

Workshop

## Islam, the Quran and Late Secularism

Berlin, 12 June 2008

Convenor: **Mohammed Tabishat** (Al-Ain University; Fellow of “Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe,” 2007/08)

The workshop focuses on processes of receiving and reproducing Islam and the Quran in the modern world. Contrary to traditional assumptions that predicted the decline and privatization of religion with the onset of modernity, contemporary culture and society seem to be marked by an unexpected renaissance of the Sacred. Whether this is symptomatic of “late secularism,” or whether it is related to the abiding interest of secular societies in matters religious is a question that informs the entire workshop.

Both Islam and the Quran have become subjects of significant cultural and political debate in recent years. Quranic hermeneutics and philology – fields of interest limited to a select circle of scholars during the twentieth century – are now receiving increased public attention. In Europe and the United States, Islam is often singled out as a supposedly pristine religious tradition untouched by modern developments and at the same time posing a major threat to them; in Muslim majority societies, on the other hand, the perception of Islam as a basic constituent of cultural identity guarantees Islamic concepts and texts an important place in many social and political debates. Two peculiarities of such debates, both in and outside European and Near Eastern settings are, firstly, that the Quran is often at their heart (even though the cultural reality of Islam consists of much more than that), and secondly, that the lines between scholarly and more general public discourses are often hard to draw.

The workshop will investigate the circumstances under which scholarly work and intellectual reflection on Islam, and on the Quran in particular, take place in the contexts of secularism or even “late secularism.” What implications do such debates have for generating conceptions of Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities? Are such meanings dependent on characteristics supposedly inherent in the traditions involved or are they rather functions of the debates and discourses of power that regenerate them?

Also taken into account will be the historical dimension of scholarly conversations on Islam and the Quran within modern societies, both European and Near Eastern, by addressing debates and scholarship on Islam and the Quran that took place in Europe and the Middle East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – just about the time when paradigms of modernization and secularization were emerging.

The Workshop is being convened by Dr. Mohammed Tabishat (Fellow of “Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe”) in relation to EUME’s research area, “Perspectives on the Quran: Negotiating Different Views of a Shared History,” which tries to situate the foundational text of Islam within the religious landscape of late antiquity, thus historicizing it, and examining its genesis as well as its reception and perception in both the Middle East and Europe.

Ein gemeinsames Forschungsprogramm

Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften · Fritz Thyssen Stiftung · Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin



## **Program**

Venue:

Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften  
Jägerstraße 22/23, 10117 Berlin, room no. 230

**Thursday, 12 June 2008**

### **I.**

Chair: MOHAMMED TABISHAT

Introduction.

Reinterpreting the Quran in a Secular Time: An Exploration of Contemporary Discourses on *al-Nafs*  
*MOHAMMED TABISHAT (Al-Ain University, Fellow of EUME 2007/08)*

The Myth of Philology and the Study of the Quran  
*MICHAEL MARX (BBAW, Corpus Coranicum)*

Projects of Reconciliation and Reform in Secular Contexts: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism  
*ISLAM DAYEH (Freie Universität Berlin)*

Contemporary Readings of the Story of Lot  
*PETER PÖKEL (Freie Universität Berlin)*

The Politics of Translation of Quranic Concepts  
*TAMIM AL-BARGHOUTI (Cairo, Fellow of EUME 2007/08)*

### **II.**

Chair: HANNELIES KOLOSKA

Marxism and Islam: A Critical Reading of Laroui's "The Arabs and Historical Thinking"  
*MICHEL KABALAN (Freie Universität Berlin)*

Secularism in the Arab East: Emergence, Arguments, Historical Place  
*ALEXANDER FLORES (Hochschule Bremen)*

Debates on the Meaning of Islam  
*JOSEPH MASSAD (Columbia University)*