

Biographies and topics speakers

Geert Jan van Gelder | Bad Beards in Classical Arabic Literature

Geert Jan van Gelder (b. Amsterdam, 1947) was Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Groningen from 1975 until 1998 and Laudian Professor of Arabic at the University of Oxford from 1998 until 2012. He sported a rather thin beard for a brief period in 1970–1971. He has published widely on Classical Arabic literature.

Abstract

Innumerable erotic epigrams, even anthologies, on the cheek-down or “peach fuzz” (‘idhār or khatt) of adolescent boys have been composed in Arabic. This paper will ignore them (they have been studied before, notably by Thomas Bauer). Instead, it will deal with texts—predominantly poems, mostly lampoons—on proper beards. Even though the Prophet is reported to have commended the growing of full beards (waffirū l-liḥā, a‘fū l-liḥā), it is often stressed that long beards are a sign of stupidity. Interesting descriptions of beards are scarce in pre- and early Islamic poetry; they blossom in the Abbasid period. Among the lampoonists of beards Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 283/896) takes pride of place. Speaking of beards, one cannot avoid noting that they are also very often mentioned more casually, in scatological insults.

Jan J. van Ginkel | “Long as God can grow it”. The attitude to hair in Syriac Christian Literature

After studying Classics (and Syriac, Byzantine, and Early Medieval Studies) in Groningen, I defended my PhD Thesis there in 1995. I've taught Syriac and the History of Christianity in the Middle East and have been involved in various projects on the history and literature of the Middle East at various universities (Groningen, Utrecht, Leiden, VU Amsterdam) with my own "Syriac" input.

Abstract

Hairs, both on top of the head, or under the chin, even on the entire body has always been a distinctive marker within Christian communities. In the following some first suggestions on the functioning of hair (here also meaning facial and body hair) within the Middle Eastern Syriac-speaking Christian community in the first millennium will be presented.

There are two distinct periods. First the period before the Arab conquest during which Christianity was the dominant force in society (Roman Empire). In the sources hair is sometimes used to mark the distinction between "religious" people and lay people. Also within these groups the way hair is presented can indicate the function within these groups. For the "religious people" the distinction between church officials and the "ascetics / mystics" is the most clear, but with more subtle changes in style a more elaborate categorisation was possible in society. Also for lay people there was diversity in

hair styles, which was often merely a "fashion", but sometimes there are additional motivations.

In the second period, when Islam was the dominant religion, the new rulers could / would influence behaviour and presentation of non-Islamic communities (in this respect one often refers to the so-called Pact of Umar). However, these communities, building on the traditions they inherited – including the division of lay and religious people -, did also develop their own styles, sometimes following sociological developments within the Islamic Empire, sometimes responding to pressure or temptation.

In the presentation only first impressions and interpretations can be presented as research into this field is but in its infancy. However, I do hope to show that there was diversity in the attitude to hair than one would expect from normative texts, and I also hope to discuss some first attempts of explaining that diversity.

Camilla Adang | Dreams about hair as indicators of good or bad fortune

Camilla Adang is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University, where she teaches classical Islamic thought. She studied Languages and Cultures of the Middle East and Spanish at Catholic University Nijmegen, The Netherlands (now Radboud University Nijmegen), where she also defended her PhD thesis entitled *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, a revised version of which was published in 1996 by Brill. She has held research fellowships in Madrid, Jerusalem, Leiden, Wassenaar and Göttingen and has published widely on social and intellectual (including polemical) encounters between Muslims and Jews in the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period, as well as on the controversial legal scholar and theologian Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba, on whom she lectured in 2015 as LUCIS Fall Fellow. She is involved in several projects dealing with the intellectual history of al-Andalus and is one of the Principal Investigators of the international research project *Biblia Arabica: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*. In addition, she is one of the editors of the Brill series *Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies* and serves on the editorial or advisory boards of various other book series and scientific journals.

Abstract

Like earlier cultures and religions, Islam has a rich (though not wholly original) tradition of dream interpretation, and over the centuries many encyclopedic manuals arranged according to dream motifs were produced of which unfortunately only few have survived. In the present paper, I shall present and compare the interpretations of hair (including body and facial hair) seen in dreams as described in three popular extant works, namely *Tafsīr al-aḥlām* attributed to Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/733), *al-Ishārāt fī ‘ilm al-‘ibārāt* by Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī (d. 873/1468), and *Ta‘bīr al-manām* by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (d. 1143/1731). The motifs in question are: sha‘r (hair in general), shayb (grey or white hair, associated with old age), liḥya (beard) and shārib (moustache).

Christian Lange | Beards of paradise: Prophetic and other beards in the Muslim eschaton

Christian Lange (PhD Harvard, 2006) holds the Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Utrecht. In his research, he seeks to inject the study of Islamic sources in

Arabic and Persian with the analytical categories and approaches developed in the Study of Religion and cognate disciplines in the Humanities. He's primarily interested in the areas of Islamic theology (eschatology in particular), Islamic law and legal theory, and Islamic mysticism. He is the author of *Justice, Punishment, and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* (Cambridge 2008) and of *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge 2016).

Abstract

In my contribution, I will examine a late-medieval Arabic treatise by the Syrian scholar Ibrahim al-Naji (d. 900/1494) devoted to the question of whether the blessed in paradise sport beards, as well as repercussions of the discussion in a number of late-medieval Islamic compilations of eschatological hadiths. At first glance, al-Naji's treatise may seem no more than an amusing oddity. However, as I shall argue, al-Naji does not use eschatological imagery to make predictions about a future afterlife (at least not primarily) but to cultivate an orthodox cultural and religious identity in the here-and-now. A seemingly obscure eschatological question can thus be shown to serve distinct ideological aims: al-Naji's denial of the ideal of beardless beauty can be read as an instance of the age-old rejection of the Greco-Roman background upon which Islam arose, as well as as a reorientation, propagated by certain scholars of the Mamluk period, of Islam toward its Arabo-Semitic origins. My contribution thus seeks (1) to contribute to the study of Islamic eschatology as narrative mythology, and (2) to make an historical argument about the changing parameters in Arab-Muslim facial sensitivities and identity formation in the Mamluk Near East.

Shahzad Bashir | Hair and the Politics and Poetics of Memory

Shahzad Bashir specializes in the intellectual and social histories of Persianate Islamic societies. His most recent book is entitled *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (2011) and he is currently completing a book entitled *Islamic Pasts and Futures: Explorations in the Meanings of History*.

Abstract

I will concentrate on Persian materials from the fourteenth century CE to discuss the way hair is used to indicate charged social bonds between human beings. The topic touches upon intimacy in the context of eroticization and the use of symbolism and ritual to inculcate group identity and solidarity. Tracking this kind of use of hair provides a way to consider the complex relationship between literary representation and social reality in Islamic contexts.

Megan Reid | Hairstyles of Holy Men in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods

Megan Reid is a lecturer in history at California State University Long Beach. A cultural historian, she received her PhD in Religion from Princeton in 2005 and also holds a Master's Degree in Islamic Studies from UCLA. Her widely-reviewed first book, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam*, was published in 2013 by Cambridge University Press. Dr. Reid was named a Carnegie Scholar to undertake research on her second book project

entitled “Punishment and Appropriate Justice in Islamic Societies.” Her areas of expertise include medieval Islamic history, religion and the body, and the history of Islamic law.

Abstract

My paper examines the various messages conveyed by holy men’s hairstyles in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. In particular I will explore the meanings of letting one’s hair grow long or become unruly. In some cases the message was obvious: someone who had deliberately disheveled hair usually indicated a kind of pious insanity, feigned or real. But the meaning is often murkier, and it is hard to discern whether a hairstyle was invoking something old or something new. The upkeep of one’s hair might make reference to ancient ideals, either by complying with them or disregarding them. It might also refer to more recent trends in piety, such as the shaved heads of the antinomian qalandars.

Petra Sijpesteijn | Fighting Corruption by Cutting Hair and Beards

Wen-Chin Ouyang | TBA

Wen-chin Ouyang was born in Taiwan and raised in Libya. She completed her BA in Arabic at Tripoli University and PhD Middle Eastern Studies at Columbia University in New York City. She taught Arabic language, literature and culture at Columbia University, University of Chicago and University of Virginia before she moved to London. She is interested in critical theory and thought as well as poetics and prosaics. She has written extensively on classical and modern Arabic narrative and literary criticism. She is the author of *Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Culture: The Making of a Tradition* (1997), *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel* (2012) and *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel* (2013). She has also published widely on *The Thousand and One Nights*, often in comparison with classical and modern Arabic narrative traditions, European and Hollywood cinema, magic realism, and Chinese storytelling. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Middle Eastern Literatures* and a member of the editorial board of *Bulletin of SOAS*. She founded and co-edits *Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature*. She chaired the editorial board of *Middle East in London Magazine* (2007-2008) and contributes regularly to *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*. A native speaker of Arabic and Chinese, she has been working towards Arabic-Chinese comparative literary and cultural studies, including *Silk Road Studies*.