

NŪR



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The Magazine of The Center
for Arab & Islamic Studies
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Summer 2020

SPECIAL ISSUE



مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

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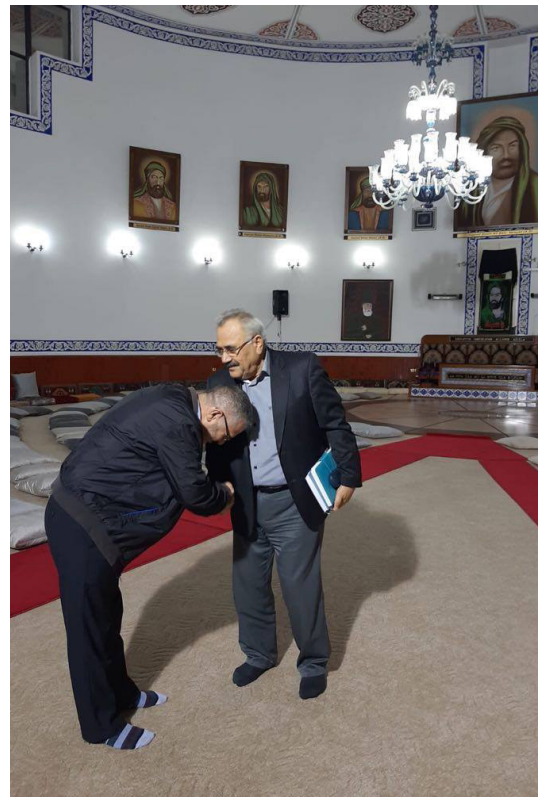
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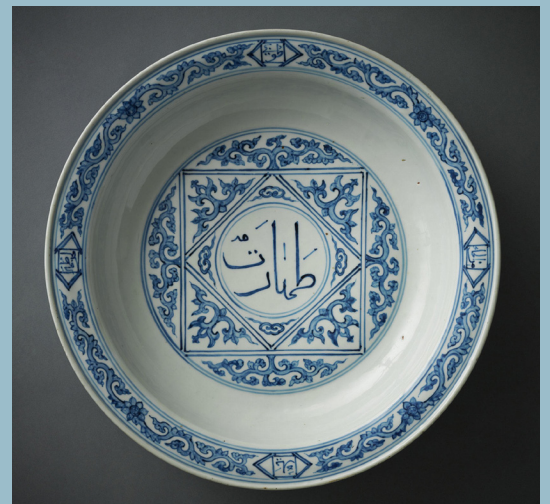
CAIS STUDENT NEWS

NEW & NOTEWORTHY BOOKS



Ablution basin. Jingdezhen, China, 1506-21.
Aga Khan Museum (AKM 722).

This large porcelain piece was made in China for a Muslim patron. In the center appears the Arabic word *taharat* (“purity”), indicating that it was meant to be used for the ritual ablutions (*wudu*) performed in preparation for prayer. It is an elegant reminder of the current importance of personal hygiene in an age of pandemic.



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



It gives me great pleasure to bring you this special summer issue of *Nūr*, the magazine of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies. Due to events foreseen and unforeseen, a year has passed since our last issue. Production of the Fall 2019 issue had to be placed on hold due to the many events commemorating the 800th anniversary of the encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219. Regular readers of *Nūr* will recall that the last issue (Spring 2019) was devoted to that subject. The ongoing significance of their encounter was expressed by numerous lectures, symposia, conferences and interfaith celebrations on and off campus, nationally and internationally, and it was my honor and pleasure to represent the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS) on such occasions. Some of these events are described in this issue.

As the Spring 2020 issue of *Nūr* was taking shape, a far more serious issue presented itself – the COVID-19 pandemic. As related in an article below, I was confronted by the gravity of the pandemic last February while presenting at a conference in Iran – one of the first countries affected by the virus outbreak. As quarantines and lockdowns reached into spring, the celebrations of Easter and Ramadan worldwide, among the most anticipated of holy seasons, were muted and private, contrary to practice. Bonaventure alumna Amina Golden-Arabaty (class of 2019) explores the effects of the pandemic on Muslim communities, locally and further afield. Even before the appearance of COVID-19, the Uighur Muslims of China were experiencing systematic persecution, confinement and indoctrination. Their plight is described in an article by Bonaventure History Professor Christopher Dalton.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans were confronted with yet another malady, one affecting African Americans particularly – the disease of systemic racism that most recently claimed the lives of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Although Muslim societies have not been immune to racism, in this issue of *Nūr* we recall the last sermon of the Prophet Muham-

mad (pbuh) in which he underscored racial equality in the community of believers. In addition, Bonaventure alumna Soquania Henry (class of 2019) provide profiles of noteworthy Muslims of color, past and present.

Due to COVID-19, Muslims (other than Saudis) were not permitted to perform the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca required of all Muslims at least once in their lifetime, if at all possible. The hajj was a transformative experience for American civil rights leader Malcolm X as he reflected on race relations. His description of the hajj, included in this issue, spoke profoundly and powerfully to Americans in the 1960's and have enduring significance in our own time.

St. Bonaventure's students of Arab and Islamic Studies continue to make an impact internationally. In summer 2019, two CAIS students taught English in a YMCA program in Egypt. Their experiences are documented in this issue. Although Bonaventure students finished the 2019-20 academic year at home with on-line classes, this did not hinder them academically or professionally. In this issue we profile three exceptional CAIS students and their plans for the future.

Although the pandemic will greatly restrict activities on and off campus for a time, CAIS remains committed to its mission "to promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures, an appreciation of both their historical and contemporary significance, and respectful relations between Muslim and Christian people."

السلام عليكم

Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D.

Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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72 Hours in Iran

BY MICHAEL CALABRIA, O.F.M., PH.D.



For many Americans – at least those of a certain age – Iran conjures up images of the American hostages of 1979 and the repressive revolutionary regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. In more recent decades, Iran has often been pilloried by politicians of both parties, particularly as Iran attempts to thwart American–Saudi hegemony in the Middle East and protect Shi’ite Muslims from the same extremists that often target westerners. The ongoing acrimony between the US and Iran not only has serious geo-political repercussions, but also denies Americans of the prodigious historical and cultural riches that Iran has to offer.

Although Islam is often associated with Arab culture and society, it was Islamic Persia that significantly shaped classical Islamic civilization, producing great scholars of history and Qur’anic exegesis (tafsir) such as al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari, and poet-mystics like Rumi, Jami, Sa’di, and Hafez, as well as skilled artisans, architects, painters and calligraphers. In the 17th

century, the city of Isfahan, the capital of the Persian Safavid Empire Shah was so renowned for its architectural wonders that it was dubbed: naqsh-i Jahan – “half the world.”

Thus, when I was offered an opportunity to deliver a paper at an international conference on the Qur’an in Tehran in February 2020, I grabbed it. Moreover, conference organizers in Iran made the offer difficult to refuse as I received a call from the Iranian “consulate” in Washington, DC offering to expedite my visa application.

Little did I know, however, that when I arrived in Tehran on February 23, COVID-19 had already preceded me there. Landing at Imam Khomeini Airport ca. 4am, it was difficult to form a first impression of the country since darkness veiled from my sight everything between the airport and downtown Tehran – almost an hour away.

It was over lunch later that day with some of the conference organizers and attendees that things began to come into focus. The restaurant where we lunched looked like something out of New York’s East Village. Its walls were covered with pictures of American and British Rock’n Roll singers and bands, and the staff were tattooed with multiple piercings – not exactly what I had expected from the Islamic Republic! It was over lunch that we learned that the two-day conference would be reduced to one day since some of the presenters were unable to travel. At that point, I was still mentally preparing my travel itinerary for the rest of the week. Iran, however, was preparing for a pandemic – and very soon, so would I.

After lunch, as we made our way to the Grand Bazaar, we passed



"There were no health questions, screening or quarantine. I was free to wander the airport, use the subway, ride the bus, and walk the streets of New York City."

the 19th-century Golestan Palace. This was one of my "must-sees" in Tehran because the Palace's library has a 17th-century image of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan that I hoped to use in my forthcoming book on the Taj Mahal. Just as we were approaching the entrance, however, the gates were closing – and closing indefinitely, due to COVID-19, according to the security guard. It was an ominous sign of things to come. On a warm, early spring day, the bazaar was crowded with shoppers, only a very few of whom wore masks. I had not even thought to bring one with me.

It was only the next morning, on Monday, February 24, before leaving for the conference, that I realized how serious that situation had become since my arrival. International news was reporting that fifty people had died from the Corona virus in the city of Qom – some 90 miles

from Tehran. Turkey and Iraq closed its land borders with Iran, and Turkish Air flights from Tehran to Istanbul were being diverted or turned back. That was particularly troubling for me since my return flight – on Turkish Air – connected through Istanbul.

The conference began that morning with a welcome and address by the Director of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Dr. Phorough Parsa, followed by conference organizer Dr. Ala Vahid Nia – both speaking fluent English and both of them women. There were a number of other women faculty members in Islamic and Qur'anic Studies, and women graduate students as well. In fact, sixty percent of university students in Iran are women, and women account for nearly a quarter of university faculty – not significantly lower than the US where women account for less than a third of university faculty. The papers presented by the Institute's faculty and students demonstrated a critical reading of the Qur'an; that is, they employed rigorous scholarship in their analyses. This was not the conservative tone that I had expected in Iran. It seemed that the religious conservatism ushered in by the 1979 Revolution had ebbed considerably, at least in cosmopolitan Tehran.

Yet, the mood at the conference was discernibly rushed. All public, educational and cultural institutions were closing that day (Feb. 24) due to the spread of COVID. Even with the greatly reduced number of participants, we had less time to present, and there would be little or no time for Q & A. By late afternoon, when the conference concluded, my level of anxiety was rising. My return flight was still nearly a week away. What



International Conference on the Qur'an, Tehran 2020

would the situation be then? Would I be able to get out of the country? Without an American embassy in Iran, what could I do? Credit cards were useless in Iran due to economic sanctions, so I my financial resources were limited to the cash that I brought with me.

Upon returning to the hotel that evening I began to make plans for an earlier departure. I chatted online with booking agents for hours until late into the night. My message to them online ran as follows: "I'm in Iran. The country is shutting down. I need to get out NOW." The situation was dire indeed. One-way flights from Iran to the US were running as high as \$5000 for an economy seat. I considered all options. Rome (where the Franciscan Curia is located) was not an option as COVID was already decimating Italy. Delhi, perhaps? I have Jesuit friends there and I could stay with them until I could get back to the US. Little did I know that very soon, India would be in total lockdown. Before long, I realized that Istanbul was my best bet since my connecting flight at the end of the week was through Istanbul, and I could stay with the Franciscan friars there until my departure. Finally, in the early hours of Tuesday morning, I was able to book a flight for 4am on Wednesday: Tehran to Doha, and Doha to Istanbul. Seventy-two hours after arriving in Iran, I was leaving. There would be no visits to museums or historic mosques in Tehran or Isfahan.

I arrived in Istanbul on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 25, admittedly relieved to be in a city I knew well and where I had a home with the friars indefinitely, if need be. All passengers arriving from Iran had to undergo a simple health screening: a few questions to answer, temperature, and address information in Turkey for contact tracing. COVID-19 had not yet come to this city. The streets, shops, restaurants, mosques and tourist attractions were still crowded with

people. In Iran, COVID cases had surged in the days after my departure and Iran was soon to become the number three hotspot in the world for infection after China and Italy.

Three days later, on March 1, I landed in Kennedy Airport fully expecting to be questioned about my trip to Iran and then quarantined. I remember anxiously approaching the Immigration officer:

Officer:Where are you arriving from?

Me:Istanbul.

Officer:Did you visit any other country?

Me:Yes, I was in Iran for three days.

Officer:Are you carrying any alcohol or tobacco?

Me:No.

Officer>Welcome back.

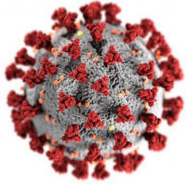
"Welcome back"? There were no health questions, screening or quarantine. I was free to wander the airport, use the subway, ride the bus, and walk the streets of New York City. Although I immediately entered self-imposed quarantine upon my return to St. Bonaventure the following day, and eventually tested negative for exposure to the virus, I had not left COVID-19 behind in Iran, I had come home to it. Viruses know no borders.



Mohsen Radfar and Fr. Michael in Iran

The Blame Game:

COVID-19 & Muslims



Ever since COVID-19 appeared in the United States, politicians have been quick to play the blame game. Instead of acknowledging an inadequate national response, they have frequently referred to COVID-19 pandemic as the “Chinese virus,” or worse: “Kung Flu.” This has resulted in an increase of verbal and physical attacks on Asian-Americans. East Asians are not the only minorities being scapegoated, however. Muslims, too, are being blamed for the spread of the virus in Britain, Australia, India, and Sri Lanka – as well as in the US. In the UK, there has been a forty percent rise in online Islamophobic content compared to last year. Muslims are accused of not observing social distancing and increasingly face death threats, verbal and physical attacks. Conservative MP Craig Whittaker explicitly accused Muslims in general as one segment of the community that is not taking the pandemic seriously. Harun Khan, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain stated: “Islamophobic hate crime is always prevalent in British Society, but particularly during the pandemic, we know this has been exacerbated by the far-right peddling conspiracy theories about Muslims spreading Corona virus” (Newsweek, 8/7/20). In Australia, Adel Salman, vice-president of the Islamic Council of Victoria told local media: “I’m really concerned, I’m thinking ‘here we go again’, scapegoating, marginalizing, unfairly stigmatizing the Muslim community.”

In India, already polarized politically along sectarian lines, right-wing government officials speak of Muslims as “super spreaders” of the virus who are perpetrating “corona jihad.” While it is true that one Muslim group, the Tablighi Jamaat, ignored warnings about large gatherings, across the country, Indian Muslims, numbering 200 million, are indiscriminately suffering deadly attacks, economic boycotting, and online defamation (New York Times, 4/12/20). Moreover, there are reports that some hospitals are segregating their patients on the basis of religion or are denying Muslims routine medical care as well as COVID-19 treatment. “Virtually overnight,” writes journalist Rana Ayyub, “Muslims became the

sole culprits responsible for the spread of the corona virus in India” (Washington Post, 4/6/2020). Muslim Gujjars in Punjab, many of whom are dairy farmers, are unable to sell their milk, have been beaten and barred from entering villages. In Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka, Muslims are similarly stigmatized and subjected to attack. As reported on the Anti-Defamation League blog, American Islamophobes have likewise added their vitriol to the pandemic by falsely accusing Muslims of refusing COVID-19 tests on religious grounds and protesting social distancing and mosque closures.

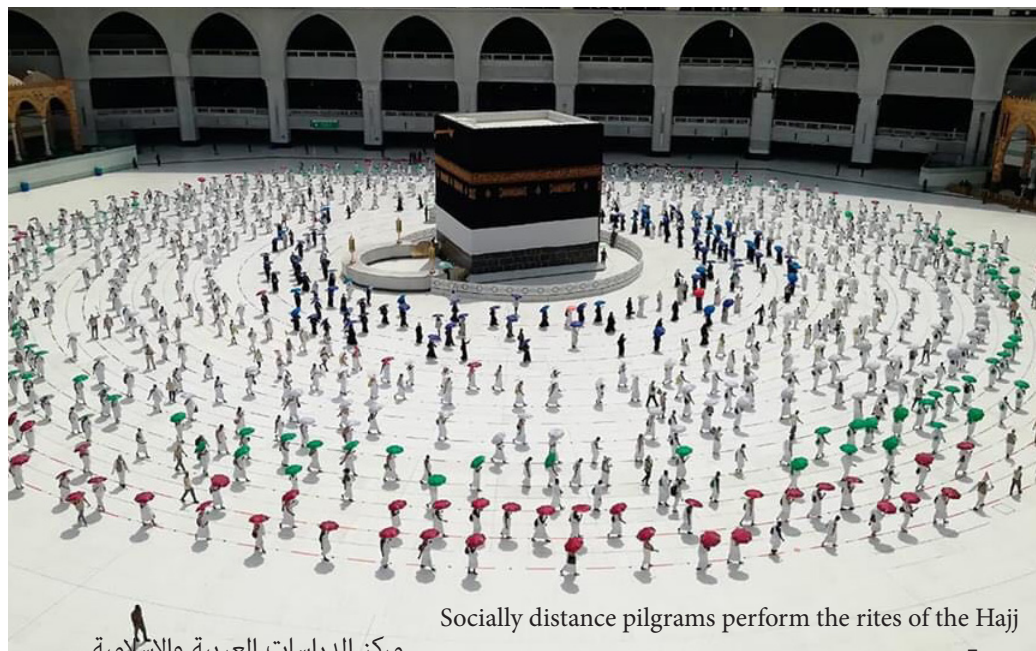
Moreover, the pandemic has been particularly difficult for all Muslims worldwide because lockdowns, quarantines and travel bans prevented family and communal celebrations of the most significant communal religious observances in the Islamic calendar:



Ramadan (April 23-May 23), Eid al-Fitr (May 24), the hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca (July 28-August 2), and Eid al-Adha’ (July 30-31). During Ramadan, Muslims traditionally gather daily with family, friends and even complete strangers to break the fast – and often in large numbers in homes, mosques and city streets. Many people remain in mosques all night long, praying and reciting the Qur’an. COVID-19 changed all of that. The hajj, which annually draws more than two million people to Mecca and Medina, was limited to a thousand participants all of whom were Saudi residents. Local community member Shabana Chauhdry remarked: “I’m missing the usual gatherings at the masjid (mosque) but it’s for the safety of our community. It would be awful to have a large gathering and potentially spread the disease, so in these unprecedented times, tough measures are being taken.” In the Golden-Arabaty home in Olean, the isolation of self-imposed quarantine required a complete adjustment to holiday celebrations. Family member Amina observed: “There was no shopping this year or going out to special places. Instead we took comfort in the company of those we love while thanking God for the opportunity to share good health.” A memorable year indeed in many ways.

AminaGolden-Arabaty

Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D



Socially distance pilgrims perform the rites of the Hajj

A Lapse of Recognition: The Plight of China's Uyghurs

By Christopher Dalton

There are not many who are familiar with the Uyghurs. Even after living in China for some time, I was unclear on who exactly they were. One afternoon when I was wandering through the open-air markets of Kunming, in southwestern China, I happened to stroll into the nearby Muslim Quarter. Taking advantage of my environs, I followed the aroma of cooking beef and lamb to a kabob stand. There, an older gentleman wearing a white brimless cap energetically attended to several skewers of meat on a grill, seasoning them with heavy spices as he turned them over and again. As I approached him to ask how much the kabobs cost, I was surprised by how deeply blue his eyes were, and indeed how non-Chinese he appeared in general. He spoke Chinese well enough, and while kabobs and money changed hands I joked that we could be brothers with our matching blue eyes. He asked me what nationality I was and I asked him the same. He said that he was “Wei-wu-er,” but I misunderstood him because I was not familiar with the term, so I assumed he said “Hui,” which is the common designation for Chinese Muslims. It wasn’t until months later that I learned that “Wei-wu-er” meant Uyghur, and that far from being Chinese, Uyghurs were Central Asian, mostly

Muslim, and spoke a Turkic language. As innocent as this case of mistaken identity may have been, I still feel somewhat discomfited by it, because it now echoes the predicament that there is a broader lapse of recognition of the Uyghurs, and thus the suffering and loss they are presently experiencing as China dismantles their traditions and their faith.

In the last ten years, the Uyghurs have become the target of intense scrutiny and policing. The once far away province of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has become ever more connected and integrated with the rest of mainland China, so much so that the population of settled Han Chinese now outnumber the population of Uyghurs there. While this immigration has brought about growth and prosperity in Xinjiang, many Uyghurs have been pushed aside, left out and exploited. Accordingly, the cultural friction between the Chinese and the Uyghurs has become apparent in popular rhetoric, which easily falls into stereotypical assumptions about one another. The most common of these from the Chinese are “look out for Uyghurs; they’re dangerous; they carry knives; they’ll steal from you and murder you; they’re terrorists.” From the Uyghur point of view, you might hear: “be cautious around the Chinese; they act

like your friend, but when you turn around they’ll take everything—even your house; they’re sneaky.” Naturally, these have some basis in fact, but fear of the other not only exaggerates differences, it also compels irrational thought and speech. Regrettably, this discord between the Chinese and the Uyghurs has boiled over into violence and coercion in the last decade, to the point where the Chinese government has embarked on an project of social control and re-education of the Uyghur population, with the most inhumane attempts to eradicate Uyghur culture and strip away their very identity.

However, like many peoples who live at the margins of China’s domain, the Uyghurs have historically been forced to negotiate the uneasy tension of foreign colonization, settlement, and enterprise. Exchanges between their ancestors and the Han Chinese first began in the 3rd century B.C.E. and reached a zenith in the 9th century C.E. The Uyghurs descend from the peoples who lived, traveled, and traded along the ancient Silk Road. Their genetic inheritance is broad, so much so that the genuine diversity of the peoples who identify as Uyghur span the greater Tarim Basin and across Central Asia. In antiquity and into the Middle Ages this re-

gion played host to the nomadic movements of proto-Mongolic

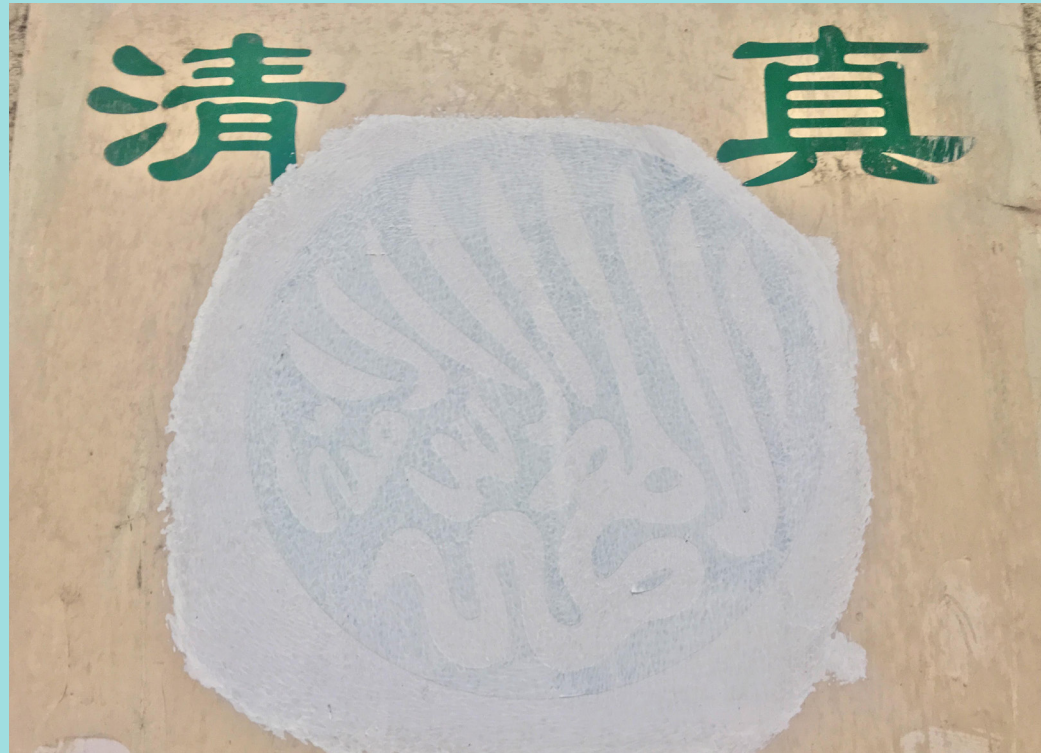


tribes from northern Central Asia, the establishment of the eastern Iranian kingdoms such as Khotan and Sogdia, and the expanding reach of Imperial China and its silk trade. By 9th century C.E. a people who identified themselves as Uyghurs carved out a relatively small dominion at the western edge of the Taklamakan Desert where the Kunlun Mountain Range meets the Tian Shan. Their well-couched kingdom named Qocho became a crossroads of competing influences. The influence of the Chinese on the region was pervasive, largely due to the stabilizing effects of its economic prosperity and religious tolerance, so much so that the Uyghurs of the High Middle Ages primarily practiced Chinese Buddhism. However, as China's dynastic power waned a contest of Iranian-Turkic religions like Manichaeism, Nestorianism, and Islam waged war, both figurative-

ly and literally, in Qocho. Shortly after the Islamic conquest of Qocho in the 13th century C.E., it became subsumed by the Mongol Empire and eventually dissolved in the 1300's. The Uyghurs faded from the view of world history at that time and the entire region seemingly lapsed from the known world's recognition for over four centuries.

again. Despite having been neglected, or even possibly forfeited by the Chinese during the last two to three centuries, the Uyghur homelands, like other conquests and expansions of the Qing dynasty, have been included as part of China as matter of precedent when considering the borders and domain of the modern state.

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT HAS REMOVED OR COVERED SIGNS IN ARABIC FROM MOSQUES AND STORE FRONTS



In the 1700's, a remnant tribe descended from the Mongols, known as the Dzungars, assumed control of the Uyghur homelands and defied the territorial claims of China's Qing dynasty. As China's Qing emperors were Manchurian, and not Chinese, conquest and expansion served as a means of legitimizing their rule. It worked, and the almost complete genocide of the Dzungars emphasized the power and ability of the dynasty. In 1758, the Uyghurs became a vassal state within the empire and were promptly forgotten about
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While historical issues of Western colonization and imperialism are at play in China's insistence of resetting the map to its 18th-century status, as well as in their compulsion to thoroughly extend their sphere of strategic interests in the 21st century, the uncertainties of legitimacy are similarly at the center of the government's abuses of the Uyghurs and its policies in Xinjiang. Other concerns enter the equation, namely China's increasing population, and more im-

portantly, China's growing middle class. Xinjiang represents one part of the solution for demands on natural resources, particularly energy sources such as oil, coal, and gas. Earlier this year, President Xi Jinping announced a new "Belt and Road" initiative aimed at connecting China not only to its distant resources via highway, rail, and pipeline, but also to its Asian, Middle Eastern, and African neighbors in an attempt to strengthen trading ties. Infrastructure programs like these have been going on since the late 1990's, steadily matching pace with the growth of China's economy. The Uyghurs represent a nuisance or an inconvenient obstacle in the government's plans to industrialize this corridor.

Two decades ago, Beijing's focus was on Tibet, primarily as destination for domestic and international tourism in the build up to the 2008 Olympics. The tensions caused by Chinese real estate development and new commercial enterprises in Lhasa boiled over in the spring of that year as locals vandalized businesses, targeted non-Tibetans with violence, and even set a Mosque on fire. Although their resentment was primarily directed at the Han Chinese, grievances with the Hui Chinese Muslims, who make up a large part of the manual labor force in southern China, were also victims of this riot. That next year, similar circumstances prompted the Ürümqi Riots in Xinjinag. The underpinnings of the riots dealt with the general dissatisfactions of the Uyghurs toward Han Chinese settlement and enterprise in Xinjiang, as well as with the government's role in curtailing Uyghur religious practices and cultural associations, much the way they were doing in Tibet. But, the spark that set off the vi-

olence was the Uyghur's protest against the government's mishandling of murder case in the southern province of Guangdong, where a large group of migrant workers, both Han Chinese and Uyghurs, erupted into a brawl and two Uyghurs were killed. The government's response to both riots was swift and violent. Reports are unreliable, but apparently the clash in Ürümqi was more significant, both in terms of the destruction of property and loss of life.

Since the Ürümqi Riots, policing in Uyghur cities has become a major initiative. And, since the 2014 Kunming Attack, in which four Uyghur separatists killed 31 people in a train station using knives and cleavers, government anti-terrorist specialists and agents have not only locked down major cities in the region with complex series of checkpoints, but also with surveillance cameras that use facial recognition and even (walking) gate recognition software. Kitchen knives are licensed, even for restaurants, vendors, and butchers, and regulations require the knives of cleavers to be tethered to a workstation by chain. There are regular round-ups of Uyghur men that often occur in the middle of the night. Women, too, have been arrested in large numbers, while the children of these families are interned in re-education orphanages, and are indoctrinated with communist ideology that criticizes their culture and Islamic faith. Reports surface almost daily of the human rights abuses carried out in the internment and labor camps in which these men and women are locked away. Just within the past weeks, journalists have obtained a leaked internal document of the Chinese government that details its plans to systematically subjugate the

Uyghur people and purge China of Uyghur culture and faith. While the document is hundreds of pages long and demonstrates a range of manipulations, cruelties, and injustices, its motives are spelled out plainly—fear of the other.

There is sometimes little that can be done about situations so complex and so far away. And, there is only so much bad news one can bear in times like these. On top of it all, we must shoulder our own burdens, whatever they may be. Yet, this dilemma of self and other are inextricably bound together. There is an intrinsic value in recognizing another's problems. No matter how complex or how far away, recognition of another's problems offers perspective. In addition, our acknowledgment of another's circumstances, like the Uyghurs', may be just enough to ameliorate the situation. In this case, what is being done to the Uyghurs has been perpetrated behind closed doors, in the dark of night, in a media blackout, at the oldest and most remote crossroads of the world. To know of it, brings light to these injustices, and so frustrates those whom wish to see it carried out in secret.



Christopher Dalton
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Celebrating the Sultan and the Saint

The spring 2019 special edition of *Nūr* explored various dimensions of the historical encounter of the Egyptian Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil and Francis of Assisi in 1219 – a peaceful encounter of faith in the midst of a violent conflict. In fall 2019, the Franciscan family worldwide began its commemoration of the 800th anniversary of their encounter in partnership with Muslim communities. CAIS was an important part of many of these celebrations which included the following:

Sept. 9-15, 2020, Istanbul, Turkey: “Celebrating 800 Years of St. Francis and the Sultan”

The OFM Commission for Dialog with Islam (Fr. Michael Calabria, Chair) convened a gathering of scholars, educators and religious to explore the historical and contemporary significance of the Francis-Sultan encounter. Participants came from Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, Italy, France, Spain, and the United States to attend the commemoration. Presenters included: Paul Moses, author of *The Saint and the Sultan* (2009), as well as Franciscan scholars Michael Cusato and Gwenolé Jausset who have written extensively on the subject. The commemoration began with a viewing of the film *The Sultan and the Saint* (Unity Productions, 2016). Fr. Victor Edwin, SJ, Professor of Islamic Studies, Vidyajoti College of Theology (Delhi) spoke about his experience of showing the film in India.

The week-long gathering culminated with an inter-religious prayer service held at St. Maria Draperis Church with Muslim Sheikh Nail Dede Kesova and Mevlevi Sufis. In addition to scripture readings and hymns from the Christian tradition, the service included the music of the Mevlevi and a worship ceremony known as Sema, which involves the recitation of devotional Islamic prayer and whirling to facilitate an experience of union with the Divine.

In connection with the 800th anniversary, the OFM Special Commission for Dialog with Islam also prepared an e-book titled “St. Francis and the Sultan, 1219-2019: A Commemorative Booklet,” available on the CAIS website (www.sbu.edu/CAIS).

September 30, 2019, St. Bonaventure University: “Francis Month”

As part of St. Bonaventure University’s month-long celebration of the Feast of St. Francis, CAIS and University Ministries hosted guest speaker Jordan Denari Duffner, author of: *Finding Jesus Among Muslims: How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic*. Denari Duffner, a graduate student in Georgetown University’s Theology Department spoke on: “St. Francis and the Sultan: Living Their Legacy Today.”

October 11-12, 2019, Franciscan Spiritual Center, Aston, PA: “Praying with Francis and the Sultan”

In this unique two-day program, Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) explored the worlds of Francis and the Sultan through their respective prayer and spirituality, including Francis’ Cantic of Creatures and Praises of God, as well as the “Beautiful Names of God” (al-asma al-husna), passages from the Qur’an, and poetry from the Sultan’s Islamic tradition.

October 16-17, 2019, Istanbul, Turkey: Course on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue in the Franciscan Mission

As part of a three-week course on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue conducted by the Franciscan community in Istanbul, Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) presented on: “Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Christian Perspectives,” and “Challenges and the Future of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.” Other presenters included Dr. Adnane Mokrani, Professor of Islamic Studies (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome), and Br. Fellyanu Dougan (Istanbul).

October 28, 2019: Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Orlando, FL

Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) presented on: “Christian-Muslim Relations: A Franciscan Perspective” using Franciscan sources, Church documents, and historical texts.

October 30, 2019, St. Bonaventure University: “Faith and Fraternity in a Fragmented Age: Catholic and Muslim Perspectives”

This event co-sponsored by CAIS and the Franciscan Institute featured a panel discussion on The Document on Humanity Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi on February 4, 2019. Panelists included: Fr. David Couturier, OFM Cap., Director of the Franciscan Institute, Fr. Michael Calabria, OFM, Director of CAIS, and Dr. Shazia Siddiqui, MD, of the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier.

November 7, 2019, Catholic University, Washington, DC: The Sultan and the Saint: the Spiritual Journey of Transformative Encounter (Conference)

At this one-day conference featuring scholars and interreligious leaders, Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) presented: “Hagiography and History in the Accounts of St. Francis and the Sultan.” Also presenting at the conference was Imam Muhammad Bashar Arafat, President of the Islamic Affairs Council of Maryland.

November 21, 2019, La Crosse, WI: Viterbo University

Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) presented on: “St. Francis and the Sultan: An Encounter of Faith and Culture for a Divided World.”

November 22, 2019, Chicago, IL: Franciscan Pilgrimage Program

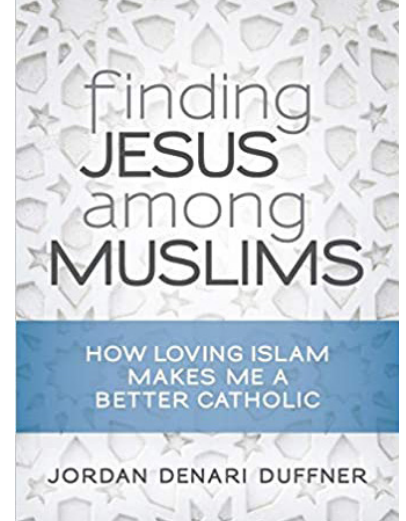
Fr. Michael Calabria (CAIS) presented on: “The Age of St. Francis and the Sultan: Cultural Confluences in the Medieval Mediterranean.”



Jordan Denari-Duffner signing copies of her books during Francis week



Fr. Michael Calabria and Jordan Denari-Duffner



Jordan Denari-Duffner speaks to the St. Bonaventure Community on her story



Fr. Michael receiving a grant on behalf of CAIS from the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier



Jordan Denari-Duffner, University Chapel

Excerpt below from Jordan Denari Duffner's book, *Finding Jesus among Muslims*

The Width of a Hair 71

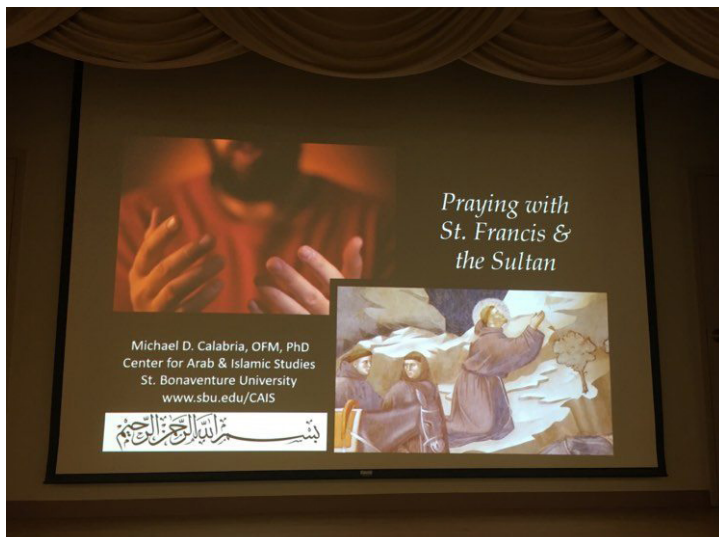
a moving and mysterious experience of interreligious prayer when he was alone in the monastery's church one night. An unnamed Muslim guest arrived, and they prayed together *Surat al-Fatiha*, the *Magnificat*, and the Lord's Prayer. This mystical, three-hour event of interreligious prayer, which Fr. de Chergé insisted was a fact and not a dream, was a central experience in his religious life as a human being and as a Catholic monk.⁴

Praying with Muslims is something that has been formative in the religious life of Fr. Michael Calabria, the Franciscan priest and scholar of Islam at St. Bonaventure University. Long before Fr. Michael was an ordained priest, he learned to pray *salah* as Muslims did and he recounted his experience to me over email (in February 2017):

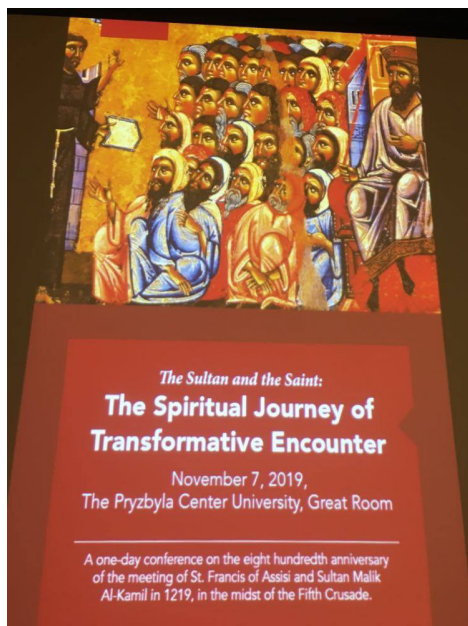
In essence, my whole fascination with Islam began with prayer. I remember going to Egypt for the first time in 1981. I was an undergraduate studying Egyptology and was in Egypt to do archaeological work. I knew nothing about Islam at that time. . . . I visited a mosque for the first time, the mosque of Ibn Tulun. I walked into that great, expansive courtyard and was captivated by the simple beauty and tranquility of the space, and its openness to the sky, open to the Creation—and thus, the Creator. . . . Soon after, we began our work in the eastern desert. One morning, just before dawn, I was awakened by the sound of human voices outside my tent. I got up, and in the pink glow of the pre-dawn, I saw some of our workmen praying, prostrating. I was transfixed. It was utterly and serenely beautiful and yet very powerful at the same time. Who wouldn't want to experience that? . . . And so I learned *salah*. *Salah* is fully embodied prayer. Postures signify attentiveness to God, humility before God, repentance and submission to God. I found the postures quite meaningful in my personal prayer. It's particularly profound for me to make *sujūd*—prostrating, touching my forehead to the ground, while praying: "Glory to God, the Most High"—at precisely the moment when I am physically in the lowest position. . . . To some this may sound like syncretism, but I think [St.] Francis would have appreciated the words of the great Sufi, Rabi'a: "In my Soul, there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church that dissolves, that dissolves in God."

The call to pray with Muslims that I and other Christians have heard is rooted in a conviction expressed by the late Jacques Dupuis,

Franciscan spiritual center, Aspon PA, October 2019



Presentations at the Catholic University, Washington DC, November 2019



Course on Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, Istanbul, October 2019
with Dr. Adnane Mokrani, Br. Fellyanus Dogan



Faith and Fraternity in a Fragmented Age, St. Bonaventure University, October 2019 with Fr. David Couturier, Fr. Michael Calabria and Shazia Siddiqi



Istanbul conference, September 2019



Interfaith
prayer service
and *sema* with
Mevlevi Der-
vishes.



Fr. Michael Cal-
abria with Fran-
sican scholars
Michael Cusato,
OFM, Gwenolé
Jeusset, OFM
and Sr. Kathy
Warren, OSF



MUSLIM BLACK LIVES MATTER

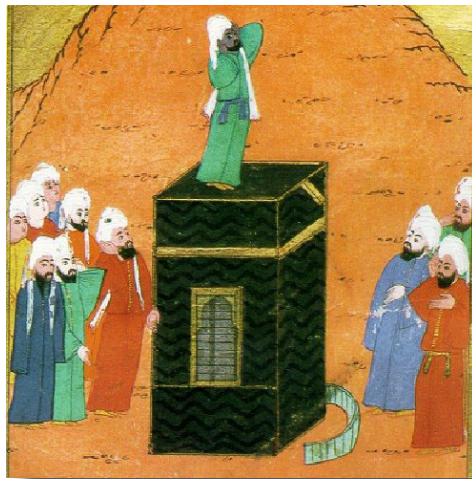
By Soquania Henry



Ilhan Omar was born 1982 in Mogadishu, Somalia. In 1995 she arrived in the U.S and became an American citizen shortly after. As a young adult, Omar involved herself in local politics and volunteered her time as a translator for the American-Somalian community. Today Ilhan Omar lives as one of only two Muslim women of color elected to the United States Congress. In her service Omar promotes black women's progression in congress and stands up against Islamophobia and anti-semitism. Since elected Omar has been an inspiration for young Muslim women of color.



Nana Asma'u was born 1793 in Northern Nigeria. She lived as a poet, religious scholar, and pioneer for women's education in West Africa during the 19th century. As a Muslim women, Nana led political campaigns that advocated for women to have a role in everyday society.



Bilal ibn Rabah was born 580 C.E., and was a former Ethiopian slave. Bilal had such a beautiful voice, Muhammad (pbuh), choose Bilal to be the first to call for prayer in Islam. As Muhammad's close companion, Bilal was highly respected as a black Muslim and in his role, represented a united and diverse Islam.



MALCOLM X AND THE HAJJ:

A VIEW OF RACIAL HARMONY

In 1964, civil rights leader, Malcolm X Undertook the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. It was a transformative moment in his life and for the first time, he experienced racial harmony in as way he had not thought possible. His description of the Hajj is as compelling and challenging now as it was more that 50 years ago.

“Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this holy land the home of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other prophets of the holy scriptures. For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors

“I have been blessed to visit the Holy City of Mecca. I have made my seven circuits around the Ka'aba, led my a young Mutawaf named Muhammad. I drank water from the well of ZemZem. I ran seven

times back and forth between the hills of Mt. Al Safa and Al Marwah. I have prayed in the ancient city of Mina, and have prayed on Mt. Arafat.

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

“America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered ‘white’ --but the ‘white’ attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.

“You may be shocked by there words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and accepts the reality of life and new experiences and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand

with every form of intelligent search for truth.

“During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug)--While praying to the same God--with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the ‘white’ Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana.

“We were truly all the same (brothers)--because their belief in one God had removed ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior and the white from their attitude.

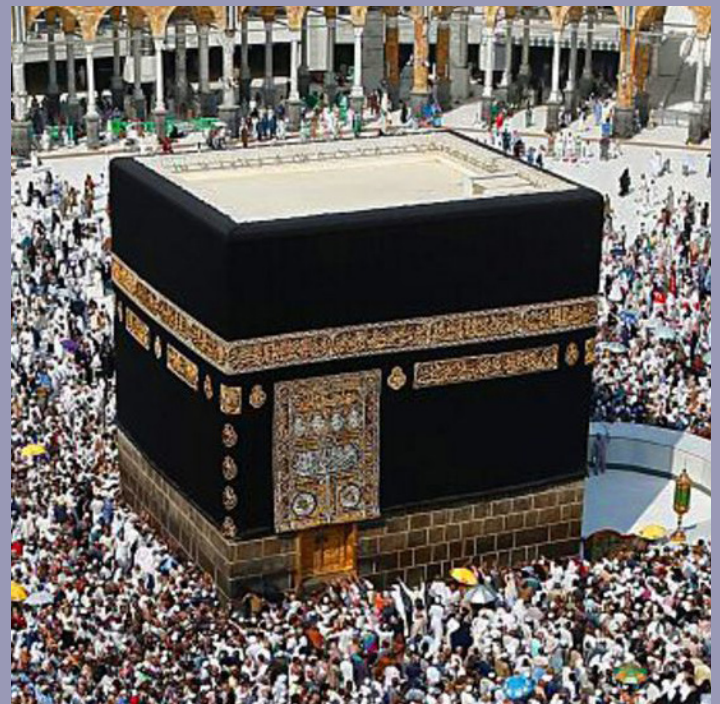
“I could see from this that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the oneness of man--and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their differences in color.

“With Racism plaguing America like and incurable cancer, the so-called ‘Christian’ white American heart should be more receptive to a proven solution to such a destructive problem. Perhaps it could be in time to save America from imminent disaster--the same destruction brought

upon Germany by racism that eventually destroyed the Germans themselves.

“Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. The American Negro never can be blamed for his racial animosities--he is only reacting to four hundred year of the conscious racism of the American whites. But as racism leads America up the suicide path,, I do believe, from the experiences that have had with then, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the spiritual path of truth--the only way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to.”

--From: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Ballantine Books, 1973 pp.346-348)



The Prophet and Race Relations

On the ninth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah in the tenth year after the hijra (6 March 632 CE), the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) delivered his final sermon in the Uranah Valley of Mount Arafat during the Hajj. It is a humble and remarkable text upholding the inherent dignity of all regardless of gender, ethnicity, and race. It is particularly relevant in light of renewed discussions about race and racism in the United States and elsewhere in the world. We provide a short excerpt here. The full text may be read at: <https://icliny.org/last-sermon/>.

“All Praise is due to ALLAH, so we praise Him, and seek His pardon and we turn to Him.

We seek refuge with ALLAH from the evils of ourselves and from the evil consequences of our deeds. Whom ALLAH guides aright there is none to lead him astray...

...All of humanity is from Adam and Eve, an Arab

has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white – except by piety and good action...Do not therefore do injustice to yourselves. Remember one day you will meet ALLAH and answer your

deeds. So beware: do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone...”

The Prophet Muhammad preaching after the Battle of the Ditch. Safavid Period, ca. 1590. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. S1986.282.



Holy Wisdom or Holy War? The Fight over Hagia Sophia

By. Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD

It is unquestionably one of the greatest works of architecture in the world and --is at the top of the "must-see" list for anyone visiting Istanbul: Hagia Sophia, or in Turkish, *Aya Sofya* – "Holy Wisdom" – the sixth-century Byzantine basilica which became an Ottoman mosque in the year 1453 and then declared a museum by President Atatürk in 1934. Now change has come again to the structure's identity. On July 10, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Hagia Sophia will once again serve as a mosque. The decision by Turkey's Council of State was celebrated and vigorously defended by many Muslims in Turkey and in other countries, who see it as a triumph of Islam against the forces of Western secularism and a reassertion of Muslim power in the world after decades of decline. Still other Muslims vigorously opposed the decision as politically motivated and for the negative effect it may have on Muslim-Christian relations.

Although Mr. Erdoğan has promised that, like all Turkey's mosques, "its doors will be open to everyone -- Muslim or non-Muslim," many Christians around the world lamented the decision. The Russian Orthodox Church responded with "bitterness and indignation." The head of the World Council of Churches expressed "grief and dismay" in a letter to Turkey's president, and Pope Francis said he was "deeply pained" by the decision. On social media photoshopped pictures of Hagia Sophia appeared, its dome

topped by a cross and its minarets erased. Sadly, the decision has given Christians and Muslims new ammunition for a religious war of words with an unhealthy dose of sectarian myth, nationalism and geo-politics in place of the spirit of Holy Wisdom that the seminal structure has conveyed as a basilica, a mosque and museum over the centuries.

The Basilica of Holy Wisdom (*Hagia Sophia* in Greek) was built by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in his capital of Constantinople and consecrated in late December 537 CE. It was the third church built on the site. The first church, consecrated in 360 CE, was destroyed by fire in riots that occurred when the Empress Aelia Eudoxia deposed the Patriarch John Chrysostom. The second church built on the site was also destroyed by fire – this time, during a revolt against Justinian in 532. Whatever Hagia Sophia means to Christians now, its earlier incarnations were seen as legitimate targets in times of political and religious unrest in the Christian capital.

It was Justinian's imposing edifice, the third Hagia Sophia, that stretched architectural forms and engineering skills to their limits: a cavernous interior space covered by a large central dome with a diameter of over thirty-six meters, raised fifty-five meters above the ground. In an ingenious

design, the thrust of the dome is countered by two semi-domes and massive buttresses on opposing sides of the structure. Justinian was so impressed by the magnificent structure that when he entered the basilica for the first time, he allegedly compared it to the biblical Temple of Jerusalem, exclaiming: "O Solomon, I have outdone you!" The design proved a little too daring, however, as the dome collapsed subsequently on several occasions. In the Ottoman Period, additional buttresses shored up buckling walls, and to this day the structure requires on-going structural maintenance.

As with the earlier churches that stood on the site, not all Christians expressed concern for the preservation of the Basilica with the same zeal as we see now in the aftermath of Erdoğan's decision. During the period of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries, when the Church forbade figurative art in religious contexts, Justinian's interior mosaic decoration was removed or altered. Centuries later, when Latin Christians attacked Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), they looted Hagia Sophia of its treasures, guzzling wine from sacred vessels as they were regaled by the bawdy songs of a prostitute whom they had seated on the Basilica's patriarchal throne. Christians who now lament the use of Hagia Sophia as a mosque would do well to recall the controversies and con-

flicts *within* the Church that mar the history of Hagia Sophia as a Christian place of worship and which still divide the Christian community East and West.

“It is the preservation of Hagia Sophia’s magnificent mosaics and access to the structure as a whole that concern many people now that the Museum of Hagia Sophia is again a mosque.”

In May 1453, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II succeeded in breaching the formidable walls of Constantinople. As the most significant structure of the city – and one that symbolized the power of the Byzantine Christian Emperor – Hagia Sophia was re-purposed as a mosque, but nevertheless retained its former name, rendered in Turkish as *Aya Sofya*. Critics of Erdoğan’s decision have indicated that Mehmet’s act was a violation of Islamic law which protects Christian places of worship (Qur’an, *al-Ḥajj* 22.40). After the conquest, a *mihrab* (prayer niche) was added to the structure’s eastern apse, but oriented southeast in the direction of Mecca. The *mihrab* is inscribed – as are most Ottoman *mihrabs* – with a passage from the Qur’an (*Āl ‘Imrān* 3.37)

which describes Mary at prayer in the temple of Jerusalem where she is miraculously provided by God with sustenance. The placement of the *mihrab* in the eastern apse is fortuitous for in the mosaic of semi-dome above, the Virgin Mary sits with the infant Jesus on her lap. For Muslims, Mary is a paragon of submission to God’s will, chosen by God “above all the women of the world” to bear Jesus, God’s Prophet, Mercy, Spirit and Word. This mosaic was still visible in the when Cornelius Loos made his drawings of the interior in 1710, as were the nearby images of Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) and other angels, esteemed in both Christianity and Islam as God’s celestial messengers. Thus, in spite of the Sunni Muslim proscription of images within religious contexts, for at least 250 years from the time Hagia Sophia became a mosque until the mosaics were covered with plaster, Muslims prayed in the presence of these images, reminded of Mary’s steadfast faith and the angelic annunciation of good news – the birth of Christ Jesus (*Āl ‘Imrān* 3.45). Now those images are covered with drapes during prayer to address current sensitivities.

It is the preservation of Hagia Sophia’s magnificent mosaics and access to the structure as a whole that concern many people now that the Museum of Hagia Sophia is again a mosque. Emotions are running high and the rhetoric quite hot on both sides, indicating that the recent war of words is about much more than simply the re-use of Hagia Sophia as a mosque. Historic Istanbul, the area known as Sultanahmet, is certainly not lacking in mosques. There are many other mosques in the area, including the large adjacent mosque of Sultan Ahmet (“the Blue Mosque”). For some Turks, however, *Aya Sofya*’s status is a matter of Turkey’s national sovereignty. When Greece recently voiced its opposition to the

change in Hagia Sophia’s status, Mr. Erdoğan shot back: “Are you ruling Turkey, or are we?” For Mr. Erdoğan’s supporters, reclaiming Hagia Sophia as a mosque is a matter of religious pride and a way of reasserting Islam in the secular Turkish Republic. Turks who oppose the decision, among them novelist Orhan Pamuk, wish to uphold Turkey’s secular identity established by Atatürk at the founding of the Republic in 1923. Many Muslims worldwide celebrated the return of Hagia Sophia’s status as a mosque as a sign of hope and strength at a time when Muslims are under increasing attack in China, Myanmar, India, Palestine and elsewhere even in the midst of a devastating pandemic. These are indeed serious humanitarian issues, and they deserve international attention, but we must also acknowledge the violence inflicted on Muslims other Muslims. Returning Hagia Sophia to a mosque does not solve these problems and, in the eyes of some, further politicizes Islam in Turkey and elsewhere.

Although Hagia Sophia ceased to function as a church more than 500 years ago, Christian responses have also been quite strong, even though Turkey’s Christian population is no more than 0.3-0.4% of the population. For some Christians, particularly those living as minorities in Muslim-majority countries, the decision exacerbates their feelings of vulnerability and fear, particularly in countries plagued with sectarian inequality and violence, including the bombing and burning of churches. These are also legitimate concerns, but the fate of Hagia Sophia does not address them any more than it addresses the pressing problems of Muslims living under duress. Indeed, the rancor generated by this recent change only serves to distract us from the real issues affecting many religious minorities in the world. Most disturbing, however,



have been the expressions of Islamophobia, subtle and blatant, Christian vs. Muslim. Facebook postings have included images of crusading knights killing Muslims captioned with the medieval motto: *Deus vult* – “God wills it” – a far cry from Holy Wisdom that is the true foundation of the structure.

Setting aside sectarian and ideological concerns, what has really changed in *Aya Sofya*? The admission fee (\$15 US) will be eliminated since it is not technically permissible to charge for visiting a mosque. Given the number of visitors – 3.7 million every year – closing the mosque during prayer times, at midday and midafternoon particularly, will certainly have an impact on the constant flow of visitors, particularly in the busy spring and summer tourist seasons. Visitors will need to remove their shoes or have covers provided. Both men and women will need to be attired properly which will perhaps be an inconvenience for tourists minimally dressed for Istanbul’s hot summer climate. Women will be required to cover their heads,

a practice shared by Muslim and Byzantine women. Such changes indicate that, above all, *Aya Sofya* will again be a place of prayer, perhaps a quieter and more contemplative environment than it has been in decades.

While the public prayer in Aya Sofya is again Islamic, there will be nothing to prevent anyone from offering a prayer from their own faith tradition in the quiet of their hearts. It is therefore deeply regrettable that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other Christian congregations observed July 24, the first day of prayer in Aya Sofya since 1934, as a “Day of Mourning.” By doing so, they have preached that Christians should mourn as Muslims pray. This, I think, does far more damage to interfaith relations than Mr. Erdoğan’s decision. Amid all the rancor surrounding Hagia Sophia now, the religious and political arguments for and against its use as mosque, I am reminded of a poem written by Rabia al-Adawiyyah, a Muslim woman and mystic (d. 801 CE), words that express true Holy Wisdom:

In my soul,

There is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church where I kneel.

Prayer should bring us to an altar where no walls or names exist...

In my soul,

There is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church

That dissolve, that dissolve in God.

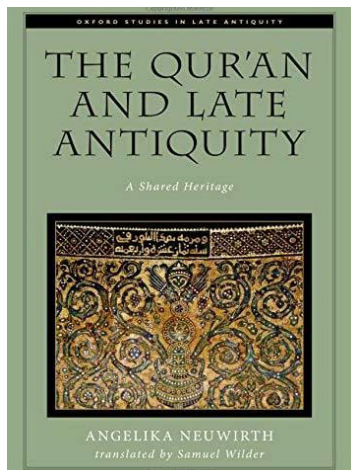
M. Calabria, OFM, PhD



Mehmed II and the Patriarch of Constantinople.

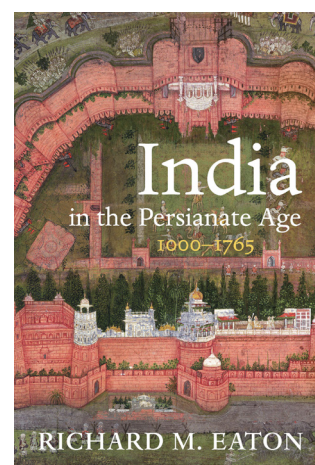
FROM THE BOOK SHELF:

New and Noteworthy Books in Arab & Islamic Studies



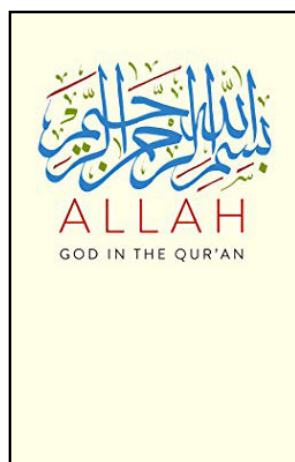
Angelika Neuwirth. *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*. Translated by Samuel Wilder. Oxford University Press, 2019. 534 pp.

A lengthy, scholarly examination of the Qur'an within the context of the Near Eastern culture in Late Antiquity. Neuwirth covers much ground here, including the history of the Qur'an, the chronology of its revelation and structure of its suras (chapters), Biblical comparisons, and much more.



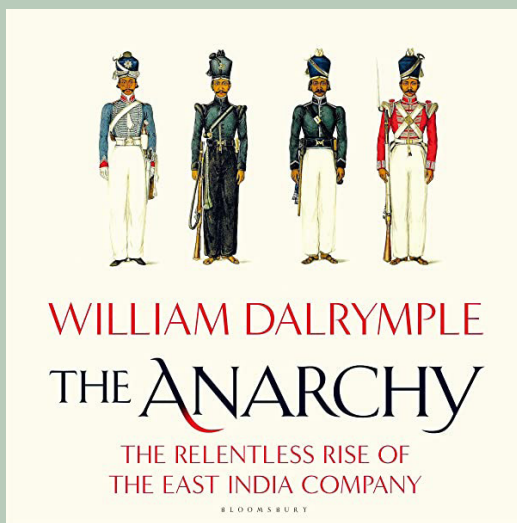
Richard M. Eaton. *India in the Persianate Age, 1000-1765*. University of California Press, 2019.

This welcome and well-written history covers the very period that Hindutva nationalists are seeking to erase from school textbooks, i.e. the centuries when various Muslim political sultanates and dynasties established themselves as rulers in India and South Asia. In contrast to nationalist ideologies, Eaton demonstrates that this period constitutes a unique blend of Sanskrit and Persianate cultures, giving rise to a land of unparalleled diversity, creativity and productivity.



Gabriel Said Reynolds. *Allah: God in the Qur'an*. Yale University Press, 2020. 327 pp.

Reynolds, a professor of Islamic Studies at Notre Dame, was recently named consultor ("advisor") for the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. His latest book is a competent, albeit often provocative, study of God as represented in the Qur'an and compared with the Bible.



William Dalrymple. *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. Bloomsbury, 2019. 522 pp.

Dalrymple is the prolific author of books on South Asian history and culture, including a riveting account of the Indian Uprising of 1857 (*The Last Mughal*). His latest work provides the most comprehensive account of how the British East India Company bought and fought its way to wrest India from the Mughal emperors. American readers should take particular note of role of General Lord Charles Cornwallis. After surrendering to George Washington at Yorktown in 1781, he restarted his career as Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in India.

Exhibit Catalogs



Caravans of God, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa. Edited by Kathleen Bickford Berzock. Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University in association with Princeton University Press, 2019.

This volume serves as the catalog for an exhibit by the same name which was on view at the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto) until late February 2020, and was due to open at the National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) in April 2020 until the COVID pandemic closed all museums. It is hoped that the exhibit will be available for viewing once the Smithsonian reopens as it provides a fascinating view into commercial and cultural exchanges between Islamic North Africa and Christian Europe in the Medieval Period.

Cloth That Changed the World: The Art and Fashion of Indian Chintz. Edited by Sarah Fee. Royal Ontario Museum, 2019.

This exhibit was due to open at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum April 2020. The catalog and exhibit tell the story of chintz, a multicolored printed or painted cotton cloth that originated in India, and became an immensely important commodity in world trade by the 16th century, much of which was controlled by Islamic Empires. In fact, the European demand for chintz became so great that cheap imitations were produced in place of the Indian cloth; hence the slang term "chintzy." The profound social, economic and environmental impact of chintz is well documented in this exceptional volume. This exhibit is now due to open at the Royal Ontario Museum in September of 2020.



CAIS Student Trip



Cairo, Egypt

Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt



The Cairo Museum: Amina Golden-Arabaty, Emily Palmer

Volunteering with the YMCA in Samalut, Minya



Teaching music and English to Egyptian children at the YMCA of Minya

2019





Citadel fortress in Alexandria, Egypt



The Sphinx, Giza



The Monastery of St Anthony



1210 steps to the cave of St. Anthony



مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية





Gratitude

Exceptional circumstances often bring forth exceptional people. This very much has been my experience of the local Muslim community during these past difficult months, and I wish to acknowledge them here. Local restaurateurs Amber Rafi and Aamir Sultan Malik provided meals to people unable to leave their homes due to COVID concerns.

Throughout this ongoing crisis, the many Muslim medical professionals in Allegany and Olean continue to address the area's everyday medical needs even when their own lives are at risk. This heavy burden is shared by the devoted members of their families. In a truly touching gesture, Drs. Zafar Mirza and Shazia Siddiqi brought me a meal (Iftar) to break the Ramadan fast since we were not able to gather at the local mosque this year due to the pandemic. Shabana Chaudhry and other women of the community sewed masks for the Olean medical community and the St. Bonaventure Friars in the early weeks of the pandemic.

These are the faces of American Muslims. We are truly blessed by their presence in the local community and in our country.

CAIS



Tea and Sweets in CAIS



Drs. Mirza and Siddiqi deliver food during the Pandemic

Spotlight on Graduates



LUKE GOBLE

Studying Arabic and Islamic Studies with St. Bonaventure's CAIS has allowed me to continue my love for languages and studying different cultures around the world. Equally as important, it has prepared me for the next step in my life as I head to Comoros, an Arabic-speaking country off the east African coast with a

largely Muslim population where I will be teaching English for the next two years with the Peace Corps. The last three years studying Arabic and Islamic studies have expanded and changed my view on life and the world around me in a way I never could have expected as I began my journey at Saint Bonaventure.



ERIN ZLOCKIE

Arabic culture has always been prominent in my life due to maternal roots from Lebanon. Many in the newer generations of my family do not speak the language fluently. I decided as a child I would become fluent, declaring it a goal. While attending St. Bonaventure, I took advantage of the opportunity to study Arabic offered through the university's Center for Arab and Islamic Studies. I developed a passion for learning and cultivated a more in-depth knowledge of the rich history and culture. As a language student, studying Arabic enabled me to not only fulfill my childhood objective but also utilize it as part of my skillset

in the language field. Studying Arabic equipped me with a solid foundation, particularly regarding translation. As a professional achievement, I hope to translate Arabic texts into English and vice versa for publication. I am interested in using my knowledge of Arabic to facilitate understanding of the importance of Arabic culture historically and what that means today. Learning Arabic is an asset in this time as it offers a crucial perspective. While learning Arabic has been challenging, I found that the experience has been rewarding as there are so many open doors and endless possibilities.



EMILY PALMER

The past four years of Arabic and Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University have been filled with creating and achieving goals such as learning Modern Standard Arabic, Qur'anic Arabic, and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, as well as personal reflection and growth. I have found new ways to connect with people throughout the world not only in the classroom but also in Morocco and Egypt due to the incredible opportunities that arose from being a part of the Center

for Arabic and Islamic Studies. The most important thing I have learned is how to understand people today based on their history, culture, spirituality, and relationships with others—context is everything. I am excited to bring these experiences with me this fall to the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter in England where I will pursue a MA in Middle East Studies with a specialization in Arab and Islamic Studies.

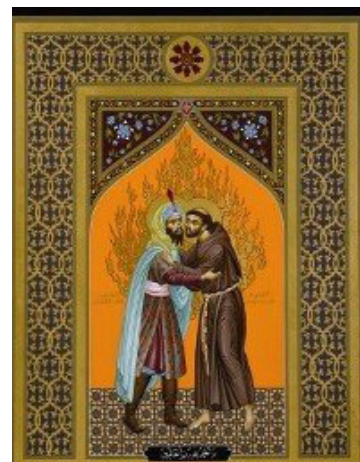
The Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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.

Nur: The Official CAIS Magazine ©
Design and layout by
Amina Golden-Arabaty

YES! I would like to share St. Bonaventure's Vision and help promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic studies by making a gift to the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies.

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