

Workshop

Religious Narratives at the Crossroads of Scripture, Tradition and Culture: Reflections on the Jonah Story

July 5-6, 2012

Venue: Villa Jaffé, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10, 14193 Berlin, Germany

Convened by

Samer Rashwani (EUME-Fellow 2011/12 / University of Aleppo)

Joseph Witztum (EUME Fellow 2011/12 of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung / Jerusalem)

Mehrdad Abbasi (EUME-Fellow 2011/12 / Encyclopaedia Islamica Foundation Tehran)

Participants

Mustapha Bouhandi (Casablanca University)

Islam Dayeh (Zukunftsphilologie / Freie Universität Berlin)

Orhan Emlaz (Universität Wien)

Susannah Heschel (Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2011/12 / Dartmouth College)

Rainer Kampling (Freie Universität Berlin)

Hannelies Koloska (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin)

Admiel Kosman (Universität Potsdam)

Yousef Kouriyhe (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin)

Clemens Leonhard (Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2011/12 / Universität Münster)

Angelika Neuwirth (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin)

Samuela Pagani (Università degli Studi di Lecce)

Daniel Vorpahl (Freie Universität Berlin / Universität Potsdam)

Objectives

This workshop wishes to examine the reception of scriptural narrative in the three monotheistic traditions. While the fact that Biblical tradition has found a narrative extension in the religious lore of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has been honored in hosts of scholarly works, the comparative reading of these traditions together has not yet been given due attention.

Inspired by the path-breaking study of Abraham Geiger (1833), European scholars have long been fascinated with the interrelations between Jewish and Christian readings of Biblical

narratives and the Qur'an. This project needs to be resumed, though with a fresh look at the texts that incorporates traditional and modern Arab and Muslim scholarship: Rather than searching for influences or deviations, the relationship between the various traditions will be considered as a conversation between them, i.e. a process of negotiating and sometimes superseding given versions. The texts thus will no longer be treated as hierarchically scaled.

By focusing on shared narratives we wish to emphasize the continuity between the three traditions as well as to draw out some of the unique developments. In short, what we suggest here is not merely a descriptive approach, but rather a comparative study of the history of the intellectual and cultural reception of scriptural narratives.

The workshop endeavors to explore the possibility and advantages of such a multidisciplinary comparative approach for both philological and cultural studies. For this reason, the focus will be limited to one particular narrative, namely that of Jonah, so that the processes of adaptation that religious narratives undergo will be more evident.

The story of Jonah was chosen for several reasons. It is manageable in terms of length and relatively understudied from a comparative point of view (especially on the Islamic front). In addition, its rich manifestations in literature, art and popular culture offer much room for contemplation as do its striking emphasis on the value of human life and the tension it presents between divine mercy and justice.

The following broad issues are examples of suitable topics for the workshop:

- The processes of transformation and modification which the narrative underwent when taken up in new religious settings
- A comparison of the exegetical responses to various aspects of the narrative, including philological obstacles and theological difficulties (e.g., the infallibility of prophets and the tension between divine mercy and justice)
- The mystical and symbolic interpretations and dimensions of the narrative (e.g., the great power of prayer)
- The literary reception (in poetry and prose) of the narrative and its relation to the traditional and theological reception
- The manifestations of the narrative in visual art
- The social and popular manifestations of the narrative (e.g., myth, shrines, amulets).

Format:

The workshop will take the format of short panel presentations of thirty minutes each, followed by sixty minutes of questions and discussion for the entire panel. Each panel will have a discussant and two presenters. The workshop will have a total of four panel discussions, a "texts analysis" session, and keynote. It will spread over two days and be held in Berlin in July 2012.

Schedule:

**Main Venue: Villa Jaffé of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10, 14193 Berlin
Thursday, July 5, 2012**

10.00 – 10.15	Introduction Samer Rashwani (EUME-Fellow 2011/12 / University of Aleppo)
10.15 – 12.15	Samuela Pagani (Università degli Studi di Lecce) <i>Jonah According to Ibn 'Arabī</i> Orhan Elmaz (Universität Wien) <i>On Difficult Words in Surah 37:139-148</i> Moderation: Islam Dayeh (Zukunftsphilologie / Freie Universität Berlin)
12.15 – 13.15	Lunch
13.15 – 15.15	Rainer Kampling (Freie Universität Berlin) <i>A Fish is not Necessarily a Fish – the Triple Reception of the Story of Jonah by Christian Authors in Late Antiquity</i> (in German) Hannelies Koloska (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin) <i>'The Sign of Jonah': Early Christian Readings of the Jonah Story and the Iconography of the Qur'an</i> Moderation: Clemens Leonhard (Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2011/12)
15.15 – 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 – 17.30	Panel Samer Rashwani <i>The Jonah Story between The Qur'an and Traditions: Reading from Al-Tha'labi's Qisas Al-anbiya'</i> Joseph Witztum <i>The Recasting of the Jonah Story in Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer</i> Mehrdad Abbasi <i>The Jonah Story in the Shi'i Tradition : Reading from Bihār al-Anwār</i>
17.30 – 17.45	Coffee Break
17.45 – 18.45	Keynote Susannah Heschel (Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2011/12 / Dartmouth College) <i>Scriptural Mysteries: The Rise of Scholarly Investigations of Scriptural Transmissions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</i> Moderation: Angelika Neuwirth (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin)

Friday, July 6, 2012

10.00 – 12.00

Admiel Kosman (Universität Potsdam)

Jewish and Non-Jewish Ways for Decoding Jonah's Story as a Symbol

Daniel Vorpahl (Freie Universität Berlin / Universität Potsdam)

The Impact of Jonah's Nineveh-Image on the Books of Tobit and Judith

Moderation: **Joseph Witztum**

12.00 – 12.15

Coffee Break

12.15 – 14.15

Mustapha Bouhandi (Casablanca University)

The Essential Qur'anic Addition in the Field of Abrahamic Religions: The Narrative of Yunus as a Case Study (in Arabic)

Yousef Kouriyhe (Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin)

The Story of Jonah in Syriac Literature: Jacob of Serugh as a Case Study (in Arabic)

Moderation: **Mehrdad Abbasi**

14.15 – 15.30

Lunch

Abstracts and Short Biographies

Mehrdad Abbasi, EUME-Fellow 2011/12 / Encyclopaedia Islamica Foundation Tehran

The Jonah Story in the Shi'i Tradition : Reading from Bihār al-Anwār

Bihār al-Anwār is a comprehensive collection of traditions compiled by the Shi'i scholar Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1111/1698). In one of his volumes devoted to the stories of the prophets, Majlisi preserved many Shi'i traditions concerning Jonah as well as different approaches of Shi'i scholars to the story. In the discussion panel we will read parts of the chapter devoted to Jonah's story, trying to identify the sources, parallels and theological interpretations imbedded in these traditions.

Mehrdad Abbasi is an Assistant Professor of Qur'anic Studies at the Islamic Azad University in Tehran, Iran, where he teaches courses on Qur'anic sciences, exegetical texts and methods of Qur'anic exegesis, and supervises MA students' theses on the same topics. He is also a Researcher on Islamic Studies at Encyclopaedia Islamica Foundation in Tehran. He received his PhD from the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at Islamic Azad University in Tehran (2007), his MA from the University of Tehran (2002), and his BSc in Industrial Engineering from Sharif University of Technology in Tehran (1999). He currently is a fellow of the research program 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe'.

Mustapha Bouhandi, Casablanca University

The Essential Qur'anic Addition in the Field of Abrahamic Religions: The Narrative of Yunus as a Case Study.

In this paper, I will present the various Qur'anic additions to the Jonah story with regard to content, approach and strategies of narration. In doing so I will respond to two main questions concerning the relation between the Qur'an and other scriptures: First, should the Qur'an be understood as an endeavor to collect, harmonize, and translate into Arabic the content of Jewish and Christian canonical and apocryphal books? Second, did the Qur'an intend to abrogate and replace earlier scriptures and revelations? I will argue for a different approach for which I have coined the term "the essential Qur'anic addition".

Mustapha Bouhandi, professor of comparative religion at Hassan II university in Casablanca. He got his PhD from Hassan II University in Casablanca on the influence of Christian theology on Muslims commentary of the Qur'an. In 2010 he founded a research center for comparative religions (Adyan). Among his publications are: "Akthara Abo Hurayrah" (2002), "We and the Qur'an" (2003), "The influence of Christian theology on Muslims commentary of the Qur'an" (2004), and recently "The Essential Qur'anic addition: critical reading in Genesis" (2012).

Orhan Elmaz, Universität Wien

On Difficult Words in Surah 37:139-148

In this short presentation, we want to explore the category of hapax legomena in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. A specific method of analyzing words will be exemplified by using Qur'anic examples. The paragraph Q 37:139-148 will be used to contextualize a very prominent word in the Jonah story – the denoter of the type of plant that provided Jonah with shade: Biblical qîqāyôn (Jonah 4:6.7.9.10) and the Qur'anic hapax yaqṭīn (Q 37:146), respectively, have quickened interest in scholars through the ages. Back in 1684, Christopher Thomas dedicated his dissertation to qîqāyôn, while Jeffery and some other Orientalists have held yaqṭīn to be a foreign word the origin of which is qîqāyôn. In this paper we want to compare and evaluate explanations of that plant where applicable, and present one possible way of how to merge knowledge of various scholarly approaches.

Orhan Elmaz currently is holding the position of an assistant professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Vienna. Orhan Elmaz studied Arabic Studies, Medical Informatics and IT Management. His dissertation on Qur'anic hapax legomena was published by Harrassowitz in 2011, and his major interests include the Arabian Peninsula in Antiquity, Qur'anic Studies and Digital Humanities.

Susannah Heschel, Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2011/12 / Dartmouth College

Scriptural Mysteries: The Rise of Scholarly Investigations of Scriptural Transmissions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

How does one discover one's own religious identity by exploring the Scriptures of another religion? Jewish interest in the study of religion – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – began in the midst of a Jewish struggle in Europe for political emancipation and social integration. From the outset in the 1830s, Jews turned to the study of the Qur'an and early Islamic texts and discovered parallels with rabbinic writings. Their scholarship continued, albeit with changes in tone, until the 1930s in Europe, and then shifted to other parts of the world. The complexity of the Qur'an's readings of texts in Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, and other languages may allow us today to find religious identity in a new way: instead of speaking of Jewish or Christian "influences" on the Qur'an, we might more fruitfully speak of Islam as a treasury of profound and helpful insights into texts and ideas that can enrich Jews and Christians as well.

Susannah Heschel is the Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. Her scholarship focuses on Jewish-Christian relations in Germany during the 19th and 20th centuries, the history of biblical scholarship, and the history of anti-Semitism. Her numerous publications include *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, which won a National Jewish Book Award and Germany's Geiger Prize, and *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*.

Rainer Kampling, Freie Universität Berlin

A Fish is not Necessarily a Fish – the Triple Reception of the Story of Jonah by Christian Authors in Late Antiquity

The Christian reception of the story of Jonah is significantly bound to a motif that turns up in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew. It is the motif of the reversion as a messianic indication (Mt 12, 38 – 39 / Mt 16,4 / Lk 11, 29-30).

This aspect was mostly used as an exclusionary argument towards Judaism, with regard to salvation. The insertion in Gospel of Matthew, that interprets the fish as symbolizing the tomb of Christ, became even more significant (Mt 12,40). These passages have defined the contours of the Christian reception of the story. The peculiar circumstance of this reception was that a canonic text (Jonah) got a canonical interpretation through the reception in the New Testament, that later authors felt bound to. This fact poses a huge problem for the theological research as it cannot be determined with certainty which text is being received. Jonah can equally be interpreted as Christ, the fish as well as the grave.

Rainer Kampling, Study of Catholic theology, Latin philology and Jewish Studies at the Universität Münster; 1983 Promotion: *Das Blut Christi und die Juden. Mt 27,25 bei den lateinischsprachigen christlichen Autoren bis zu Leo dem Großen* (NTA.N.F. 16), Münster 1984/1991; Habilitation: *Israel unter dem Anspruch des Messias. Studien zur Israelthematik im Markusevangelium* (SBB 25), Stuttgart 1992. Visiting Professor of NT in Saarbrücken. Since 1992, Professor of Biblical Theology / NT at the Freie Universität Berlin. Main research areas: Theology and history of Jewish-Christian Relations, Theology of the Synoptic Gospels, Reception history of the Bible.

Hannelies Koloska, Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin

'The Sign of Jonah': Early Christian Readings of the Jonah Story and the Iconography of the Qur'an

The most popular scene of the Hebrew Bible depicted in Early Christian art was Jonah emerging from the mouth of a sea-monster and lying asleep under an arch covered by a climbing gourd vine. This artistic representation of Jonah as a symbol of rescue and resurrection reflects the interpretation of the Jonah story by pious Christians. In contrast Jonah's role as a preacher of repentance, the penitent Ninevites and moreover the Jonah-Christ typology as stressed by Early Christian writers and theologians hardly entered the realm of Christian art. These different representations of the Jonah story shall be outlined in this lecture. The lecture's main focus will however be the Qur'anic Jonah-narratives and their iconography and symbolism. It is assumed that the Christian traditions are discussed, re-interpreted and thus commented on in the Qur'an. The textual representations will be explored by analyzing their probable references to Christian images and texts.

Hannelies Koloska has studied Protestant Theology and Arabic Studies in Berlin and Birzeit. She completed her Master's degree on Ibn al-Jawzī's "Kitāb aḥkām an-nisā". She worked as a research assistant at the Collaborative Research Centre 626 "Aesthetic experience and the dissolution of artistic limits" at Freie Universität Berlin and wrote her Ph.D. thesis on "Aesthetic and literary dimensions of Sura 18 (al-Kahf)". She is currently a researcher at the Corpus Coranicum project. Her research interests include the Qur'an, Islamic exegesis and Christian - Islamic relations.

Admiel Kosman, Universität Potsdam

Jewish and Non-Jewish Ways for Decoding Jonah's Story as a Symbol

The intriguing Biblical legend on Jonah, the prophet who ran away from God and was swallowed by a giant fish, stimulated the thought and the imagination of many thinkers in history, and was the trigger of many interesting explanations that were raised in order to decode what they saw as the secret, hidden message of this story.

Following these readings I will offer several options to see this story as a symbolic set of signs, especially symbolic readings which I was able to discover in the Jewish tradition.

Admiel Kosman is a professor in the department of Religious Studies at the Universität Potsdam, and the Academic Director of the Abraham Geiger Kolleg.

Yousef Kouriyhe, Corpus Coranicum / Freie Universität Berlin

The Story of Jonah in Syriac Literature: Jacob of Serugh as a Case Study

In his long hymn about Jonah (Mēm̄rā on Jonah) Jacob of Serugh managed to reflect the Christian reading of this story, taking the words of Jesus concerning the resemblance between Jonah and Jesus as starting point of his hymn.

Yousef Kouriyhe, Lecturer of Syriac and Aramaic literature in Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies (Freie Universität Berlin), and researcher in Corpus Coranicum project. He graduated from the philosophy Department in Damascus University, and got his PhD from the Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies „Buch der ersten Philosophie: Aus dem Kompendium *Ruhm der Weisheit*, Edition und Übersetzung.“.

Samuela Pagani, Università degli Studi di Lecce

Jonah According to Ibn 'Arabi

The figure of Jonah plays a key role in Ibn 'Arabi's reflections on the relationship between the divine attributes of mercy and wrath. Scattered references to the story of Jonah are found in the *Meccan Illuminations (Futuhāt al-makkiyya)*, while an entire chapter of the *Bezels of wisdom (Fusus al-hikam)* is devoted to the spiritual teaching to be drawn from the "word of Jonah" – even though the name of the prophet appears only in the chapter's title, but not in the text itself.

In my presentation, I will discuss those passages of the *Futuhāt al-makkiyya* where reference is made to the Qur'anic verses concerning the salvation of the people of Nineveh (Qur'an 10:98), and Jonah's anger (Qur'an 21:87). Through the exegesis of these verses, Ibn 'Arabi contributes original insights to the theological problem of the non-fulfillment of the divine threat, which both Muslim and Christian authors have confronted. In Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on Jonah, the problem of eschatological salvation is explicitly tied to that of salvation in this world. This appears most clearly in the chapter on Jonah of the *Fusus al-hikam*, which is entirely devoted to the relationship between secular and eschatological retribution. In this text, juridical reasoning, Qur'anic exegesis, and mystical insight cooperate in order to extend the non-fulfillment of the threat both to death penalty and to eternal damnation.

Samuela Pagani is lecturer in Arabic language and literature at the University of Salento (Lecce, Italy). She also teaches History of the Islamic Near East at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She got a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from the "Istituto Orientale" of Naples in 2000. Her main research field is the intellectual history of Sufism in the early modern period.

Samer Rashwani, EUME-Fellow 2011/12 / University of Aleppo

The Jonah Story between The Qur'an and Traditions: Reading from Al-Tha'labi's Qisas Al-anbiya'

Al-Tha'labi was a renowned Qur'anic scholar of the fifth/eleventh century, and his 'Ara'is al-majalis is arguably the finest and most widely consulted example of the Islamic qisas al-anbiya' genre. In the discussion panel we will read together parts of his chapter on Jonah, exploring different approaches in reading such a text. We will also look at its sources, its relation to the Qur'anic text, its parallels in previous and later traditions. In my discussion I will concentrate on the hermeneutical principles that lay behind different traditions in Al-Tha'labi's qisas al-anbiya'.

Samer Rashwani studied Islamic Sciences at Damascus University (BA, 1997). In cooperation with a group of pan-Arabic young intellectuals, he laid the foundation for a new forum of critical Islamic thought (*al-Multaka al-Fikri*/Intellectual Forum for Innovation) in 1998. Rashwani moved to Egypt to complete his Qur'anic studies at the University of Cairo, receiving an MA in 2004 and a PhD in 2007 for his dissertation "Defending the Qur'an from the 3rd to the 5th century A.H. and its role in the development of Qur'anic Sciences". Rashwani has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia (Universities of Damascus and Aleppo) since 2007. He has taught several courses in Hadith, Qur'anic studies and methodology. He currently is a fellow of the research program 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe'.

Daniel Vorpahl, Freie Universität Berlin / Universität Potsdam

The Impact of Jonah's Nineveh-Image on the Books of Tobit and Judith

This lecture will examine the reception of the Book of Jonah in the apocryphal books of Tobit and Judith. Although their link to the Jonah story is sometimes noted, it has not been examined in detail. The Book of Jonah is not simply quoted in these apocryphal texts; Judith doesn't even mention the prophet at all. The Jonah-tradition has, however, an impact on the narrative of these books, which circles mainly around Jonah's image of the city of Nineveh. Tobit and Judith represent the Jewish diaspora with role-models of Jewish heroes, settled in an (un-)historical patchwork. In both books Nineveh seems to be the paradigmatic capital of paganism. Since this image of Nineveh reflects the impact of the Book of Jonah, Tobit and Judith offer an interesting testimony for the understanding of the story of Jonah in the 3rd and 2nd century B.C.E. In their use of the Jonah narrative the books of Tobit and Judith do not only illustrate their own narrative setting, but also give a new perspective on Jonah itself.

Daniel Vorpahl, is a visiting lecturer at the Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Potsdam since 2009. He studied English and American philology, Jewish Studies, Religious Studies and Comparative Literature (Universität Potsdam). In 2011 he was awarded a PhD scholarship from the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit. His doctoral dissertation is on "The history of reception of the Book of Jonah in the early Jewish and rabbinic scriptural interpretation until 10th century".

Joseph Witztum, EUME-Fellow 2011/12 of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung / Jerusalem

The Recasting of the Jonah Story in Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer

Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer is an aggadic Midrash most probably composed in the eighth century CE. We will read its retelling of the Jonah story and trace the history and exegetical logic of some of its embellishments. In doing so we will also examine some parallels in Christian and Muslim recastings of the story.

Joseph Witztum holds a BA and MA in Arabic Language and Literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and his doctoral dissertation, "The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'an: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives", was completed in the Near Eastern Studies Department at Princeton University (2011). He is especially interested in the comparative study of the Qur'an, Syriac poetry, and rabbinic texts.

Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe (EUME)*

The research program **Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe (EUME)** seeks to rethink key concepts and premises that link and divide Europe and the Middle East. It focuses on the diverse processes of transfer, exchange and interaction between Europe and the Middle East. EUME is hosted and supported by the Forum Transregionale Studien.

Forum Transregionale Studien**

The **Forum Transregionale Studien** is a Berlin-based research platform designed to promote research that connects systematic and region-specific questions in a perspective that addresses entanglements and interactions beyond national, cultural or regional frames. The Forum works in tandem with already existing institutions and networks engaged in transregional studies and is supported by an association of directors of universities, research institutes and networks mainly based in Berlin. It is funded by the Senate of Berlin.

*For more information on EUME please see: www.eume-berlin.de.

**For more information on the Forum please see: www.forum-transregionale-studien.de

Contact:

Georges Khalil
Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe
Forum Transregionale Studien
c/o Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
Wallotstrasse 19, 14193 Berlin
Telefon: +49 (0)30 89001-259
Telefax: +49 (0)30 89001-200
eume@trafo-berlin.de