



European perspectives on the Qur'an (16th-18th C.): polemics and beyond

Workshop “The European Qur'an”

ERC Synergy Grant EuQu (<https://euqu.eu/>)

From the Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth century, European history was in a transitional stage marked by both continuities and ruptures. Humanism, the Reformation, the “Great Discoveries” and, finally, the Enlightenment participate in their own way in the reconfiguration of the place of the religious in European consciousness and society. This reconfiguration profoundly changed the relationship with Europe’s other(s) (Stroumsa 2010). The publication by Theodor Bibliander of a Latin translation of the Qur’an in 1543 paved the way to a discovery of this text by a plurality of European readers. The numerous translations that followed all around Europe highlight the profound interest that the “Mohammadan law” elicited among European readers. Both familiar and foreign, the Qur’an was “good to think with”, as several works have recently shown (Elmarsafy 2009; Garcia 2012 ; Bevilacqua & Loop 2018).

Perceived for centuries essentially through the prism of alterity, the Scripture of Islam is integrated into a series of interconnected debates agitating Europe: interconfessional disputes (Segesvary 1978, Bobzin 1995), political thought (Tolan 2019, Malcolm 2019), philological observations (Hamilton 2001 and 2017, Loop 2013), religious dissidence (Khayati 2009, Champion 2010, Mulsow 2010), etc. Although anti-Muslim concerns remained dominant, European engagements with the Qur’an were transformed by philological critique and other novel readings of the Qur’an. Ludovico Marracci’s Latin translation of the Qur’an (1698), which combines religious polemics with unparalleled philological accuracy, provides a striking and well-known example of this transformation.

While non-polemical (or marginally polemical) readings of the Qur'an coincide with challenges to the hegemony of a Christian paradigm, a linear reading of history which opposes medieval "obscurantism" to a secular "enlightenment" is insufficient to explain the specificities of European representations of Islam in the modern period (Bevilacqua 2018, Loop 2019). The complexity and hybridity of the periods requires therefore a nuanced and plural framework.

The workshop's objectives are twofold:

- to further explore the diversity of approaches to Islam and the Qur'an in the early modern period
- to encourage a reflection on the tools and sources available to scholars for mapping out approaches to Islam's sacred text during this critical juncture of European history.

Particularly welcome are contributions which critically consider the utility and limits of binary oppositions: polemic versus irenic, religious versus critical, Middle Ages versus Enlightenment, Christian versus Muslim, orthodoxy versus heterodoxy.

In this perspective, the following under-researched areas may provide interesting insights:

- the impact of "heterodox" movements on the reading of the Qur'an: irreligion and freethinking (Khayati 2009, Champion 2010), kabbalism, mysticism, dissident Christian movements such as the Quakers (Meggit 2013) and Unitarianism (Mulsow 2010).
- the multiplicity of approaches developed within Christian "orthodoxies", i.e. in spaces more or less controlled by ecclesiastical institutions. To what extent can one distinguish, beyond the conventional and often formulaic polemical remarks of early modern authors, approaches to the Qur'an which reflect other concerns (mystical, theological, political, philological etc.)?
- the impact of scholarly virtues (accuracy, impartiality, curiosity etc.) and philological approaches on readings of the Qur'an (Bevilacqua 2018).
- The reception of the Quran amongst educated elites in contexts where the Orient becomes fashionable: amateur orientalists, literary circles, antiquarians etc.
- The reception of the Quran in spaces of increased familiarity between Muslims and Christians, European and Orientals, and the role played by liminal groups in European understandings of the Qur'an : Iberian Moriscos, oriental Christians, famous converts, oriental informants of Europeans scholars (Babinski 2019)

We encourage contributions based on sources and archives which have remained under-utilized. These may include:

- clandestine manuscripts and private letters
- Quranic citations in translated works of literature and philosophy (*Hayy Ibn Yaqdhān*, *Gulistān* etc.)
- archives that might shed light on popular beliefs concerning Islam and the Qur'an (following the works of Ginsburg (1976) and Tommasino (2018) on Menocchio using Inquisition archives)
- archives that may allow us to document the circulation of Qur'anic translations: who publishes, translates, reads, buys, censors or supports the publication of the Qur'an?

Practical information

The workshop will take place on **2-3 December 2021** at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, in Nantes, France. Travel arrangements will be covered for the participants.

Presenters will be able to participate virtually if preferred.

Presentations will be in English or in French.

Interested scholars are invited to **send a title and an abstract (max. 400 words) by 1st July 2021 to the following address : euqu@univ-nantes.fr**

Publication of the proceedings in a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal is being considered.

For questions, please contact Emmanuelle Stefanidis (emmanuelle.stefanidis@univ-nantes.fr).

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