

LUCIS Annual Conference 2018

Approaching Shi‘i Islam in the Academy

The study of Shi‘i Islam is currently undergoing something of a resurgence. But, as with the broader field of Islamic studies, Shi‘i studies remains underpopulated and under theorised. Attempts to link academic discourses remain far and few in between. Disciplines, fields, and subfields which touch upon Shi‘ism and which have much to contribute to each other often do not do so, with scholars tending to speak more to others within their disciplinary boundaries.

The primary objective of this conference, then, is to enrich conversations between scholars of Shi‘ism and to demonstrate the relevance of Shi‘i themes to broader conversations in Islamic studies. While presenting original research, contributors will refer to the state of their subfields, and how examples derived from the study of Shi‘ism can complicate and enrich debates in broader fields and disciplines.

The conference brings together leading specialists and emerging scholarly voices in the study of Shi‘i Islam in Europe and North America. In convening this conference, LUCIS encourages the consideration of all branches of Shi‘i Islam including strands of thought and practice that have been considered heterodox by some Shi‘i traditions, as well as Shi‘i modes of thought and comportment within purportedly non-Shi‘i expressions of Islam. The conference will also be followed by a one-day early-career workshop entitled "Shi‘i Piety: Theory and Materiality from Premodern to Postmodern".

Day 1

Wednesday, 14 November

09.00-9.30 Coffee and Registration

9.30-9.45 Opening Remarks

Session 1

9.45 – 10.30

Domesticating Shi‘i Islam: Notes from an Outsider
Ab de Jong (*Leiden University*)

10.30 - 11.15

The Widows of Karbala: Studying Women in Contemporary Shi‘ism
Edith Szanto (*American University of Iraq*)

11.15 – 11.45 Coffee Break

Session 2

11.45 – 12.30

Approaching the study of Shi‘i texts: rethinking the use of form, function and content
Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (*Institute of Ismaili Studies*)

12.30 - 13.15

Female Religious Authority in Shi‘i Islam
Mirjam Künkler (*Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study*)

13.15 - 14.00 Lunch

Visit to Leiden Library Special Collections

14.15 - 15.30

Presentation of selected manuscripts given by Arnoud Vrolijk, Curator
(There are only a limited number of spots for the tour. Registration in advance will be necessary to participate.)

Session 3

15.45 - 16.45

Discussion panel: Issues facing Shi‘i Muslims in the Netherlands

Panel participants:

Arjen Buitelaar (*Su-Shi Interfaith Dialogue*)

Anne Dijk (*Director of the Fahm Institute*)

Magreet van Es (*Radboud University Nijmegen*)

Session 4

17.00-18.00

Keynote Speech: Normalising the Study of Shi‘ism: Shi‘i Contributions to the Formation of Islamic law

Robert Gleave (*University of Exeter*)

18.00-19.00

Reception for all conference attendees at the Faculty Club

19.30

Dinner for speakers and chairs

Day 2 Thursday, 15 November

09.30-10.00 Coffee

Session 5

10.00 - 10.45

Piety and Virtue in the Teachings of Imam ‘Ali: Sermons and Sayings in the *Nahj al-Balāgha*

Tahera Qutbuddin (*University of Chicago*)

10.45 - 11.30

Interpreting the Imams: the Problems and Opportunities in Studying the Shi‘i Hadith Corpora

Edmund Hayes (*Leiden University*)

11.30 - 12.00 Coffee Break

Session 6

12.00 - 12.45

On the Integrality of Shi'ism to the Study of the History of the Classical Sunni Caliphate
Deborah Tor (*University of Notre Dame*)

12.45 - 13.30

Shiite Patterns of Post-Migration in Europe
Dr Matthijs van den Bos (*University of London, Birkbeck*)

13.30 - 15.00 Lunch

Session 7

15.00 - 16.30

Plenary Session

16.30 - 17.30

Reception for all conference attendees at the Faculty Club

19.30

Dinner for speakers and chairs

Friday, November 16 Early-career workshop Shi'i Piety: Theory and Materiality from Premodern to Postmodern

Participants of the conference are invited also to attend an early-career workshop, with discussion sessions on pre-circulated papers, funded by the Juynboll Stichting and LUCIS. Organized by Radhika Gupta and Edmund Hayes.

The workshop will take place in the following locations:

Morning (9.30-13.00): Heinsiuszaal, Leiden University Library

Afternoon (14.00-18.00): Eyckhof 1, room 003C

If you are interested in attending and reading the papers before the workshop, please write to e.p.hayes@hum.leidenuniv.nl. The programme is available [online](#).

Abstracts

Arjen Buitelaar (*Su-Shi Interfaith Dialogue*)

Participant in the panel discussion: Issues facing Shi'i Muslims in the Netherlands. Alumnus of Utrecht University. Co-founder of Su-Shi Interfaith Dialogue

Anne Dijk (*Director, Fahm Institute*)

Participant in the panel discussion: Issues facing Shi'i Muslims in the Netherlands. Religion scholar, Islamologist and Islamic theologian with a specialization in authority structures. Co-founder of Su-Shi Interfaith Dialogue.

Margreet van Es (*Radboud University Nijmegen*)

Participant in the panel discussion: Issues facing Shi'i Muslims in the Netherlands. Her PhD and postdoctoral research work is on Muslim responses to anti-Muslim sentiments in the Netherlands and in Norway, including when, how and why Shi'i youth sometimes emphasize their Shi'i identity.

Robert Gleave (*University of Exeter*)

Normalising the Study of Shi'ism: Shi'i Contributions to the Formation of Islamic law (Keynote Speech)

The argument that Shi'ism forms a crucial element of any proper academic approach to Islamic Studies still needs to be made. Recent general survey works and their exclusion of Shi'i material demonstrate this. In this lecture, I aim to demonstrate how Shi'i material can help fill in some important gaps in our history of early Islamic intellectual formation, particularly in the field of Islamic legal studies. I hope to demonstrate how an integrated approach makes for a richer narrative and, ultimately, a more academically sound account of the formative period of Islamic law.

Edmund Hayes (*Leiden University*)

Interpreting the Imams: Problems and Opportunities in Studying the Shi'i Hadith Corpora

Oceans of ink have been spilt describing and debating the formation and canonization of Sunni hadith books, but the Shi'i hadith corpus still requires much work to understand the dynamics that lead to its formation. In recent years, we have seen a move away from the dominant history-of-ideas paradigm, richly pioneered by scholars such as Kohlberg, towards more textually precise *isnād*-critical approaches influenced by scholars of Sunni (prophetic) hadith like Motzki and Schoeler, and enriched by bibliographical and philological studies of lost and fragmentary books and their authors. Within Islamic studies and Islamic history, Shi'i hadith are often understood as misfits when approached from the Sunni perspective, because the bulk of them do not issue from the Prophet Muḥammad, but rather from the Imams. Laying aside the theological issues this implies, this means the dynamics of the corpus must be studied in a different way by the historian or textual critic, from Sunni hadith. This paper explores some of these dynamics, surveys methodologies and suggests future direction. It argues that the development of a robust set of methodologies for understanding Shi'i hadith corpora are crucial, not only for understanding the development of early Shi'ism, but will also provide crucial tools for the understanding of the dialectic development of Islam in general: from law and theology, to society and politics.

Ab de Jong (Leiden University)

Domesticating Shi‘i Islam: Notes from an Outsider

The concept of domestication (or familiarization) was used to great effect by the late Jonathan Z. Smith to outline an intellectual strategy through which things that are unknown or strange or exotic are rendered familiar by recasting them in terms that are better known and, most often, have some intellectual respectability. In its most basic form, it is a common human way of coping with reality, but for students of religion (and of history, and culture) it can have disastrous effects. In this paper I will argue that at least from the perspective of an outsider to the field, many (past and current) trends in the academic study of Shi‘i Islam show the workings of this strategy. I will focus on two core issues: (1) the presentation of the ‘origin’ of Shi‘i Islam in political terms; (2) the representation of Shi‘i Islam in terms of ‘deviance’ (with a specific focus on Patricia Crone’s ideas about ‘true’ monotheism).

Mirjam Künkler (Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study)

Female Religious Authority in Shi‘i Islam

The talk will provide an overview of the volume *Female Religious Authority in Shi‘i Islam: Past and Present*, edited by Mirjam Künkler and Devin Stewart and forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press. The volume brings together case studies of women who have exercised religious authority across Shi‘i history. The talk will particularly focus on examples from the modern era. It will also outline lacunae and untapped sources for future research.

Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (Institute of Ismaili Studies)

Approaching the study of Shi‘i texts: rethinking the use of form, function and content

Much of the scholarship examining Islamic texts in general and Shi‘i texts in particular has been concerned with their historicity and reliability. This concern has often overshadowed the examination of texts *per se*, attention to their formal characteristics and the relationship between form, function and content in them. However, more recent scholarship has raised questions about the historicity of early Islamic texts and proposed that they should be approached in a way that takes fully into account the long process of their development, their form, their proposed function and the particularity of their content and its organisation. In this paper I will discuss some of the ways in which concern with the analysis of certain Shi‘i texts - be they biographical works, works of history or collections of *ḥadith* - and their gradual development has helped to shift the focus away from a concern with their reliability and authenticity to a focus on the study of their nature and the potential this offers for an appreciation of the Muslim literary and historical tradition itself as well as for a better understanding of the aspects of history, doctrine and practice these texts engage with. In particular, I will explore issues such as the definition of genres and its importance for understanding the relationship between the form, function and purpose of texts, various modes of arranging reports in early examples of texts and the juxtaposition of variant reports as a means of creating a narrative.

Tahera Qutbuddin (University of Chicago)

Piety and Virtue in the Teachings of Imam ‘Alī: Sermons and Sayings in the *Nahj al-Balāgha*

What is the relationship between virtue and piety? Grounded in the Qur’an and the Prophet Muḥammad’s sayings, the teachings of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 661) – first Imam after the Prophet Muḥammad according to the Shia, and fourth Caliph according to the Sunnis – contend that they are essentially linked. In my presentation, I will analyze ‘Alī’s sermons and sayings to demonstrate that in his vision virtue and piety go hand in hand such that each entails and informs the other: you cannot be truly pious if you are not truthful and kind and you cannot be truly virtuous if you do not humble yourself before your creator.

Underscoring the vital correlation, he preaches that the fundamental source for acquiring knowledge of virtue is divine revelation: we originally learned virtue, and continue to learn virtue, from the guidance of the prophets sent by God through the ages to teach humankind. In light of the importance of Imam 'Alī's thought to the development of Islamic virtue ethics, I will offer some remarks on why Sharīf Raḍī's tenth-century compilation of his words titled *Nahj al-balāgha* has in many quarters been pejoratively, rather than descriptively, labelled a Shi'i text. This, although it contains sermons, epistles, and wisdom sayings attributed to one who has high stature in both the Sunni and Shi'i communities, and although its materials are found in many so-called Sunni texts as well. In other words, what excludes a text from being considered part of the so-called mainstream Islamic canon? What makes a text Shi'i, Sunni, or more generally Islamic?

Edith Szanto (American University of Iraq)

The Widows of Karbala: Studying Women in Contemporary Shi'ism

The study of women in contemporary Shi'ism began roughly in the 1980s, following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which sparked interest in contemporary Shi'ism more generally. Since then numerous works have focused on Shi'i women's rituals, such as the *sofre*, women's pilgrimages, and their interpretations of female saints, especially Fatima az-Zahra and Sayyida Zaynab. Geographically, most studies on Shi'i women have focused on Iranian women, though much of the work on Iranian women does not focus on their religiosity as such. Concurrently, there has been a growing body of literature on Shi'i women's pious practices in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, and Bahrain. The paper will consist of two parts. First, it will offer an analytical review of the state of Shi'i women's studies and secondly, it will point out some of the ways in which these studies contribute to the study of women in Islam in general. The paper will review the state of Shi'i women's studies by chronologically examining dominant themes in the academic literature, including agency, affect, pilgrimage, and gifting. This approach will allow for an analysis of how various concerns have moved in and out of the spotlight over time. In particular, this paper will demonstrate how female members of the *ahl al-bayt*, especially Sayyida Zaynab, have not only featured prominently in the Karbala narrative and in its ritual commemoration, but have also provided a set of role models that can be reinterpreted repeatedly depending on the narrator's aims and views. The second part of the proposed paper will point out some of ways in which the study of Shi'i women mirrors, compliments, and contributes to the wider study of Muslim women.

Deborah Tor (University of Notre Dame)

On the Integrality of Shi'ism to the Study of the History of the Classical Sunni Caliphate

Too frequently, the study of classical Islamic history– the period stretching from the rise of Islam in the 7th century to the destruction of the Caliphate in the 13th century– has suffered from a double methodological problem of atomization that warps and distorts historical understanding. These two forms of atomization are, first, of period and place – that is, scholars have studied only one small and isolated part of history, in isolation from what came not only before and after, but also around their own chosen piece of the larger contemporaneous mosaic; and, second, of what one might call sectarian narrowness: that is, scholars have frequently limited their own intellectual study to what a later era would define as either “Sunni” or “Shi'ite,” thus gravely undermining not only their understanding of a period in which at first no such distinctions had yet crystallized, but also of the succeeding centuries, during which Sunnis and Shi'ites of all stripes lived and interacted with and against one another. Consequently, both intellectually “Sunni” and intellectually “Shi'ite” historians have frequently ignored the vital role of Shi'ism in the broader unfolding of Islamic history, without which neither Sunni nor Shi'ite history can be

properly understood. This paper hope to address both of those serious historiographical issues of atomization by elucidating the integrality of Shi'ism to the study of classical Islamic history, and especially to the history of its central and sole religiously sanctioned political institution, the Caliphate or Great Imamate, while simultaneously tracing the changing nature of that centrality over the course of time.