to the table with confused and angry eyes left with their questions answered, misconception cleared and smiles on their faces.

I mentioned earlier indirect learning occurred on that day because I was astonished by the feedback I received days later from participants. They had explained to me their experiences while wearing the hijab all day, and how they have come to understand what it's like to be a covered (hijabi) women in our society—which was the ultimate goal.

In addition to the event held and supported by St. Bonaventure, Chauhdry hoped for a similar effect when she spearheaded her stand for solidarity on "World Hijab day." About 30 OHS students and several teachers wore a hijab to school. While the school administration gave Chauhdry permission to spread the word and ask for participation, it was not a school-sponsored event. To Chauhdry's knowledge, OHS has only five practicing Muslim students, none of which wear hijab regularly and "some students simply wanted to know what a hijab was," she said. Chauhdry said she only expected a few girls to participate in the event, but that her heart was "filled with joy" when she saw her music teacher wearing a headscarf.

Opportunities like these are not common, and that is part of the problem. Due to our human instinct, we tend to fear what we do not know and without having the opportunity to walk in someone else's shoes (or in this case, their hijab), widens the gap in our society and fills it with fear. It has not only been a privilege but an honor to be a part of this and because of the incredible support and voiced interest, any event that facilitates necessary dialogue, peace and understanding can be anticipated in the future.

This piece originally appeared in the Olean Times Herald



Promoting understanding of the hijab

From the Bookshelf:

The Sultan and the Queen: The Untold Story of Elizabeth and Islam by Jerry Brotton. Viking, 2016. by Alex Von Tunzelmann. Harper, 2016

Reviewed by Jason Sparkes

In 1601, Queen Elizabeth of England issued a proclamation expelling “negroes and blackamoors” from her realm. This portrayal of dark-skinned foreigners as dangerous had a clearly religious dimension, specifying that “most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel” (p. 270). Significantly, this proclamation coincided with the first Moroccan diplomatic delegation to England.

In the age of Trump, we might interpret the Queen’s executive order, banning Muslims and other dark-skinned foreigners, as proof of an ongoing clash between the white West and the dark Rest. But Jerry Brotton sees things differently. This professor of Renaissance Studies at the University of London situates Elizabeth’s proclamation in the broader context of an unprecedented rapprochement between England and the Islamic world. Brotton explains that as Elizabeth faced economic and political troubles domestically, “her immediate response was that of political leaders since time immemorial when faced with a crisis: attack economic immigrants, refugees fleeing persecution and ‘aliens,’ even though in this case it made little sense considering the commercial benefits of her long-standing alliance with Morocco” (p. 270). Elizabeth’s response to a domestic crisis contradicted her long-term foreign policy strategy of forging alliances with Muslim leaders in Morocco, the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Brotton tells the story behind this xenophobic proclamation. He describes how English society had come into close enough contact with Muslims to feel threatened. Indeed, it is worth exploring the conditions which led the first Moroccan Embassy to travel all the way to London in the first place.

The Sultan and the Queen examines the subtleties, ambivalence, tensions and complexities of Anglo-Islamic relations under Elizabeth. When the Queen began to seek alliances with Muslim rulers, the Ottoman Empire was the strongest military force in the Mediterranean, and England was an isolated Protestant kingdom on the margins of Catholic Europe. The English language had

yet to incorporate terms like “Muslim” or “Islam.” Elizabethans spoke instead of “Mahometans,” “Persians,” “Moors,” “Pagans,” “Turks” and other vaguely identified heretic peoples (p. 5). However, most Catholics saw Protestantism as just another such heresy. By forging alliances with Muslim rulers, Elizabeth provoked genuine horror in Catholic Europe. In places like Spain, France and Venice, this Anglo-Islamic alliance was seen

as an existential threat. Yet, always one to embrace complexity, Brotton reminds us that these Catholic powers had their own trade deals and diplomatic relations with Muslim rulers, and that neither Elizabeth nor most of her subjects were lovers of Islam. As English diplomats, sailors and merchants traveled and established themselves throughout Islamic lands, Elizabethans were alarmed to see several of their compatriots convert to Islam while attempts to evangelize Muslims bore little fruit. And they were uneasy with the cultural impact within England of these new foreign alliances

At the end of the sixteenth century, North Africans and Turks made a dramatic entrance into English culture. They were generally portrayed in literature, painting, performing arts and religious sermons as merely negative reflections of the “good” Christian self. Yet, despite these negative views Elizabethans were also fascinated by Muslims. As Anglo-Islamic trade flourished, the English lexicon expanded thanks to new words of foreign origin, like “candy,” “crimson,” “indigo,” “tulip,” and “zero” (p. 5). Members of the English upper and middle



Jason Sparkes is a doctoral student in Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University.

classes delighted in spices, sugar, embroidery, tapestry, carpets, jewels, and textiles from Persia, the Ottoman Empire and Morocco. English arts and crafts integrated Turkish elements while the textile industry imported wool, cotton and silk from abroad. Moreover, a new form of drama emerged in London, which explored the encounter between Elizabethans and Muslims. Despite the persistence of Orientalist stereotypes in English theater, playwrights like Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare also depicted Muslim characters as complex individuals. Brotton's lengthy discussion of theatrical works, woven into nearly every chapter, is one of this book's major strengths. It reveals a range of feelings within Elizabethan society towards Muslims, including anxiety, mistrust, theological condemnation, and willingness to interact for pragmatic purposes.

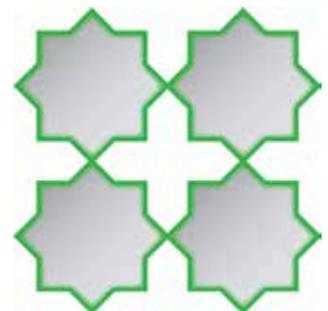
Inevitably, by weaving into a coherent narrative an extraordinary number of events taking place in many continents and over several decades, Brotton's analysis is uneven. For example, his nuanced understanding of Elizabethan theater contrasts with his superficial grasp of Islamic theology. On page 19, he writes that Islam rejects holy intercessors, perhaps unwittingly corroborating a minority position in an ongoing theological debate about the Islamic doctrine of intercession (tawassul in Arabic). Also, he writes of "Islam's official injunction against figurative images" (p. 267) without acknowledging the rich Islamic tradition of figurative arts or the historical debate among Muslim scholars surrounding this question. But we should not fault Brotton for being more knowledgeable of England than the Islamic world. Like any scholar, he has areas of expertise. And this book on how Elizabethans interacted with Muslims is primarily about English history.

Brotton successfully corrects the common misperception of Tudor historians depicting Elizabethan England as existing in "splendid isolation from the rest of the world" (p. 10). He convincingly argues that Elizabethan engagement with Muslims was

exceptional. On the one hand, it was unprecedented; on the other it was short-lived. Queen Elizabeth's successor did not pursue her political alliances with the Islamic world. Intent on ending England's diplomatic isolation in Europe, King James I ended 19 years of English war with Spain by signing the Treaty of London in 1604. Trade continued with the Ottoman Empire and further east into India, but political and military alliances beyond Christian Europe were no longer on the agenda. English foreign policy now prioritized reconciliation with Christian kingdoms and colonial expansion into North America. At the same time, the Ottomans slowly disengaged from Western Europe throughout the seventeenth century, to focus on their conflict with Persia.

The Queen and the Sultan reveals how obstinately complicated history is despite our simplified narratives. We should bear this in mind when analyzing more recent events. Take for example the dominant notion that Barack Obama was tough on Israel and that Donald Trump is tough on Muslims. Certain facts complicate this story. For instance, in September 2016, Obama allotted Israel the largest military aid package in American history, worth \$38 billion over ten years. And in May 2017, Trump signed a major arms deal with Saudi Arabia, a country he had previously accused of masterminding the 9/11 terror attacks. Worth \$110 billion and predicted to expand to approximately \$380 billion within a decade, this was the largest arms sale in American history. Does this mean that Trump secretly loves Islam and that Obama is Israel's best friend? No. But it does tell us that people tend to have complicated and even contradictory positions on any given topic. And while it is useful to take a bird's-eye view of history to discover dominant trends and recurring patterns, we must never lose sight of how messy life is on the ground level. Brotton teaches us that while Muslim bans and xenophobia are nothing new, neither is the building of friendly alliances between people of different cultural and religious heritages.

To stay up to date with everything happening at the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, visit us online at www.sbu.edu/CAIS



Dialogue in Delhi

by Amina Golden-Arabaty

In July of 2017, the Interfaith Coalition for Peace organized a talk at the India Islamic Cultural Center) in New Delhi, India. Lecturing there on “Pope Francis and Muslims” was St. Bonaventure’s Director for the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS), Fr. Michael Calabria, O.F.M., Ph. D who spoke on, Pope Francis, Islam, St. Francis, Muslims and most importantly, how they all connect.

The 266th and current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church is known and loved because of his constant and sincere devotion to spreading peace and love across the world. With his Papal inauguration in March of 2013, he chose the name ‘Francis,’ inspired by St. Francis of Assisi. Fr. Michael spoke of how Pope Francis not only shares a name with this humble Saint, but that his exemplary work within the last four years, particularly his interfaith initiatives have been nothing but progressive, encompassing, and sometimes even a little controversial but not unlike those of his namesake.

During Holy week in 2013 (and again in 2016), Pope Francis included women and Muslims among those whose feet he washed—this was a first. Additionally, when in September of 2015 when the pope visited ‘Ground Zero’ in New York City, he was accompanied by a Muslim imam and a Jewish rabbi. Then, later that year when asked why he was meeting with the Imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo, he responded saying that the meeting itself was his message. He has also rejects the term ‘Islamic terrorism’ because people of other father perpetrate violence.

Moreover, Fr. Michael shared the famous story of the historical encounter that occurred in Damietta, Egypt in 1219 between St. Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. The encounter is iconic today because of the interfaith/interreligious dialogue that was believed to have occurred. While

their time together was brief, it was an encounter of deep mutual respect.

While reflecting on his experience in India this past summer, Fr Michael said, “it was particularly poignant for me as a Franciscan to speak to a largely Indian audience of Muslims, Christians and Hindus at a time when there are serious religious and political divisions in India that ironically parallel those in the US. In India, however, it is the rise of Hindu extremism that has resulted in violence against Muslims and Christians. This has largely gone unreported in the West. Yet, as the world’s largest secular democracy, the future of religious pluralism in India is vitally important for the world.” This is why, in a similar way, the CAIS helps to provide many opportunities for students and locals to experience diversity through the variety of courses offered, programs hosted and and events held nationally and internationally, such as this one.



Fr. Michael in Delhi

CAIS Reaches Out . . .

Locally, Nationally and Internationally!

In addition to its courses and programs on the St. Bonaventure campus, CAIS is represented at many local, national and international events. In the past several months, these have included:

Loudonville, NY

June 5, 2017, Siena College, Holy Name Province, Provincial Chapter: "Islam: What ISIS Doesn't Want You to Know."

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD, presenter

New Delhi, India

July 17, 2017, India Islamic Cultural Center: "Pope Francis and Muslims."

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD presenter

Rochester, NY

August 1, 2017, Nazareth College, Sacred Texts and Human Contexts Conference: Women and Gender in in Religions: "By the Book: Women as Calligraphers and Patrons of the Qur'an."

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD, presenter

St. Bonaventure, NY

August 30, 2017, "Hajj: the Pilgrimage to Mecca," an all-day showing of Nat Geo's "Inside Mecca" to coincide with the annual observance of the Hajj.

September 14, 2017, "8 Borders, 8 Days," (film presentation and panel co-sponsored with *Citizens Action Network of Southwestern New York and St. Bonaventure College Democrats*).

Panel discussion: Dr. Tahir Chaudhry, MD; Dr. Ibrahim Zabad (Political Science, SBU); and Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD

Allegany, NY

September 20, 2017, St. Elizabeth Motherhouse, Franciscan Sisters of Allegany: "Common Ground" What Catholics and Muslims Share."

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, presenter

Aston, PA

September 22-23 2017, Franciscan Spiritual Center: "Doing What is Beautiful: the Spirituality of Islamic Art"

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, presenter

Interfaith Prayer Service Kicks Off Francis Week

by Emily Losito

The McGinley-Carney Center for Franciscan Ministries has a distinguishing feature – the Interfaith Prayer Tower. University Ministries and The Center for Arab and Islamic Studies hosted an Interfaith Prayer Service to mark the beginning of Francis Week in the great room.

Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, welcomed all religious people with different phrases like “a salaam u aleikum,” “namaste” and “peace be with you.”

“This is the first time we’ve had an Interfaith Prayer Service as part of Francis Week. It’s important to bring all faiths and celebrations to this week,”

Fr. Michael said. “[St.] Francis’ vision informs everything we do on this campus.”

Five candles stood on the large table at the front of the room behind statues, books and other religious items to represent Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Native American practices.

Students, including Keshav Seetharaman, Anna Aylward, Keegan Miller, Jordan Golden-Arabaty and Haylei John, read from the Bagavad Gita, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Qu’ran and a reading from the Native American Chief Seattle.

Prior to the readings, the students lit the candles for the respective readings.

Fr. Francis Di Spigno, OFM, said, “[These readings are] an enrichment to who we are at Bonaventure.”

“Candles lit signify the different religions resembling the light we all share as a campus, a country and a planet,” Fr. Michael said during the service opening.

During the service, Fr. Michael said praying with people from other religions isn’t easy, but we should all respect the differences and learn to accept those differences.

“It’s so appropriate that we do this on a Franciscan campus, to encourage respectful and meaningful dialogue as Franciscans,” Fr. Michael said. “We didn’t want to hold this in the chapel because we didn’t want [people of other religions] to feel like we weren’t inviting them. We wanted everyone to take part in this on neutral ground.”

Paul Boyd, a freshman biology major, said he enjoyed the service and the inclusion of the Native American faith.

“As a Boy Scout, I’ve had experience in these mixed faith prayer services,” Boyd said. “It’s always good to see people of different faiths come together.”

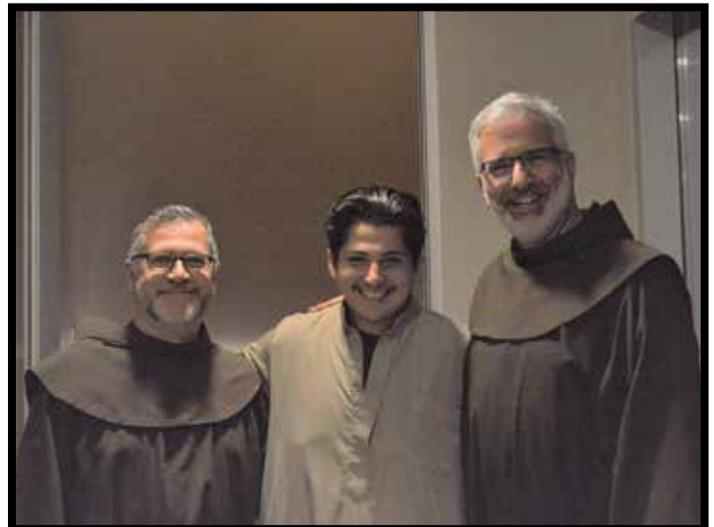
Fr. Michael said he wanted the service to represent the religions he knew were present on campus.

“Where we live is home of the Seneca nation,” Fr. Michael said. “There are very deep roots here that are of the Native American tradition.”

More campus Interfaith Prayer Services are in the works.

“We want this to be more regular and not just because of Francis Week,” Fr. Michael said. “This isn’t just a Catholic thing. We want these services to be for everyone.”

This piece originally appeared in The Bona Venture.



From left: Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD (CAIS), Bonaventure student Jordan Golden-Arabaty and Fr. Francis DiSpigno, OFM, executive director of University Ministries

Courses in Arab and Islamic Studies: Spring 2018

History of the Modern Middle East (HIST 365) – Fr. Michael Calabria

Tuesdays & Thursdays 8:30-9:45am

This course treats the emergence of the modern Middle East, focusing on the period from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 until the present day. It will address the impact of European colonialism, reformist attempts to meet this challenge, the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of nationalism, Zionism, pan-Arabism, and Islamism. Particular attention will be given to American involvement in the Middle East since the mid-20th century.

Women and Gender in the Ancient & Modern Middle East (WS 330) – Fr. Michael Calabria

Tuesdays & Thursdays 10-11:15am

A survey of the social position of women in selected areas of the Ancient and Modern Middle East from prehistory to the present day through various sources and disciplines including: history, biography, art, archeology, law, literature, politics and religion.

Middle Eastern Politics (POLS 396) –Dr. Ibrahim Zabad (Political Science)

Tuesdays & Thursdays 10-11:15

This course offers students an overview of contemporary Middle Eastern politics and focuses on the period starting from the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the present. The course will highlight the historical, political and economic roots of contemporary events. Class discussions will cover the emergence of the modern state system in the Middle East and the role colonialism and nationalism played in its development, the growth of civil society and social movements, the politics of religion, particularly the rise of various violent and non-violent forms of Islamic fundamentalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab Revolutions (Arab Spring) and the fate of ethnic and religious minorities in the wake of the region's upheavals.

Continuation Courses

Elementary Arabic (ARBC 102) – Ms. Dea Hart (Modern Languages)

Intermediate Arabic (ARBC 202) – Ms. Dea Hart (Modern Languages)

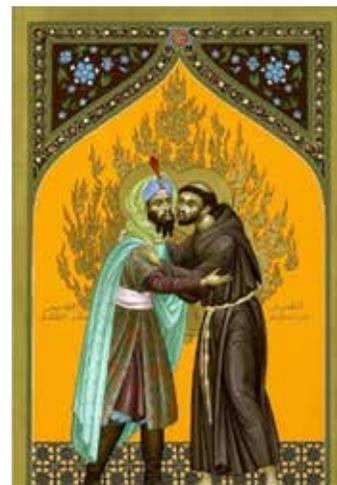
The Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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



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

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16-winter-Cntr Islam

Mission of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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