

Nūr (‘‘Light’’) نور

The Newsletter of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

From the Director’s Desk

A few weeks before this issue of *Nūr* went to press, President Trump signed an executive order that bans *all individuals* from seven countries in the Middle East, predominantly Muslim, from entering the United States. As the Founding Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, Franciscan friar, and proud American, I deeply regret the President’s decision. I hope this issue of *Nūr* demonstrates a few reasons why.

This issue opens with the address that President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave at the opening of the Islamic Center of Washington, DC in 1957. After sixty years, it remains a timely and eloquent reminder of American inclusion and diversity in stark contrast to the current climate of exclusion and xenophobia. There is an interview with Dr. ‘Adil al-Humadi, MD, an Iraqi-American, whose life in the United States exemplifies the ‘‘American dream.’’ His inspirational story is a poignant reminder that under the current executive order, individuals like Dr. al-Humadi are prevented from entering the US, prevented from achieving their educational and professional goals that this ‘‘land of opportunity’’ once offered to all. The American Muslim community is also highlighted by an article on the Muslim Student association at St. Bonaventure University.

President Eisenhower figures again in the review of *Blood and Sand*, a new book on the Suez War of 1956 with important lessons for today’s world. This issue also contains a review of Shahab Ahmed’s groundbreaking book with the deceptively simple title: *What is Islam? - The Importance of Being Islamic*.

Not far from the Oval Office, the Freer/Sackler Galleries of the Smithsonian Institution featured a dazzling exhibit this fall and winter, *The Art of the Qur’an*, reviewed below. Although the majority of the Qur’ans on exhibit come from the collection of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, many of these masterpieces of calligraphy were produced over the centuries by artists from Syria, Iraq and

Iran — countries whose entire citizenries are now banned from the US by the recent executive order.

An exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is also reviewed below. *Jerusalem, 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven* documented the various cultural and religious traditions — Jewish, Christian and Muslim — that enriched and enlivened the medieval city of Jerusalem. Through the artifacts on display, viewers were brought into the world of Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil whose encounter in 1219 is the subject of a new film that was shown at St. Bonaventure University on February 1. As detailed below, *The Sultan and the Saint* drew upon the expertise of several members of the St. Bonaventure community.

Finally, there is a report on the first meeting of the Special Commission on Dialogue with Islam. Created in 2016 by the Franciscan Curia in Rome, the purpose of the Commission is to encourage and assist friars and other members of the Franciscan family in establishing relations with Muslim communities for the purposes of genuine friendship, and promoting common concerns of peace and justice. Peace and justice — they are inseparable.

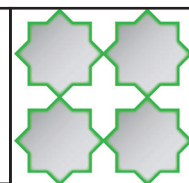
Fr. Michael D. Calabria, OFM
Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

السلام عليكم

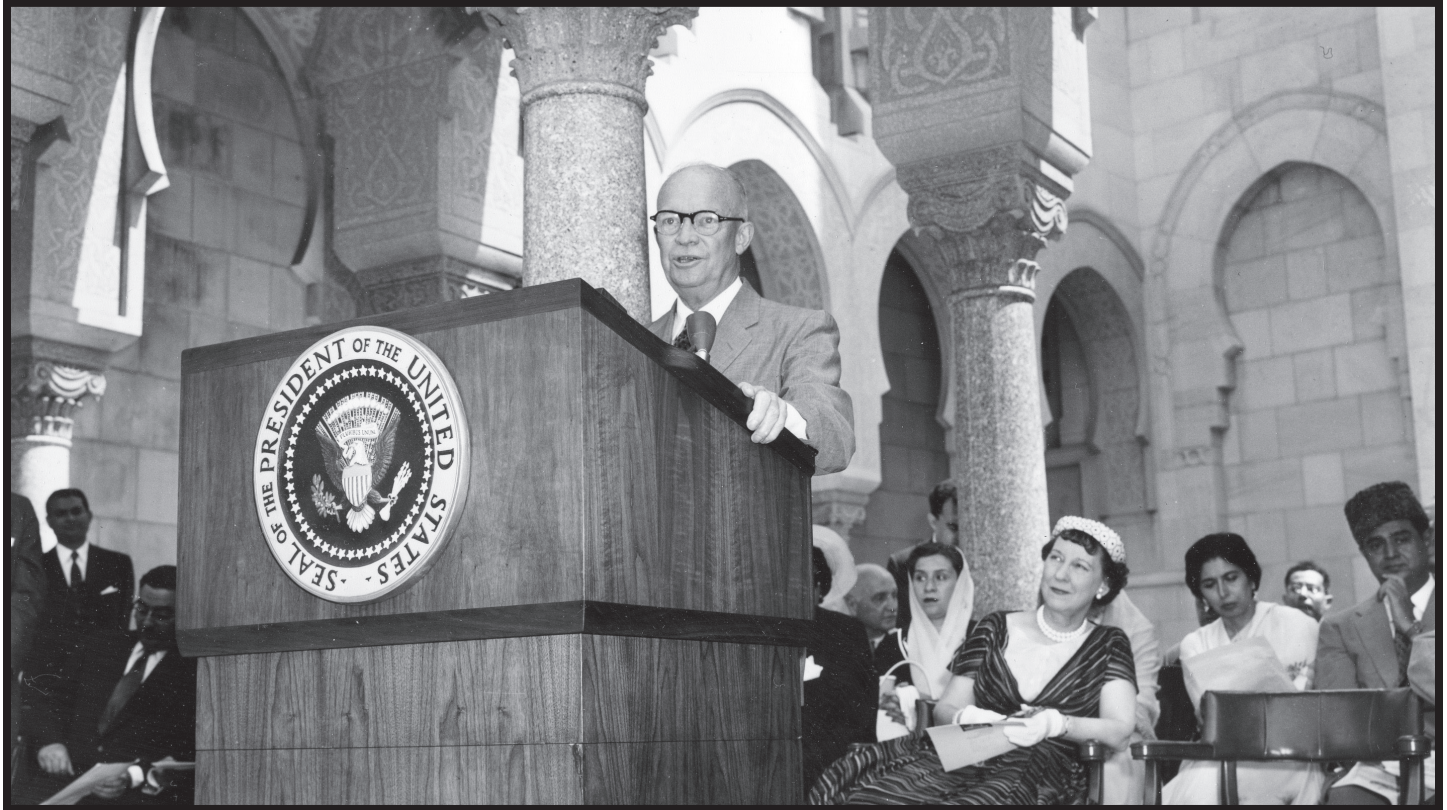


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President Eisenhower's 1957 Speech at the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C.



Plans to establish a mosque in Washington, D.C. were first conceived in 1945 when the Turkish ambassador to the U.S., Mehmet Munir Eretgun, died suddenly. At the time, there was yet no mosque in the nation's capital in which to hold prayers in spite of the presence of many Muslim diplomats as well as local residents. Two men in particular are credited with realizing those plans: Egyptian envoy Mahmud Hassan and contractor Abraham Joseph Howar, a Palestinian Muslim who immigrated to the US in 1904. Howar (born Muhammad 'Issa Abu-l Hawa) is an American success story who worked his way up from textile merchant to business owner and contractor. Construction on the mosque began at the site in Embassy Row on Massachusetts Avenue in 1949, and the mosque was dedicated on June 28, 1957 with President Dwight D. Eisenhower presiding.

Mr. Ambassador, Dr. Bisar, Governors of the Islamic Center, and distinguished guests: It is a privilege to take

part in this ceremony of dedication. Meeting with you now, in front of one of the newest and most beautiful buildings in Washington, it is fitting that we re-dedicate ourselves to the peaceful progress of all men under one God.

And I should like to assure you, my Islamic friends, that under the American Constitution, under American tradition, and in American hearts, this Center, this place of worship, is just as welcome as could be a similar edifice of any other religion. Indeed, America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church [sic] and worship according to your own conscience.

This concept is indeed a part of America, and without that concept we would be something else than what we are. The countries, which have sponsored and built this Islamic Center have for centuries contributed to the building of civilization. With their traditions of learning and rich culture, the countries of Islam have added much to the advancement of mankind. Inspired

by a sense of brotherhood, common to our inner most beliefs, we can here together reaffirm our determination to secure the foundation of a just and lasting peace.

Our country has long enjoyed a strong bond of friendship with the Islamic nations and, like all healthy relationships, this relationship must be mutually beneficial. Civilization owes to the Islamic world some of its most important tools and achievements. From fundamental discoveries in medicine to the highest planes of astronomy, the Muslim genius has added much to the culture of all peoples. That genius has been a wellspring of science, commerce and the arts, and has provided for all of us many lessons in courage and in hospitality.

This fruitful relationship between peoples, going far back into history, becomes more important each year. Today, thousands of Americans, both private individuals and governmental officials, live and work — and grow in understanding - among the peoples of Islam.

At the same time, in our country, many from the Muslim lands — students, businessmen and representatives of states — are enjoying the benefits

of experience among the people of this country. From these many personal contacts, here and abroad, I firmly believe that there will be a broader understanding and a deeper respect for the worth of all men; and a stronger resolution to work together for the good of mankind.

As I stand beneath these graceful arches, surrounded on every side by friends from far and near, I am convinced that our common goals are both right and promising. Faithful to the demands of justice and of brotherhood, each working according to the lights of his own conscience, our world must advance along the paths of peace.

Guided by this hope, I consider it a great personal and official honor to open the Islamic Center, and I offer my congratulations to its sponsors and my best wishes to all who enter into its use.

Thank you very much.

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The Islamic Center of Washington, D.C.

An Interview with Dr. Adil al-Humadi

By Michael D. Calabria, O.F.M.



Dr. al-Humadi and Fr. Michael Calabria examine a rare Qur'an in the Friedsam Library's Special Collection

Dr. Adil al-Humadi, MD, is a distinguished member of New York's Southern Tier medical community through whose generosity, and that of his son Dr. Mohaned al-Humadi, the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies was founded at St. Bonaventure University in 2015. Dr. al-Humadi is also a prominent member of the Southern Tier's Muslim community. In September 2016, in the midst of the presidential campaign, an article in the Olean Times Herald featured Dr. al-Humadi (9/30/2016). Now after the election, I asked him about his life in the United States that spans almost fifty years, and his thoughts about the new presidential administration.

CALABRIA: When did you come to the United States and why?

DR: I came to the United States in 1968 to specialize and for post-graduate study in the field of medicine and surgery. It was a big step for a young man, 27

years in age, to leave his family and country to come to a new world, and work and study hard to reach his goal of higher education.

CALABRIA: Were you concerned about going to live in a country with only a very small Muslim population at the time? Were you able to connect with other Muslims?

DR: In my first year when I arrived in New Jersey in 1968, I was very busy in my work; but then, when I moved to Detroit in 1969, I was able to connect with a Muslim community in Livonia, a Detroit suburb, where I enjoyed listening to Imam Jawad Al-Sherri on Sundays. He was a Shia from Lebanon with an open mind and moderate views such that other faith members attended his preaching.

Then I moved to Buffalo in 1972 where my contact with Muslims was minimal again due to my busy

work schedule. When I moved to Olean in 1974, there was only one Muslim family of Dr. Raqib Raja. We did not get organized as a Muslim community until Dr. Zahid Chohan arrived in our area and called for a meeting in 1984 when we formed the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier. The community grew with other members arriving in the area. I also had a good relationship with the Maronite Lebanese community and its priest. We expanded our role in the community by becoming part of an interfaith group later on. Our community grew and flourished over the years, including the establishment of the weekend Arabic-Islamic school to teach our children basic principles of Islam. I was the head of that school for more than 20 years.

CALABRIA: What was your experience in those first years of living in the US as a Muslim? How did non-Muslim Americans treat you?

DR: My early experience living in the states was very good with no noticeable discrimination against me as a Muslim, and most Americans were very supportive and helpful. There were very few incidents of improper comments from a few people, but I was able to handle them gently and be their friend. I was very well liked and respected as a Muslim. I worked very hard and that eventually paid off as I established myself in the community.

CALABRIA: In your opinion, has life in the US changed for Muslim-Americans over the decades you have lived here? What are some of the positives and negatives?

DR: Americans in general have encouraged immigrants to be proud of their religion, and have loved to learn about other people cultures. We used to be proud and happy to have an exchange of ideas over the years. There will always be times when a few narrow-minded individuals write about Islam in a negative way so that we have to respond and explain in kind.

However ever since September 11, things have changed and the opinion about Muslims changed. Every time there is a terrorist act in the name of Islam, the small community in Olean has to put a disclaimer

in the newspaper and voice our disapproval for these actions. It is very demanding and very sad that we have to prove our loyalty to this country.

CALABRIA: As a Muslim-American, do you have concerns about the new presidential administration? If so, what are they?

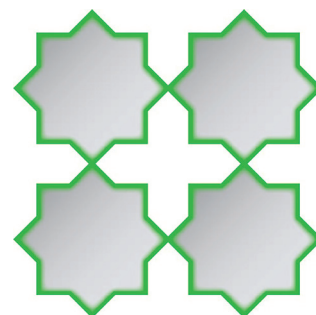
DR: I have great concern about our presidential election of Mr. Donald Trump. His behavior during the campaign is of great concern, not only because of what he said about Muslims, but also about other minority groups, immigrants, the disabled and women. He wants to create a registry for Muslims which is profiling Muslims, and is in itself a very discriminatory type of surveillance that stands against the principle foundation of religious freedom. I hope he will be surrounded by advisors that will give him good advice so that he can be a better president who represents all people with equal rights and no discrimination.

CALABRIA: If you could speak directly to President Trump, what would you say him?

DR: If I were to meet Mr. Trump tomorrow I would greet him with our Muslim salute: *As-salamu 'alaykum* — Peace be upon you! That is the best greeting you can welcome him with as a Muslim, and also as human being. All people are brothers and sisters in humanity, who share the same value of dignity and respect. And I would ask him to familiarize himself with Holy Qur'an and the Muslim culture just like Thomas Jefferson who studied the Holy Qur'an before he drafted the constitution. Americans do not know that most of the human rights addressed in the constitution are similar to what is written in the Qur'an more than 14 centuries ago.

I would ask him to surround himself with people who are familiar with human rights and with Middle Eastern culture and Islam. Also, I would ask him to treat all Muslims equally as good citizen of this country, and not alienate them or destroy their dreams of building their lives in America. I hope that Mr. Trump will make America great again and enrich its people as he has promised.

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Muslim Students and Allies at St. Bonaventure University

By Amina Golden-Arabaty

St. Bonaventure University houses a plethora of clubs—some have been around since the University's founding while others were created in subsequent years by students nurturing a simple idea. This is how MSA began.

The Muslim Students Association, now known as Muslim Students & Allies (MSA), was not an active club a short time ago. The club's former student leadership had graduated, and the club all but ceased to exist. It was eventually resurrected and represented at the club fair in the fall of 2016. After the club's reboot, as the current MSA president, I decided to change the last letter in the acronym from "Association" to "Allies" in an effort to broaden the club's membership and create an inclusive and diverse environment suitable for an academic environment. Fr. Michael Calabria O.F.M., Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, is the current advisor for the newly-resurrected MSA (Muslim Students & Allies) club.

In addition to bi-weekly gatherings, we have collaborated with the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies as well as the Franciscan Institute, and now also gather on Monday afternoons for tea and sweets. Fridays we typically set aside to help the less fortunate in our community

at the student-run soup kitchen, The Warming House, after noonday prayer. This fun and humbling experience was our first (but certainly not last) attempt to give back and help the community. We look forward to continuing working with the Warming House.

Last October, we took a trip to see an exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art on the Mughal Empire. The exhibit, "Art and Stories from Mughal India," focused on the culture of the Empire at its height from the 16th to the 18th century, including history, religion, literature, and fashion. It was an opulent, highly informative and unforgettable exhibit.

Before the end of the spring semester of 2017 we hope to visit other collections of Islamic art including the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, and at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. In addition to planning fun and informative trips, we hope to help out Bona Responds, a campus organization that assists in rebuilding and volunteering both locally and nation-wide. MSA continues to grow and we all look forward to the many good times ahead.



From the Bookshelf:

Blood and Sand: Suez, Hungary, and Eisenhower's Campaign for Peace
by Alex Von Tunzelmann. Harper, 2016

What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic
by Shabab Ahmed. Princeton UP, 2016.

Reviewed by Michael Calabria, O.F.M.

Blood and Sand: Suez, Hungary, and Eisenhower's Campaign for Peace

On Dec. 23, 2016, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2334 in spite of then president-elect Trump's best efforts to stop it. Although the US abstained from voting, the resolution passed 14-0, reaffirming the UN's position that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, have no legal validity, are a flagrant violation of international law, and are a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a comprehensive peace.

Outraged by the US abstention, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the Obama administration of leading the charge against Israel in the UN, remarking: "friends don't take friends to the Security Council." Mr. Netanyahu seems to have ignored reports by the Israeli media that *Britain* - not the US - was largely responsible for initiating the resolution, and that this was not the first time that the US abstained from such votes. The US had abstained from voting on two similar UN resolutions (nos. 446 and 452) in 1979, and actually *voted for* UNSC Resolution 465 in 1980 that "strongly deplored" Israel's continued building of settlements.

Moreover, if Mr. Netanyahu were a better student of history, he would have also remembered that there was an occasion when the US actually *did* take Israel to the Security Council — in November 1956 in a decisive move to end the Suez War and Israel's illegal and occupation of the Sinai. While the General Assembly resolution (997) did not *condemn* Israel, it noted that Israel's invasion of Egypt was in violation of the General Armistice Agreement of 1949, and urged Israel's withdrawal.

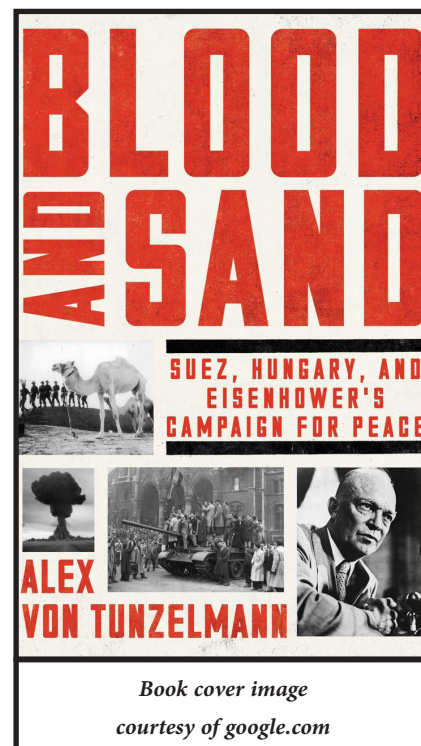
The Suez War is the subject of a compelling and well-documented tome by British author Alex Von Tunzelmann. Although largely forgotten by Americans, there are important lessons to be learned from this war, and ironic parallels to more contemporary conflicts. The basic outline of the Suez War is deceptively simple: in response to Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in July 1956, Britain and France devised a plot whereby Israel would invade the Sinai Peninsula under the

false pretext of stopping cross-border *Fedayeen* raids from Egypt. There were in fact no *Fedayeen* bases in the Sinai, as military commander Ariel Sharon (later PM and founding father of settlements) admitted. Britain and France would then follow the Israelis into Egypt under the pretext of protecting the canal for international shipping and ending the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. Nasser was hated by British Prime Minister Anthony Eden

— "I want him murdered," he told British Minister of State Anthony Nutting - and despised by French Prime Minister Guy Mollet for undermining British and French influence in the Middle East and North Africa. It was their desire that Nasser be driven from power and replaced by a more passive president. With the Egyptian military destroyed, the canal would be returned to British and French control, and the Israelis would have a much-desired share of the Sinai.

Knowing that American President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles would not approve of the scheme, Britain, France and Israel carefully concealed their plan from the US as much as was possible. Just as planned, Israeli forces crossed the border with Egypt on October 29, and advanced across the Sinai, halting just ten miles from the Suez Canal. When British and French land, sea and air forces began bombing Egyptian targets, all pretense of "peacekeeping" evaporated.

Eisenhower was incensed by this thinly veiled attempt by Britain and France to reassert their colonial power in the Middle East, and by Israel's flagrant and unwarranted



violation of Egypt's national sovereignty. In the final week of his campaign for re-election, Eisenhower found himself in the awkward position of publicly censuring Israel (thereby risking the American Jewish vote), and openly opposing the actions of two NATO allies. As Von Tunzelmann notes: "Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles were unusual in the twentieth century: an American president and secretary of state who were able and willing to say no to Israel" (228).

Eisenhower's dilemma was made even more acute by another invasion: the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In response to the overthrow of the communist government in Hungary, the Soviet army had invaded to reestablish a pro-Soviet government. Thousands of civilian rebels were killed or imprisoned, and others executed. If the US was to condemn Soviet aggression in Hungary, then it had to likewise censure England, France and Israel for their invasion of Egypt, allies or not. While there have been many other book-length treatments of the Suez War, some by those directly involved in the conflict, Von Tunzelmann writes a compelling account of the crisis, weaving together the daily events as they unfolded by the hour in Egypt and Hungary between October 22 and November 6, 1956, focusing not on military maneuvers, but particularly on Eden's pathological self-delusion amid the desperate efforts by Eisenhower and Dulles to prevent another world war — and a nuclear one at that, as the Soviet Union had intimated. While Britain and France quickly acquiesced to international pressure and withdrew their forces from Egypt, Israel was reluctant to give up its territorial gains, and only did so when Herbert Hoover (then acting Secretary of State while Dulles recovered from cancer surgery) threatened to stop all US aid to Israel and support UN sanctions against Israel — even its ejection from the UN.

If Eden may be viewed as the neurotic villain of the story, Eisenhower comes across as a principled and skillful leader who, rather than rushing to use American military muscle as most presidents have done subsequently in the Middle East, chose instead to bring the matter before the international community as represented by the United Nations. While the US voiced its objections over the invasion of Egypt to the Security Council and General Assembly, it was a UN peacekeeping force *without* American (or Soviet) involvement that was ultimately dispatched to the Sinai. Ironically, the Eisenhower Doctrine, formulated after the Suez crisis, encouraged direct, unilateral intervention by the US in international conflicts, rather than the highly successful diplomatic tact Eisenhower had taken at the UN in 1956. This has proved disastrous for the US in the Middle East and continues to be so today.

Instead of learning from Britain's mistakes in 1956, the US seems rather to have copied them. Von Tunzelmann's critique of Britain's actions sounds eerily all too familiar

to Americans sixty years later in the aftermath of the Iraqi war: "The British government had done every one of the worst possible things it could do with regard to its reputation in the Arab world. It had colluded with Israel; it had invaded a sovereign state on spurious grounds; it had prioritized oil and trade over honor and justice; it had raised the specter of imperialism...and, perhaps worst of all, the military operation it had done all these things to facilitate had failed" (435). As often noted, the lessons of history often go unrecognized and unheeded — often with tragic consequences.

What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic.

I first encountered Ahmed's book in an academic bookstore in New York City in early 2016. The title was ridiculously simple: *What is Islam?* The last thing I needed was another introductory text to Islam that I presumed it to be. The author's background as provided on the book's jacket promised an interesting, if unconventional, perspective: "a postdoctoral associate in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University." I opened the book to a random page, only to be met by a barrage of names and lengthy quotes by anthropologists, historians, theologians, poets and philosophers, and dense academic prose. This was certainly *not* a basic introduction to Islam! But did I really have time to slog through a rarefied philosophical treatment of Islam in the midst of an academic semester? I put the book down.

I was back in New York in late June 2016 to teach a three-day course on Islam and Islamic Art. It was a difficult time to speak publicly about Islam in a positive way. In addition to news stories of the carnage being perpetrated by ISIS, the Taliban, Boko Haram, al-Shabab in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, Americans were still in shock over the horrific Orlando nightclub shooting which left fifty young people dead and more than another fifty wounded. I would need all the academic authority I could muster to field questions, so I went to have a second look at Ahmed's book. I opened the book, not randomly, but to the first chapter where I read:

I am seeking to say the word "Islam" in a manner that expresses the *historical and human phenomenon* that is Islam in its plentitude and complexity of meaning...I seek to tell the reader what Islam has actually been as a matter of fact in history, and thus am suggesting how Islam should be *conceptualized* as a means to a more meaningful understanding both of Islam in the human experience, and thus of the human experience at large.

Yes, I thought — "what Islam has actually been as a matter of fact in history" — my approach exactly. I bought

the book then and there, and I'm glad I did, as it is, in my opinion, one of the most significant and profound works written about Islam in decades. It has challenged my own thinking about Islam and how I teach Islam, and has helped me articulate my own vision of Islam. That being said, this is not a book for the novice or general audience. It is admittedly a difficult and dense book written for scholars of Islam, many of who will find their work debunked by the present volume. Rather than serving as a textbook for class, it could very well be the *subject* of an entire course. For the sake of those who will never read Ahmed's book, but still might greatly benefit from its content, I offer this brief summary of the author's answer to the question his title poses: *What is Islam?* I recognize that such an attempt could very well be an injustice to a lengthy and erudite work.

In his attempt to define Islam as it has been understood historically, Ahmed does not concern himself so much with Islam as manifest in the "Arab World" — i.e. North Africa and the Middle East during the 'classical period' (700-1050 CE) as most authors would, but rather with the conceptualization of Islam in the period 1350-1850 CE in an area he refers to as the *Balkans-to-Bengal complex*, "from the Balkans through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia down and across Afghanistan and North India to the Bay of Bengal. This is an area that he describes as "post formative" — i.e. where, by the thirteenth century CE, the major theological points of dispute were for the most part settled, exemplifying the principle of agreeing to disagree.

Unlike many Muslims today, Ahmed exhaustively argues that the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex did not feel the need to articulate or legitimate their Muslim-ness/their Islam by recalling the palmier days of the early Islamic community. "Rather," he says, "they felt able to be Muslim in explorative, creative, and contradictory trajectories (p. 81)." One of his core points is that *Islam*, as conceptualized today by many Muslims and non-Muslims, is downsized and homogenized, with an *ahistorical* over-emphasis on prescription and orthodoxy that marginalizes, disenfranchises, or excludes other parts of the historical phenomenon of Islam.

With pithy and inspirational prose, Ahmed demonstrates that the "historical *bulk* of the normative discursive tradition of Muslims... is not governed by an authoritative urge to *fix the limitations of the correct* — rather it is informed by the urge to *explore and expand the dimensions of the meaningful* (286)." Rejecting the dichotomies of religion/culture and sacred/profane, he correctly observes how Muslims in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex historically have sought meaning not only in the Qur'an and *Hadith*, but in, with and through the enormously popular stories of *Kalilah and Dimnah*, *Layla and Majnun*, by Jami's poem *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, Rumi's *Masnavi*, etc. as well as art and music.

Eschewing the description of Islam as a "religion" with

all the limitations intended by Enlightenment *philosophes*, Ahmed begins to answer the question posed by in the title of his book by defining Islam as *hermeneutical engagement* — i.e. a search for meaning — and here is Ahmed's unique formulation - *a hermeneutical engagement with the Revelation of Text, Pre-Text and Con-Text*. By "the Revelation of Text," Ahmed obviously means the Text of the Qur'an. By the Revelation of Pre-Text, he denotes the Truth that is accessible in and *via* the cosmos by *existential* knowing of the cosmos, which clearly precedes the historical revelation of any scripture. "When done properly," he writes, "Existence is Revelation" (p. 350). By "the Revelation of Con-Text," (please note it is *not* "context"), Ahmed refers to how the Text and Pre-Text of Revelation are lived, explained, observed, expressed, interpreted, manifested, celebrated, etc. historically: "*that whole field or complex or vocabulary of meanings of Revelation that been produced in the course of the human and historical hermeneutical engagement with Revelation*, and which are thus *already present* as Islam" (p. 356).

The problem with the contemporary conceptualization of Islam is, in Ahmed's view that it is defines Islam solely by the Text of Revelation. Revelation has, in effect, been downsized to Text alone, whereas historically Islam has been "*nothing other than the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation in all its dimensions and loci*" (p. 355-6).

I believe Ahmed's book, with its authoritative, expansive and historically based understanding of Islam to be a potential "game-changer," academically and popularly, if it receives the attention and serious analysis it deserves. Many contemporary discussions of Islam, particularly those addressing issues of violence and terrorism perpetrated in the names of Islam, have little if any historical perspective, and focus almost exclusively on Islam since the attacks of 9/11.

What would be the effect in our religious, social, and political discourse if Islam were understood, as it was in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex historically, as a quest for meaning through Revelation as manifest in the cosmos and all aspects of human creativity and ingenuity, artistic and intellectual, as well in the Qur'an?

I was so thrilled after completing only the first chapter of Ahmed's book that I decided to contact him last summer. I was shocked to learn that this brilliant scholar had died at age forty-eight shortly before his masterful book was published. I am happy to say, however, that already my students know his name and work well.

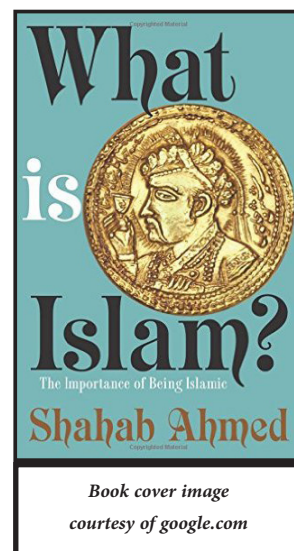


Exhibit Review:

*The Art of the Qur'an. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
October 15, 2016 – February 20, 2017.*

Reviewed by Michael Calabria, O.F.M.

It is the holy book of more than 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, revered as the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the angel Gabriel. Conveyed orally by Muhammad, the “Recitation,” or *al-Qur'an* in Arabic, was, according to tradition, memorized and recorded by the community of believers, and substantially codified within two decades of Muhammad's death (632 CE/ 10 AH) during the reign of the third *caliph* (“successor”) Uthman ibn Affan (r. 644-656 CE). It would take several more centuries, however, before the Qur'an would achieve the form in which it is recognized today, complete with chapter (*sūra*) titles, diacritics and vowel markings.

Although the Qur'an is now easily accessed through iPhone apps, tablets or cheap paperback editions in Arabic and in translation, *The Art of the Qur'an* beautifully documents the history and art of

the text over the course of ten centuries when the aesthetics of the text were prized as much as the content of the text. This is accomplished with the display of over forty Qur'ans from the collection of Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul, supplemented with another fourteen examples from the Freer Sackler's own collection. They range in date from the late seventh century CE – some of the earliest Qur'ans in the world – to the seventeenth century, produced in lands from Egypt to Turkey, and from Iraq to Afghanistan.

This first major exhibit of Qur'ans in the United States begins where the Qur'an itself *began* – with the first five verses (*ayāt*) of the ninety-sixth *sūra* of the Qur'an. These are considered to be the earliest revealed by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad ca. 610 CE. In a large Safavid Persian Qur'an (1599 CE/1007 AH) with pages measuring nearly three feet in length by two feet in width, in elegant lines of Arabic *muhaqqaq* calligraphy, alternating between black and gold, the visitor sees what Muhammad first *heard*:

*'Iqra bismi Rabbika alladhī khalaqa
Khalaqa al-insān min 'alaqin
'Iqra wa Rabbuka al-Akram
Alladhī 'allama bil-qalami
'Allama al-insān mā lam ya'lam.*

Recite! In the name of your Lord, who created
Created humanity from a clot;
Recite! And your Lord is most generous;
He who taught by the pen;
Taught humanity what it knew not.

Using well-chosen passages from Qur'ans of exceptional beauty and diversity of style, the exhibit then introduces the visitor to some of the core teachings of the Qur'an, including God and His attributes as Creator and the Most Merciful, divine





Qur'an. Iran, Shiraz, mid-16th century.

revelation (Torah, Gospel and Qur'an), the prophets including, among others, Abraham and Jesus as well as Muhammad, and Judgment Day with its promise of Paradise for the righteous and punishment for the unrepentant.

Beyond this introductory content, however, we see the evolution of the recorded text itself from a cursory *aide-mémoire* in the late 7th-early 8th century CE, written almost hastily on a piece of parchment using brown ink in a simple slanting style (*hijazi*), devoid of vowels markings and other diacritics, and without significant breaks in the text, to the emergence of a fixed and fully vocalized book of Sacred Scripture written on paper with bold black and glittering gold letters, rendered in several standardized, decorative, and monumental calligraphic scripts such as *kufic*, *naskh*, *muhaqqaq*, and *thuluth*. We see the introduction of increasingly decorative verse markings, chapter titles, breaks, and borders, incorporating vegetal elements, arabesques, and intricate

geometric designs in gold, lapis lazuli, ink and color with pages that look more like Persian *mille fleur* carpets than the leaves of a book. In short, we see an unalterable text that nevertheless changed in artistic form across time and space.

These works of sacred art impress not only theologically and artistically, but also historically and geographically. One fifteenth-century Qur'an on display, with particularly ornate pages, comes from the imperial workshop of Mehmed II who conquered Constantinople in 1453. Another Ottoman example (1577 CE / 984 AH), likewise lavishly decorated, was transcribed in the prayer room of Prophet's mosque in Medina, thus imbuing the volume with a special *baraka*, or divine blessing.

The final section of the exhibit is devoted to opulent Qur'ans from the private collections of Ottoman royal women. Commanding prodigious resources, these sixteenth-century women acquired valuable Qur'ans that they donated to the mosques erected in

honor of their husbands or other family members, or which were kept in their own mosques or mausolea. Particularly noteworthy are those associated with Mihrimah Sultan (d. 1578), the daughter of Süleyman I ("the Magnificent"). She is associated with three mosques in Istanbul designed by the great architect Sinan: one for her late husband, the grand vizier, Rüstem Pasha, for whom she acted as executor, and two for herself. Likewise three Qur'ans in the exhibit are associated with her: an early thirteenth-century Qur'an that Rüstem Pasha originally endowed to Mihrimah's brother Şehzade Mehmed (d. 1543) but was later transferred to her mosque; another thirteenth-century copy that she placed in her late husband's mosque which she had completed as the executor of his estate; and a colorful Safavid Qur'an (ca. 1580) that was transferred to Mihrimah's mosque in Üsküdar posthumously. Mihrimah is also known to have donated two Qur'ans to the mausoleum of her mother, Hürrem Sultan (d. 1558), where they were to be kept and read to honor her mother's memory. The exhibit includes a beautiful Qur'an chest of wood, ebony, ivory and silver from Hürrem Sultan's mausoleum that may have held one of Mihrimah's Qur'ans.

On both occasions when I visited the exhibition, it was gratifying to see the number of people, bending over the display cases, magnifying glass in hand (provided by the Sackler Gallery), mesmerized by the intricate beauty of the volumes on display. The value of such a well-executed exhibit is immeasurable in

helping to educate the general public about Islam and the Qur'an, as well as advancing scholarship in Qur'anic studies, but it also provides viewers with an aesthetic experience that transcends distinction of religion and culture.

Further reading

Massumeh Farhad and Simon Rettig, *The Art of the Qur'an: Treasure from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*. Washington, DC: Sackler Gallery, 2016.



Qur'an. Iran, Safavid period, 1576.



This Qur'an was endowed by Mihrimah (d. 1578), the daughter of the Ottoman emperor Süleyman I, to the mosque built for her husband, the grand vizier Rüstem Pasha. Iraq, Baghdad, 1340-1

Exhibit Review:

*Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. September 26, 2016-January 8, 2017*

Reviewed by Harout Simonian



A view of the Old City of Jerusalem

In presenting 400 years worth of medieval art from Jerusalem, the exhibit's senior curators for The Met Cloisters and The Met Medieval department Barbara Drake Boehm, Paul and Jill Ruddock and Melanie Holcomb sought to challenge our preconceptions and remind us that there's more to the city under discussion than a history of war and political struggle. "Jerusalem seems destined to be thought of as hosting ongoing conflict," said The Met's director and CEO Thomas Campbell in his remarks at the exhibit's press opening on Monday, September 19. "But Jerusalem's history is, of course, more nuanced than that." The director described Jerusalem during this period as a site of "productive coexistence." "With its diverse population, the city was also a place of artistic creativity, through times of peace and war" he added. Work of Jewish artists was presented side by side with that of Christians and Muslims.

The impressive variety of the objects in the exhibition underscored how the Holy City was a point of reference for a multiplicity of cultures, traditions and religions that enriched and enlivened the Medieval Jerusalem. From around the year 1000, Jerusalem gathered unprecedented significance as a location, destination and symbol of diverse faiths.

The name of the Holy City Jerusalem comes from Hebrew: the city of peace in a dual form of the word

referring to the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the doorway to the heavens. "Jerusalem is the most sublime of cities," wrote al-Muqaddasi (ca. 946–991), a Jerusalem-born Arab geographer. "It unites in itself the advantages of this world and the next." Considered to be the crossroads of the known world, the Holy City, a "city of foreigners," attracted tourists, merchants, scholars, and pilgrims.

Six thematic sections documented the cooperative connections among Christians, Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem during the Middle Ages. These themes included: the role of trade and tourism in Jerusalem, the quest for holiness among the congregations of the three Abrahamic religions, the drumbeat of holy war, the vital role of patrons for the creation of art work, and concluding in the final section on the promise of eternity. The two hundred featured works of art came from sixty lenders around the world, including many books and manuscripts, comprising twelve languages and nine alphabets. There were astrolabes, decorated glass vessels, jewelry, pilgrimage certificates, ornate pencil cases, icons, textile fragments, marble carvings, metalwork and woodwork, furnishings, lamps and lanterns used in sacred spaces, including one example from the Dome of the Rock inscribed "God is light of the heavens and earth" (*Surat al-Nūr* 24.35).

For Jews it is the site of Biblical King Solomon's

Temple and the place where, at the End of Days, the Messiah will appear and rebuild the Holy Temple. For Christians, it is the city in which Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. For Muslims, it is the place to which Muhammad travelled during his miraculous Night Journey from Mecca to al-Aqsa mosque to ascend to heaven. One 13th-century visitor, Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre in the Holy Land, described the city in this way: "Jerusalem is the city of cities, the holy of holies, ...and princess among the provinces...She stands in the midst of the earth,... and all nations shall flow unto her...She has been chosen and sanctified by God...honored by the angels and frequented by every people under heaven."

The title of the magnificent exhibition "Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven" had been inspired by the extraordinary Palm Sunday image presented in the third room: A page from a 13th-century Syriac Lectionary depicting Jesus' entry into the city as a king with his followers — a vision of multiculturalism in a procession. People are climbing up in trees to get a better view, while others get palm branches to show their joy and respect to the King, laying down cloaks for him to walk on in a colorful city full of domes and pitched roofs. Inhabited by all kinds of people: young, old, woman, men dark-skinned, light-skinned. Turbaned men, one with a flowing red beard, gazes upon Jesus' entry into the city. A woman with Arab features has hoisted her young son to witness a moment of history. We have the whole world represented in here. The painter that might have been in Jerusalem before captured this diversity.

In the second room, the extended view of the old city and the market on the walls made you feel as if you are there, surrounded by the artifacts that were once part of the trade and tourism in the Medieval Jerusalem: an 11th-century gold bracelet with the word *baraka*, or "blessings," woven into the intricate filigree work, and a gold pendant or amulet in beautiful condition, made in Syria or Egypt. It looks like a tiny mailbox for prayers, with an inscription calling for prosperity and happiness, lent by the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait.

The section of "The Drumbeat of Holy War" was inevitable, given the belief in Jerusalem's sanctity and the sense of exclusive ownership that gave rise to the ideology of Holy War. This period witnessed the intensification of both crusade in Christianity and *jihad* in Islam. The exhibition offered an important opportunity to present these concepts, so charged in our own day. Art was recruited to justify war, presenting it as beautiful and divinely legitimized. A manuscript that treats the art of warfare, and depicts

ingenious weapons beautifully drawn, was created for the great Islamic warrior Saladin, the Muslim ruler who took Jerusalem back from the Crusaders.

The Patrons section depicted the richness of the art of the Mamluks, who controlled Jerusalem in the second half of the 13th-century, and their great architectural sponsorship of the city. This is represented by metal work of the Sultan Nasir Mohammed Ibn Qala'un (1279-90 CE), with beautifully condensed inscriptions all of which speak about the sultan himself. A dome on one of the metalwork boxes echoes those on the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, both of which the sultan restored. From as early as the late twelfth century, sultans were associated with "sweet, heady perfume," so it is fitting that his name and attributes should appear on a vessel in which incense or other aromatics would be burned.

In the final gallery, "The Promise of Eternity," the videos were of olive trees, historical symbols of peace, in the valley of Josaphat. In this epic gallery, artists depicted the glance of what heaven must look like. Six separate pages depicted the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey from al-Aqsa mosque through the various levels of heaven, riding on a heaven-sent creature called *al-Buraq* depicted with a human head. Muhammad is seen with Abraham and with Jesus.

And the exhibition concluded with a beautiful Haggadah from Barcelona, a book used in the Seder for Passover, which is celebrated by Jews in the spring reads: "Next Year in Jerusalem" expressing the longing of the Jews to celebrate the Pesakh in the Holy City. And to be a Holy City, a Franciscan friar Father Eugenio Maria Alliata in an exhibition video reminds us that the holiness of the city comes "only if we are a little bit holy in it."

The accompanying book, "Jerusalem 1000 to 1400: Every People Under Heaven," edited by Barbara Drake Boehm and Melanie Holcomb (The Met, Yale University Press) is stunningly illustrated and printed, with essays by scholars from many backgrounds.

"Jerusalem 1000 - 1400: Every People Under Heaven" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan, from September 19, 2016 through January 8, 2017.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/jerusalem>

#MetJerusalem

Harout Simonian is a research scholar at the Metropolitan Museum who collaborated on the exhibit, and a student in the MA program in Museum Studies at New York University.



Syriac Lectionary — Iraq, possibly Monastery of Mar Mattei, 1216–20 Tempera, ink, and gold on paper; 264 folios 17½ × 13¾ in. (44.5 × 35 cm) British Library, London (Add. MS 7170)



Next Year in Jerusalem — From the Barcelona Haggadah Catalonia (present-day Spain), ca. 1360–70 Tempera, gold, and ink on paper; 163 folios 10 × 7½ in. (25.5 × 19 cm) British Library, London (Add. MS 14761)



Saladin's Treatise on Armor — Syria, before 1187 Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper; 217 folios H. 978 in. (25.2 cm), W. 758 in. (19.5 cm), D. 218 in. (5.5 cm) Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (MS Huntington 264)



Pair of Bracelets — Egypt or Greater Syria, 11th century Repoussé gold sheet, wire, and granulation a: W. 1¼ in. (3.2 cm), Diam. 2¾ in. (7 cm); b: W. 1¼ in. (3.2 cm), Diam. 2½ in. (6.5 cm) The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait (LNS 7 J ab) (Picture credit of The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Windows of videos of the Holy City's contemporary skyline were projected on the walls, giving an extra sense of being in the Holy City. In the first room we had a view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and an introduction to Medieval Jerusalem where worlds collided.



Celestial globe of al-Malik al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt whom St. Francis met in 1219. (1226/26 CE - 622 AH). Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam

Reprinted from Ordo Fratrum Minorum, 3 Dec, 2016



The Order's Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam gathered at the General Curia from 21-25 November 2016. The Commission met to establish its agenda of activities and projects for the present sexennium, chief among which will be the preparation of diverse, multilingual materials to assist the Order and its ecumenical and interfaith friends in commemorating the eighth centenary of the meeting between St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil in 1219.

This was the first meeting of the commission and was organized by Br. Russel Murray, General Animator for Evangelization and President of the Service for Dialogue. The Special Commission's members are:

- Br. Michael Calabria (Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, USA): the Order's Special Assistant for Dialogue with Islam and Director of the Center for Arab & Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University in Allegheny, NY.
- Br. Manuel Corullón (Custody of the Protomartyrs of Morocco): Custos of the Order's Custody in Morocco and Professor of Islamic Studies at the Higher Ecumenical

Institute of Theology of Rabat, aggregated to the Université Catholique de Paris and to the Protestant University of Strasbourg.

- Br. Ferdinand Mercado (Custody of St. Anthony of Padua, Philippines): former Director of the Franciscan Center for Dialogue in Kidapawan City and current Part-Time Professor of World Religions & Interreligious Dialogue at Saint Francis College in Guihulngan City.
- Br. Jamil Albert (Custody of St. John the Baptist, Pakistan): Assistant Parish Priest in Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lahore and collaborator on interfaith justice and peace initiatives with the Catholic Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue & Ecumenism in Lahore.

Other projects of the Special Commission will include the development of pastoral and preaching aids and of materials and programs designed to educate brothers of the Order about Islam and to prepare them for engagement in the various forms of Catholic-Muslim dialogue, in support of the Order's *General Constitutions* (a. 95, §3) and *Ratio Studiorum* (aa. 70-74).

St. Bonaventure hosts February screening of new “Sultan and the Saint” docudrama

By Tom Missel, director of media relations/marketing, St. Bonaventure University

St. Bonaventure University hosted a Feb. 1 screening of a new film about Saint Francis and the Sultan of Egypt that explores the spiritual exchange between these two men of faith amid a 13th century battlefield of horror.

“The Sultan and the Saint,” a docudrama about Muslim-Christian relations, features historical content about their meeting provided by several experts affiliated with St. Bonaventure.

The public was invited to the Wednesday, Feb. 1, screening, which was held in the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts on campus. The event began with a reception in the Quick Center Atrium from 6 to 7 p.m., an introduction to the film by CAIS Director Fr. Michael Calabria and film researcher Daniel Tutt, followed by the showing of the film in the Rigas Theater and a question-and-answer session.

The screening was sponsored by St. Bonaventure’s Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany and the Franciscan Action Network.

In the year 1219, during the height of the bloody Christian-Muslim conflict known as the Crusades, Saint Francis of Assisi risked his life by walking across enemy lines to meet the Sultan of Egypt, the Muslim ruler Al-Malik al-Kamil. This remarkable encounter, and the commitment to peace of the two men behind it, presented an alternative to the persistent call for war.

Told with cinematic-style re-enactments and interviews with renowned historians, art experts, religious thinkers, and brain scientists, the film centers on these two men who had an improbable meeting during a terrible period of religious conflict between their faiths, and discovered a way of finding peace between them.

Among those who shared their expertise on Franciscans and Islam for the film were Fr. Michael Calabria, O.F.M., director of St. Bonaventure’s Center for Arab and Islamic Studies; Fr. Michael

Cusato, O.F.M., distinguished professor of Franciscan studies at the university; and Sr. Kathy Warren, O.S.F., a 2002 Franciscan studies graduate. In addition, St. Bonaventure alumnus Patrick Opitz, ’01, an IMDb-credited actor, had a small role as an extra in the film.

“I’m very happy to have been part of this film. This encounter that occurred nearly 800 years ago continues to have tremendous relevance in the contemporary world,” said Fr. Michael Calabria, who holds a doctorate in Islamic studies. “I was genuinely touched and inspired by the film and believe that many others will be as well.”

“Saint Francis was a builder of bridges, badly needed at a time of religious violence. His commitment to a respectful dialogue with people of different faiths, and the ability to see others as people first, not enemies, is an inspiration to my own commitment to interfaith dialogue,” added Opitz.

Fr. Cusato, one of the leading historians of medieval Franciscan history working in the field today, is former director of St. Bonaventure’s Franciscan Institute and dean of the School of Franciscan Studies. In addition to a doctorate in Medieval Church History, he holds a master’s degree in Franciscan studies from SBU and has authored numerous publications on the Franciscan movement, and Francis’ meeting with the Sultan.

Sr. Warren is a member of Sisters of St. Francis of Rochester, Minnesota, and a specialist in interreligious dialogue. She is the author of “Daring to Cross the Threshold: Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Malek-al-Kamil” and is co-producer of the two-part DVD “In the Footprints of Francis and the Sultan: A Model for Peacemaking,” in which Fr. Cusato and Fr. Calabria also appear.

More information about the film is available at www.sultanandthesaintfilm.com. The film was produced by Unity Productions Foundation, a non-



Daniel Tutt



Daniel Tutt, left, and Fr. Michael Calabria, CAIS director

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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Mission of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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