



Call for Papers

Imperial Transformations - Comparative Strategies in Empires of Salvation Religions

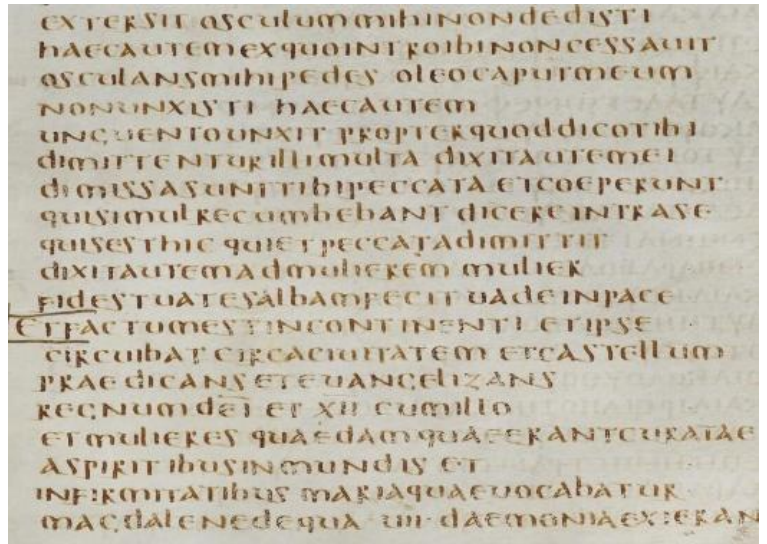
Nov. 11-14, 2026 - Universität Hamburg, Germany

Prof. Dr. Stefan Heidemann & Katharina Mewes

Over the past six years, the RomanIslam Center fostered scholarly exchanges and debates on how the Roman and Islamic empires and civilizations transformed and governed the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, as a 'sand box' to compare both empires. Our final conference will synthesize our findings and take our questions a step further to examine the 'family' of empires of salvation religions: the Roman, Islamic, and Spanish empires.

Looking at historical empires seems timely. At least since the wars of 2022 and 2026, imperial policies have shattered the world of nation-states and discarded boldly old secular salvation ideologies in practice (communism, socialism, national socialism, fascism, etc.). These developments are also driven by states, proto-states, and anti-state movements whose motives are often rooted in salvation religions.

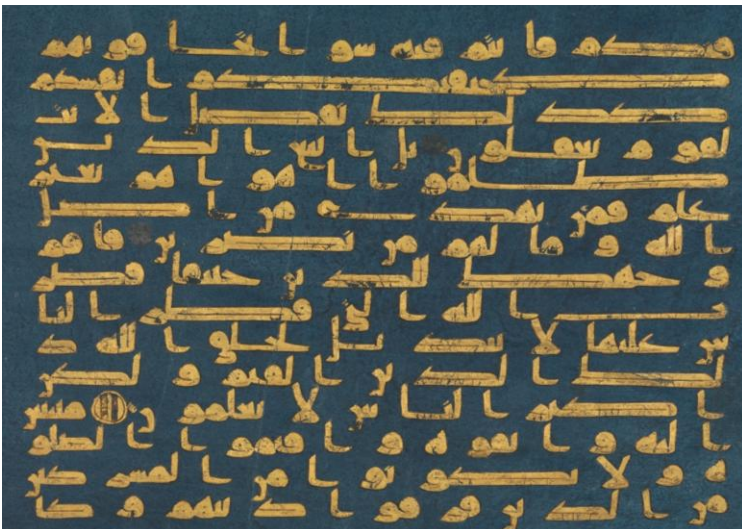
The Roman, Islamic, and Spanish empires all seem paradigmatic for our understanding of a transformative imperialism. Their imperial missions were driven by Middle Eastern salvation religions. Subsequent empires and



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political regimes until today have all drawn, in one way or another, on the common heritage of Roman, Islamic, and Hispanic imperial legacies. These empires were all understood multiethnic, despite some ruling ethnicities. They transferred a dominant imperial language and a dominant—if not exclusive—salvation religion to the regions they conquered.

These set them apart from other, later Imperialism in Asia and Africa. Even more strikingly, they led to the complete transformation of their colonial subjects, who initially embraced different religions and



Folio from the "Blue Qur'an" © THE MET

languages. The new imperial religion and language became an integral part of their identity: Romance languages and Christianity in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, Arabic and Islam in most of the Middle East and North Africa, and Spanish and Catholicism in the Americas.

There are also obvious differences between these three paradigmatic empires. The Roman empire was invigorated by Christianity. Islam rose alongside its empire. Catholicism was already an established religion in the "Old World" at the time of the Spanish conquest, but new for the Americas. One empire was maritime, one was primarily land-based, and one was oceanic.

Comparing them provides a better understanding of their transformative power. Comparison does not only look at similarities and differences. It also involves examining the approaches of imperial elites to overcome challenges and strategies of conquered peoples to comply, resist, and become the new elites.

The conference will explore these questions by surveys and case studies in each of the three empires, and pursue a comparative view in the discussion after each lecture. Finally, how does comparing of these three western paradigms help us to understand the new imperial strivings?



Biblia sacra, hebraice, chaldaice, graece, & latine: Philippi II Reg. Cathol. pietate, et studio ad sacrosanctae Ecclesiae vsum © Biblioteca Nacional de España

Following thematic baskets invite for discussion:

- Empire and Salvation Religion vs. Regional Religions
- Military, Colonialization and the Projection of Governance
- Legal Transformation, Local Law vs. Imperial
- Imperial Language vs. Spoken Languages
- Integrating Local Elites
- Transcultural Changes in Material Culture and Architecture
- Imperial Economy and Regional Entanglement
- Imperial Paradigms and their legacy

The workshop is intended to foster cross-disciplinary debates. Apart from more conceptual papers, we encourage contributions to provide case studies that specifically respond to the conference's themes.

Presentations at the conference should summarize the speaker's major points without exceeding 25 minutes, followed by 20 minutes of discussion. Abstracts should be 500-700 words in length. Please send them with a short biography to katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de before **June 15, 2026**. Draft papers will be pre-circulated and have to be handed in by Oct. 15, 2026. The results of this workshop are planned to be published with de Gruyter. Travel (economy class) and accommodation will be covered.

All prospective speakers will be notified of the outcome of their proposals by end of June 2026.