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Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation



Center for Comparative Empire
and Transcultural Studies

Workshop

A Family of Empires of Salvation Religions *The First 300 Years*



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PROGRAM AND ABSTRACTS

December 12–13, 2024

RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and
Transcultural Studies (Early Islam)

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Program

Thursday, December 12, 2024

AS, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

09:00 Registration

09:20 **Stefan Heidemann**
(University of Hamburg)
Introduction and Welcome

A Family of Empires

09:45 **Jane Burbank**
(New York University)
Russia: A Member of the Family? Orthodoxy vs. Eurasia
Keynote

10:45 **Stefan Heidemann**
(University of Hamburg)
The Second Imperial Paradigm of the West: The Islamic Empire

11:00 Coffee Break

11:15 **Peter Fibiger Bang**
(University of Copenhagen)
Situating Romanization in the Family of Empires and Salvation Religions

12:00 **Garth Fowden**
(University of Cambridge)
'Sasan après Sasan'

12:45 Lunch Break



Imperial Religions

13:45 **Claudia Tiersch**

(Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Civitas dei as *civitas terrena*? Bishops and Political Administration in the Late Roman Empire

14:30 **Jonathan Brockopp**

(Pennsylvania State University)

Salvation Religion, Imperial Religion: The Case of Heresy in North Africa

15:15 Coffee Break

15:30 **Javier Francisco**

(University of Freiburg)

Evangelization – A Mixed Bag of Imperial Geopolitics

16:15 **Frederik Schulze**

(University of Cologne)

Empire, Religion, and Local Administration in Northern Peru (1750–1820)

17:00 Concluding Remarks on Day One

19:30 Dinner





Friday, December 13, 2024

AS, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

Imperial Rules and Practices

- 9:00 **Stefan Heidemann**
(University of Hamburg)
Introduction to Day Two
- 9:15 **Shervin Farridnejad**
(University of Hamburg)
Zoroastrian Universal Salvation: Ideology of Power and Religion in Late Antique Iran
- 10:00 **Kurt Franz**
(University of Hamburg)
Religion or Faith? The Not-so-Islamic Early Empires of the Arabs
- 10:45 Coffee Break
- 11:00 **Eugenio Garosi**
(Radboud University Nijmegen)
The Grammar of Empire: Documentary Evidence for Arabic Scribal Training in the Early Islamic Period
- 11:45 **Stefan Rinke**
(Freie Universität Berlin)
The Empire and Its Elites: The Case of Spanish America
- 12:30 **Peter Fibiger Bang** (University of Copenhagen)
Stefan Heidemann (University of Hamburg)
Stefan Rinke (Freie Universität Berlin)
Round Table Discussion – Results and Outlook
- 13:00 Lunch



Abstracts and short profiles

Jane Burbank

New York University



Russia: A Member of the Family? Orthodoxy vs. Eurasia

Keynote

Abstract

Does Russia qualify as a power that introduced a dominant salvation religion into its imperia domains? On the one hand, the collapse of Soviet empire has uncovered the deep hold of religion across the enormous territory that tsars, emperors, and communists incorporated over 500 years. The interlude of official atheism did not eradicate and in some cases may have enhanced the attraction of religious commitments and practices. But which religions? Officially, Russia's statehood relied on a variant of Eastern Christianity, transformed over time into what is called the Russian Orthodox Church. Most of the area of the empire was conquered in the name of this 'true' church. However, the policies of the empire since its founding have been adjusted to a myriad of religious cults, not all of them with Middle Eastern roots. The overriding strategy of Russian empire has been to accommodate multiple

religions, leaving low level customs in place while rewarding and controlling religious authorities.

In this paper, I will offer an overview of the Russian empire's religious policies with attention to the ways that the 'umbrella' empire managed its multiple populations with their unlike religious beliefs. I begin with the Grand Principedom of Moscow's formation under the suzerainty of the Golden Horde in the 13th century. The success of the Moscow-based princes as Mongol clients depended on strategies of territorial expansion and social inclusion that prefigured Russian practices as empowered imperial rulers. A 'Eurasian' condition continued to transfigure the empire's overt mission of Christianization in multiple ways under the Romanovs (1613–1917), took on multiple forms in the U.S.S.R., and has been revitalized after the end of the Soviet regime. The cultural focus of the empire's elite since Peter the Great's time on western Europe and its imperial prowess has off and on raised the question of Russia's belonging to the West and its Roman-style ways, while obscuring underlying but widely shared assumptions about how power works and the significance of religion for the state and its peoples.

My paper will focus on three subjects: the roles that non-Orthodox believers played in the governance and extension of the empire, the particular tensions inside Russia's several salvation religions that could strain the struts of the umbrella, and the administration's approach to salvation churches outside its borders. I conclude with two case studies that illuminate this empire's pragmatic recognition of religion as a tool of imperial power: Soviet deployment of Russian Orthodoxy in the aftermath of World War Two as a means to expand communist control in Ukraine and the Russian Federation's ideological stance that elevates Russian Orthodoxy while declaring Russia a 'homeland' for other religions. The 'survival' of religion after the crash of communist empire offers evidence for both the deep penetration of the salvation confessions in the region and a particular Eurasian (vs. Roman) style of imperial rule.



Profile

Jane Richardson Burbank is an American historian and professor emerita of New York University. She is renowned for her erudite scholarship on Russia and its empire, as well as global history in its entirety. She was bestowed the 2023 Toynbee Prize in recognition of her significant contributions to global history.

Her most recent publications include *Post-Imperial Possibilities: Eurasia, Eurafrica, Afroasia*, with Frederick Cooper. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023, and *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, with Frederick Cooper. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, pb 2011. Winner of the 2011 World History Association Book Prize.



Stefan Heidemann

RomanIslam Center, University of Hamburg



The Second Imperial Paradigm of the West: The Islamic Empire

Abstract

The division of the world into a Christian Occident and an Islamic Orient and their intertwining has a long history in perception and scholarship. At the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse in Germany was dominated by the discussion of mutually incomprehensible *Kulturkreise*. It was in this context that Carl Heinrich Becker, one of the founding fathers of Islamic Studies, took a different view. Inspired by his own study of Egyptian Arabic papyri and various aspects of his legal studies, he proposed in 1910 that Islamic and Christian civilizations had common Hellenistic origins stretching from the Hindu Kush to the Atlantic. Thus, without denying ‘Islam’ its own civilization, he sharply rejected the division of the ancient world into two opposing cultures, one European-Christian and the other Oriental-Islamic. In 2014, Garth Fowden argued forcefully for the common long antiquity of the first millennium.

We begin with two empires, the Roman and the Islamic, which created transformative colonial empires in the Mediterranean and Eurasian West. Their salvation religion and ‘civilizations’ outlasted the founding of the empires by millennia and are still recognizable through various iterations. On

the other hand, Chinese culture, as the other imperial culture and civilization of the other end of Eurasia, has always seen the legacy of only one Chinese empire, that of Shih Huang Di in the 3rd century CE, a legacy that President Xi in the 21st century is eagerly defending.

For the Hellenistic Mediterranean and Western Eurasian world, shaped by Alexander and the Roman sons of Aeneas, there had always been the Iranian and Mediterranean wings, often hostile to each other. But this time it was different, and the contrast was much more fundamental. It is surprising that within one global area there are two imperial paradigms and civilizations that seem to exclude each other.

The simple answer would be to point to two distinct but related salvation religions in succession, each with their own theology and law, each with a very different origin story, and a millennia-long military conflict softened by occasional cultural exchanges. How was this development possible in the Hellenistic-Roman-Iranian world, where the new transformative imperial and cultural paradigm was first formulated on ancient Roman soil in Damascus, Jerusalem, Syria, Egypt, and northern Mesopotamia? An attempt at an answer will be made by looking at the slower than expected political separation of one from the other.

Profile

Stefan Heidemann is a historian of the Middle East with expertise in the fields of literary and legal sources, material culture, numismatics, and archaeological evidence. His research primarily focuses on periods of transition and economic and cultural change in Islamic societies, with a particular emphasis on the formation of the early Islamic Empire, the apogee of the Abbasid Empire, and the development of Middle Islamic civilization in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Selected publications of his include together with Hannah-Lena Hagemann, eds., *Transregional and Regional Elites: Connecting the Early Islamic Empire – The Early Islamic Empire at Work Vol. 1* (Berlin 2020), and, together with Kevin Butcher, *Regional History and Coin Finds from Assur: From the Achaemenids to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden 2017).



Peter Fibiger Bang

University of Copenhagen



Situating Romanization in the Family of Empires and Salvation Religions

Abstract

Arguably Romanization culminated in the adoption of Catholic, Orthodox Christianity as the religion of empire by the emperors during the 4th century CE. How does Christianization fit into our ideas of polyethnic agrarian empire?

Profile

Prof. Dr. Peter Fibiger Bang is Professor at the SAXO-Institute (History) at the University of Copenhagen. His research is situated at the interface of ancient and world history. It is focused on exploring historical comparisons between the Roman and other pre-colonial land-empires, especially the Mughal Empire of India, to suggest new ways of conceptualising the anatomy of Roman power. Topics include taxation and tribute, patrimonial lordship and the notion of Universal Empire, cosmopolitan high-culture as well as trade and economy.

Garth Fowden

University of Cambridge



‘Sasan après Sasan’

Abstract

RomanIslam addresses the first three centuries of *rising* trajectories in relations between empires and salvation religions, before the onset of ‘umbrella empire’, fragmentation or dissolution. Empires may also implode almost overnight, as did the Sasanids and Ottomans. Contemplating the RomanIslam coin’s obverse, this *falling* trajectory, two questions arise. Do religions meet the same post-imperial fate as the empires that foster and/or exploit them? And can defunct empires live on? Is their memory nightmare or paradigm, and for whom?

Take ex-Sasanid-Mazdean Iran after the Arab conquest. The Sasanids admittedly did not found, but inherited and developed both empire and religion. But Mazdaism, albeit an imperfect monotheism, possessed a scripture and a soteriology. Roughly three centuries is a reasonable timeframe to explore their falling trajectory – if it is that. ‘Sasan après Sasan’ recalls Nicolae Iorga’s *Byzance après Byzance* (1935), tracing the fortunes of East Rome and Orthodoxy in Ottoman Transdanubia.

The secularist Iranian historian Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub diagnosed *Two centuries of silence* post-Arab conquest in an influential book (19572) subjected



to clerical stricture after 1979. But ‘Dark Ages’ are always lazy constructs. Patricia Crone traced ‘nativist prophets’ and local Mazdean resistances in the countryside and mountains. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ a.k.a. Rōzbih pūr-I Dādōē (d. 756/59) translated from Middle Persian works that revolutionized Arabic writing about politics, history and religion: *Kalila wa Dimna*, the *Letter of Tansar*, and the *Khwaday-Namag* chronicles. The Abbasids’ new capital at Baghdad (762) adjoined Ctesiphon. Early Abbasid imperial style, notably in architecture and art, owed much to the spirit of place. Baghdadi intellectual life came to be dominated by Iranian scholars, often converts from or at first hand acquainted with Mazdaism or Manicheism.

As Abbasid control of the Iranian plateau loosened in the mid-ninth century, local dynasties took over and sought legitimacy through a still more dynamic identification with the Sasanids. The Samanids of Samarkand and Bukhara, for example, alleged descent from a late pre-Islamic ruler, Bahram VI Chobin. We would know far less about the Sasanids were it not for scholars patronized by the Samanids, notably Bal’ami who translated from Arabic and thoroughly overhauled Tabari’s *History of the Messengers and Kings*, and Ferdowsi’s *Shahname* completed in 1010. The New Persian language, enriched from Arabic and written in modified Arabic script, was itself an engine of this Iranian renaissance, especially through Ferdowsi’s widely translated epic. New Persian became the bridge by which the Turkish soldiery, omnipresent at Bukhara as at Baghdad, made the transition to Islam and political power. These were, of course, Sunni Muslim states still acknowledging Abbasid overlordship. But Mazdaism faded only gradually. Its scholars busied themselves – mainly in Baghdad – with preserving and systematizing their religious and literary inheritance, notably in the vast encyclopedia known as the *Denkard*. To the *Denkard* we owe forthright statements of the Sasanid Mazdean conviction that their tradition was the fount of all human wisdom, Indian and Greek learning being derivative and requiring retrotranslation to re-establish the undistorted Avestan worldview. And compared to the fundamentalist, legalistic take on Islam that was becoming prevalent thanks to Arab Ibn Hanbal of Baghdad (d. 855), and which long dominated Orientalist scholarship, Iranians developed what scholars now see as a more ‘humanistic’, ‘Persianate’ Islam. Persianate culture is easily caricatured as all about wine and pretty boys but is best summed up by the ideal – of course,



rarely realized – of the just ‘Persian Prince’ modelled on ‘Kisra’. Kisra was a composite of Khosrow I, a mighty warrior to be sure, and Khosrow II who briefly realized the age-old dream of crushing Rome, then left a legacy of defeat that turned into destruction by the Arabs. But this ideal and style went from strength to strength in the post-Sasanid/Samanid East, among Ghaznavids, Mongols, Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans, until it encountered colonial armies and the cultural seductions of Europe.

But contemplating the Pahlavi dynasty’s substitution of ‘Iran’ for ‘Persia’, not to mention the 1967 coronation crown modelled on Shapur II’s; reading Ruhollah Khomeini’s youthful wine poetry; or tracing the fortunes of Kisra through qasidas proclaiming from Delhi to Moscow the Persianate soteriology of a socialist internationalist future – one wonders whether even the twentieth century quite managed to exhaust the energies of Sasan.

Profile

Professor Garth Fowden is a prominent historian specializing in the study of late antiquity and early Islam. He is engaged in writing a comprehensive history of the Afro-Eurasian First Millennium CE in response to current debates about late Antiquity and the relation of early Islam to the late antique world. He assigns particular prominence to the development of rabbinic Judaism, patristic Christianity and early Islam, but also of other religions such as Buddhism and Manicheism.

Selected publications include *Empire to commonwealth: Consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993) and *Before and after Muḥammad: The First Millennium refocused* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014).

Taq Kasra/ The Arch of Ctesiphon · Source: Wikipedia





Claudia Tiersch

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin



***Civitas dei* as *civitas terrena*? Bishops and Political Administration in the Late Roman Empire**

Abstract

One of the reasons Emperor Constantine recognized the Christian church was to gain an integrative force to promote the threatened unity of the empire. Both the Christian church and its bishops were given considerable privileges by him. However, theological disputes soon showed that his hopes were not entirely fulfilled. But how did bishops act within local contexts? Did they prove to be bearers of political responsibility or loyal cooperation partners of the civil administration, or did they act as power factors of their own order that could not be integrated? On which factors did their positioning depend? Can temporal or geographical differences be determined?

Profile

Claudia Tiersch is a Professor of Ancient History at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research focuses on church-state relations in Late Antiquity, the significance and lifestyles of Christian female ascetics, stabilization mechanisms in the Roman Republic, as well as on Athenian democracy in the 4th century BCE. Notable publications include the edited volume *Die*



athenische Demokratie im 4. Jh. v. Chr. zwischen Modernisierung und Tradition (Stuttgart, 2016), and the co-edited work *Semantische Kämpfe zwischen Republik und Prinzipat? Kontinuität und Transformation der politischen Sprache in Rom* (Göttingen, 2021). She recently led the project “Slavery and Social Mobility in The Greek World, 800–350 BC.”





Jonathan Brockopp

Pennsylvania State University



Salvation Religion, Imperial Religion: The Case of Heresy in North Africa

Abstract

Both early Christianity and early Islam are rightly described as salvation religions, yet at certain points in their histories they have also been Imperial religions. This seems strange, because salvation religions posit a journey of the “soul” through this life into a hereafter that is somehow more significant. Imperial religions, in contrast, focus squarely on this world and public acknowledgement of the Emperor as divinely ordained. These conflicting dynamics can be seen clearly in the history of both Christianity and Islam. To examine the interplay of Salvation and Empire, I will focus on two cases of heresy from North Africa: Arian Vandal persecution of the Homousians, and Ismā‘īlī Fāṭimid violent coercion of Mālikīs and Ḥanafīs. Each of these examples concerns a heretical movement that was powered by belief in a salvation religion in its opposition to an imperial desire for conformity. As a focus, heresy allows us to observe the dynamics of religion and power that are at play in empire building, for heresy is about resisting public expressions of loyalty that are so important for Imperial religion to be successful. But examination of historical cases can also reveal a more complex reality of negotiation and definition, and they remind us that there is nothing essential about what is represented today as the orthodox creed

In the first case, Victor of Vita (b. ca. 430) wrote his *History of the Persecution* as a missive to Byzantine elites in hopes they would relieve the suffering of Afro-Romans. He included heart-wrenching accounts of suffering at the hand of the invading Vandals and also preserved a fascinating edict of Vandal King Huneric (oldest son of Gaiseric, r. 477–484). In a sense, Huneric is acting similarly to Roman emperors, asserting order in the church by force, a quintessential act of Imperial religion. Victor himself appeals both to religion, and also to the barbarity of the invaders and their lack of Romanness in destroying cultural goods, and it must be admitted that Victor's missive may be characterized as an appeal to the Romans for military assistance, using religious language as a justification for military action. In the second case, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī and 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī, leaders of the Fāṭimid movement, ceremoniously entered Raqqada together January of 910; this may have been the height of Fāṭimid authority over the city of Kairouan. The new regime worked quickly to quash opposition, and in a set of policies curiously similar to those of Christian emperors centuries earlier, local scholars "were deprived of their powers and made the object of financial and scholarly limitations which resulted in their marginalization." The scholars, however, continued to resist their new overlords in many forms, including continued study and copying of manuscripts (sometimes with curses for the new regime preserved) as well as more organized opposition. One fascinating result of these altercations may have been a new exclusive identity of Kairouan as a bastion of Maliki jurisprudence.

These two cases demonstrate that while Imperial religion can rightly be regarded as a politically expedient use of religious symbols for the gain of the Empire, salvation religions can adapt to this usage and flourish as a result. In both cases examined here, rulers benefit from the imprimatur of religious leaders. Religious institutions, in turn, benefit from imperial favor, represented most clearly in large public structures, but also including lucrative public offices and the suppression of intellectual enemies. I will conclude my paper with a few reflections on the much later Spanish incursions into North Africa, where we see neither the same resistance exhibited by Victor of Vita nor that of the Kairouani scholars. This suggests to me that without another source of political power, Salvation religion cannot resist effectively against the coercive power of a state.



Profile

Jonathan Brockopp is Professor of History, Religious Studies, and Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University. A specialist in early Muslim scholarly communities, he has worked on the Kairouan Manuscript Collection for over thirty years, and in 2018, he co-founded the Kairouan Manuscript Project (KMP) with Dr. Asma Helali. Also, with Dr. Helali, Brockopp is co-directing a new book series, *Maghribi Manuscripts*, with Penn State Press.

Brockopp considers himself a historian of religion, using the material remains of Muslim civilizations to understand the social worlds of scholars.

Selected Publications include Brockopp, Jonathan E./ Helali, Asma eds. (forthcoming), *Kairouan Manuscript Cultures / Cultures des manuscrits à Kairouan* and Brockopp, Jonathan E (2017), *Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622-950*, Studies in Islamic Civilization, Cambridge University Press.





Javier Francisco

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg



Evangelization – A Mixed Bag of Imperial Geopolitics

Abstract

The Spanish Empire had several institutional pillars to expand, consolidate and defend its rule in the Americas. They all had in common to promote transformations of hispanicization and evangelization as indicative characteristics of Spanish rule. In this presentation, I want to present and discuss how missionary enterprises of the Catholic Church have shaped imperial geopolitics – providing advantages and obstacles for the Spanish authorities.

I have identified six topics which relate to expansion, securitization and fending off European and Indigenous rivals: *One*, Indigenous as auxiliaries. Here, I will show how, despite belonging to a Catholic power, the Indigenous in Brazil would flee to the Spanish dominion in order to obtain legal protection and avoid enslavement. Guaraní auxiliaries would not only protect these refugees but also form the bulk of the Spanish military expeditions in the 18th century during the Spanish-Brazilian border disputes. This military advantage, however, came at a prize: concessions by the authorities, settlers and merchants and autonomy for missionary settlements. In New Granada, similarly, Indigenous auxiliaries (called flecheros) would be called upon

regularly to repel attacks by the French and, particularly, the British. *Two*, short-term intrusion of privateers and the question of loyalty. How did the question of religious affiliation and loyalty towards the crown factor into the reactions of rural Indigenous communities and maroon settlements? A good example to debate their loyalty and military response presents Panama in the late 1500s when several large privateering incursions occurred (incl. Drake's expeditions). *Three*, internal resistance by (not yet) subjugated and integrated Indigenous polities. Here, we will look at how the Spanish used loyal, Catholic Indigenous subjects to resettle them so they could serve as good examples. *Four*, devastating missionary failures leading to a return of Spanish power but less pronounced evangelization efforts or to never-ending border wars. A well-known example for the latter are the Spanish-Mapuche border disputes. In many cases, however, the Spanish were able to make long-term inroads through the formation of prudent alliances with countless of Indigenous polities against powerful common rivals such as the British, the Yamasee, the Apache and the Comanche. We will have a look at the Spanish territories north of the Río Grande and discuss the socio-political processes. *Five*, evangelization as a legitimation resource of expansion, rule and for conceptualizing an imperial vision. This point touches upon religion as an expansionist driver and the push and pull factors which could unfold. Although evangelization has often been (rightly) described as one key driver of Spanish expansion, it was by no means the only one. Furthermore, religious actors would call upon states officials to comply with (what they perceived as) the state's obligations which could tie up additional resources and hence impede expansion. And *six*, was evangelization becoming an obsolete model of expansion and rule in the 18th/early 19th century? Spain's focus on evangelization was increasingly seen by contemporaries as an obstacle to expansion referring to Britain's success in allying with the Indigenous without forcing them to convert to a Christian denomination. This also seems to be a widespread historiographical assessment. However, the expulsion of the Jesuit order and the turmoil among the colonists it had provoked as well as the vigorous missionary efforts in California seem to present counter examples which have to be considered when discussing imperial geopolitics.



In light of our comparative approach, I will conclude the presentation by widening the perspective and asking whether these processes were trans-imperial phenomena in the Americas, or to which extent they were exceptional for the Spanish case.

Profile

Javier Francisco is a historian for European imperial history and its socio-ecological repercussions. Among his research interests are the ecological impact of land-use, historical biodiversity assessment (terrestrial and maritime), global processes of transfer of knowledge, indigenous and local agency, imperial conflicts and social transformations. Additionally, his inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation includes projects related to post-imperial power asymmetries, ecological legacies and sustainability.

Notable publications include *Imperial Methuselah: A New Theoretical Approach on Europe's Rule in the Americas* (forthcoming) and *Die spanisch-amerikanische Jesuitenuniversität in Córdoba, Argentinien. Transatlantische Verflechtungen und gesellschaftliche Verankerung in der Kolonialzeit*. wbg Academic, Stuttgart: 2018.



Catedral Metropolitana de México © Ricardo Sánchez/DLF



Frederik Schulze

University of Cologne



Empire, Religion, and Local Administration in Northern Peru (1750–1820)

Abstract

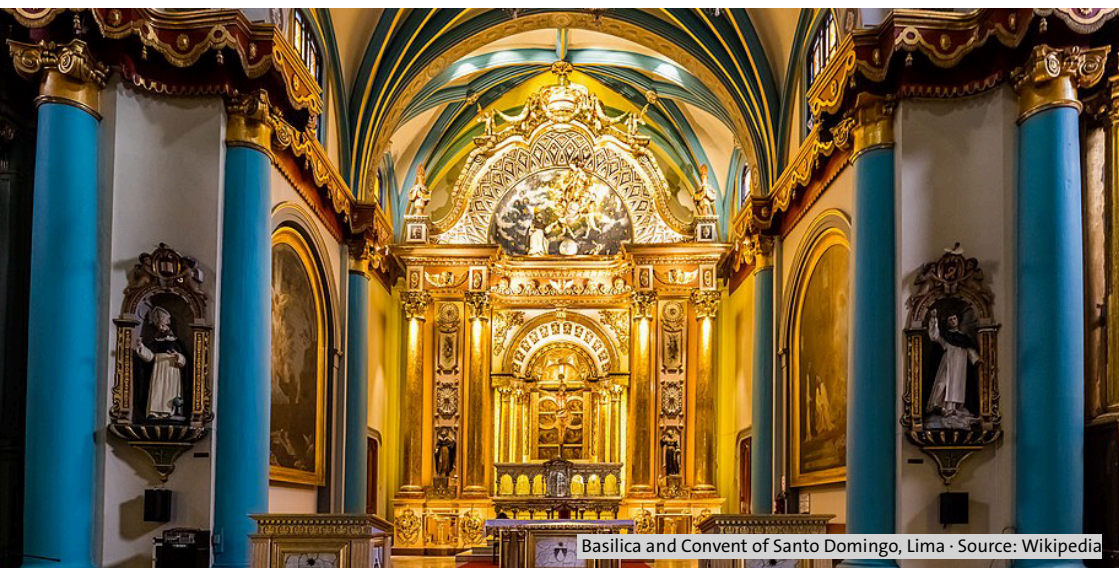
Peru had been one of the Spanish viceroalties in the Americas since 1542. Spanish power was particularly entrenched there, which was supported not only by the authorities in the capital Lima, where the viceroy was based, but also by a branched administrative apparatus that extended into the provinces and the equally broad-based institution of the church. Although the indigenous people enjoyed local self-government, they had to perform labor services and pay tribute. They were also subject to forced missionary work and the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. Despite around 300 years of relatively stable Spanish rule, the region was also repeatedly the scene of indigenous resistance, which culminated in several uprisings at the end of the 18th century.

The proposed contribution plays out the questions of religion, affiliation, and hegemony of the imperial power not on structural phenomena, but on the local colonial administration and the daily conflicts within colonial society using the example of northern Peru in the second half of the 18th century. Even if Spanish rule and the Catholic religion were fundamentally established among the indigenous population, a complex network of interests between

local officials, priests, indigenous dignitaries, and the normal population existed at the local level, in which officials and religious actors did not automatically have priority or could act without being challenged. Rather, indigenous people could assert their rights in court, and officials and clericals had to expect sanctions if they abused their power. A local perspective, so the argument goes, can make imperial dynamics and negotiation processes more visible and relativize grand narratives of the exercise of imperial power.

Profile

PD Dr. Frederik Schulze is principal investigator in the DFG research unit “Xenocracy on Site: Administration and Cultural Interdependence in the Premodern Era” at Cologne University. Previously, he worked as a lecturer, researcher, assistant and visiting professor at Freie Universität Berlin, University of Münster, and Bielefeld University. He earned his Ph.D. at Freie Universität Berlin in 2014 and his *venia legendi* for modern history at the University of Münster in 2021. He has published widely on migration, colonialism, global history, and developmentalism in journals including *History and Technology*, *German History*, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, and *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. His recent second book *Wissen im Fluss* (Schöningh Brill 2022) explores the global history of knowledge of Latin American dam building in the twentieth century.



Basilica and Convent of Santo Domingo, Lima · Source: Wikipedia



Shervin Farridnejad

University of Hamburg



Zoroastrian Universal Salvation: Ideology of Power and Religion in Late Antique Iran

Abstract

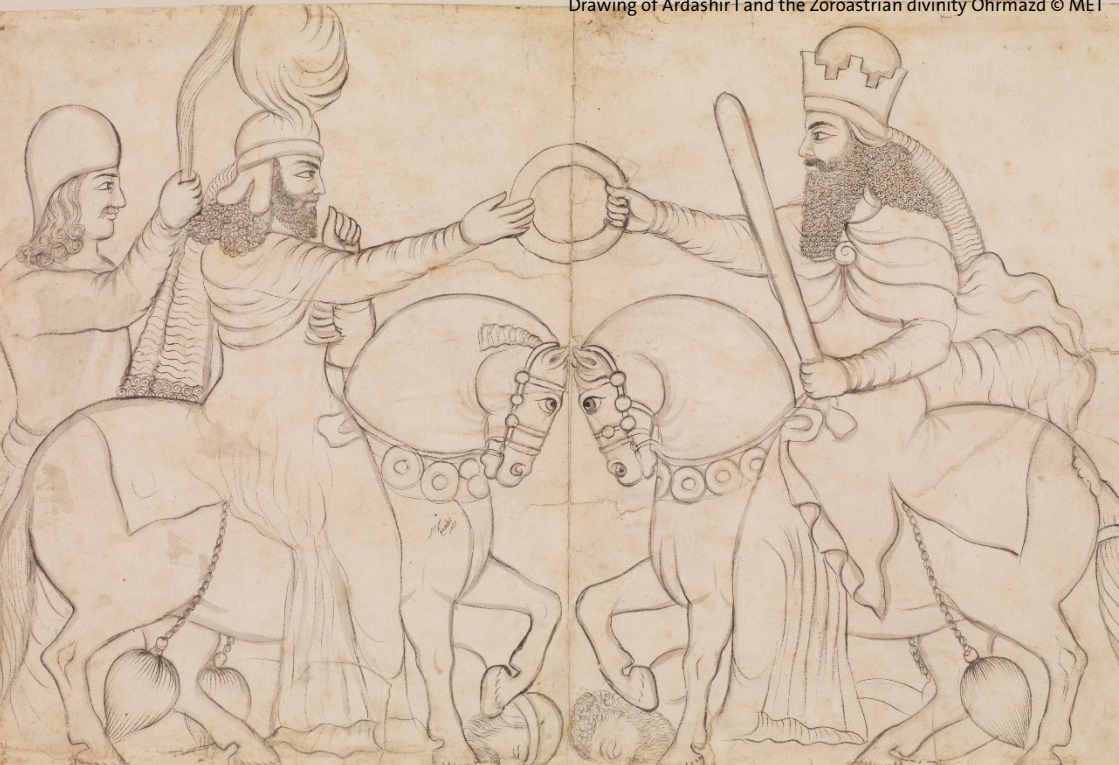
This paper explores the concept of universal salvation within Zoroastrianism as a dynamic ideological tool in Late Antique Iran. It examines how the doctrine intersected with the political and religious imperatives of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE). By analyzing theological texts, imperial rituals, and historical narratives, the paper argues that Zoroastrian universal salvation was not merely a theological promise but a mechanism of sociopolitical control. It provided a unifying framework for the diverse populations within the empire, reinforcing the authority of the king and the priesthood while legitimizing imperial conquests and governance. The study highlights the interplay between religious ideology and power, shedding light on how Zoroastrianism adapted and thrived as both a faith and a statecraft tool in the complex religious and cultural milieu of Late Antiquity. This paper shall contribute to broader discussions on the interrelation of religion, politics, and universalist doctrines of late antique Empires of Salvation Religions.



Profile

Prof. Dr. Shervin Farridnejad holds the professorship of Iranian Studies at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg since September 2022. His research focal points are antique and late antique Iranian cultural and religious history, Persianate cultural and religious history, Zoroastrian religion, rituals and literature as well as dynamics and interdependencies between Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian in the (early) Islamic period, among others. Recent publications include *A Handbook of Persian Calligraphy and Related Arts*. Handbook of Oriental Studies (HdO 109, Leiden: Brill, 2022), together with Hamid Reza Ghelichkhani, and *Food for Gods, Food for Mortals: Culinary and Dining Practices in the Greater Iranian World* (Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine, 2022), co-edited with Touraj Daryaee.

Drawing of Ardashir I and the Zoroastrian divinity Ohrmazd © MET





Kurt Franz

University of Hamburg



Religion or Faith? The Not-so-Islamic Early Empires of the Arabs

Abstract

Comparison between empires that nurtured a salvation religion calls for an assessment of the relevance of religion for each of them. Here, the early Islamic empire, to stick with that introduced term for once, poses the problems of a ‘Dark Age.’ In the wake of Muḥammad, the long earlier half of the first 300 years of imperial rule produced hardly any internal written text, other than the Quran, for the purpose of transmission to future generations. Historical experience was expressed orally and was added to by mnemonic notes only gradually. It transformed into literary transmission in the form of edited books towards the turn of the eighth century CE. Thus, the largely 170 years that followed the first expansion beyond Arabia are more of a *proto*-history. Almost all traditional knowledge of it dates from the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate (132–334 H/750–945 CE, etc.) and is accordingly biased by the political and religious lenses of the writers of that period. This is why this workshop’s core comparative categories ‘Empire,’ ‘religion,’ and, here, ‘Islam’ deserve a historico-critical approach that takes neither the original adequacy of these concepts nor their initial reference to each other for granted.

In my talk, I shall pursue this in the course of the first three pertinent polities: the rule of the four ‘patriarchal’ successors to Muḥammad, the Umayyad Caliphate, and the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate (until the Būyid usurpation of 334/945). Following brief remarks on the primeval caliphs, I will argue – starting from Julius Wellhausen’s classic study *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, 1902 – that the Umayyads’ rule consisted in an Arab-national dynastic monarchy at a time when the Arabs’ new faith had not yet evolved into the full-fledged religious system of later times. It became such only during the second century of ‘Abbāsid rule (third/ninth century) when various developments culminated in close connection: the formation of Islamic schools of law, the final compilation and editing of Hadith collections, and the eventual general enforcement of literary knowledge-transmission on the basis of edited books, notably including, here, historical prose collections, chronicles, collections of biographies, and geographies.

In order to understand why (a) Arab/Arabic/Arabian and (b) Islamic drivers of military expansion and imperial statehood were disconnected, the discussion is to highlight three circumstances. I will first refer to the difference between religion (*dīn*) as an organized and staffed institution, and on the other hand faith/belief (*īmān*), and piety (*taqwá*), as are personally or collectively felt and lived. The second point is the very starkly minoritarian nature of the early Muslim populations among the peoples of the conquered lands while, moreover, conversion to the new faith was not yet entirely welcome. Lastly, I will consider the rising integrative power of Islam vis-à-vis the non-Muslim subjects, comprising the attractiveness of ‘sectarian’ or even ‘heretic’ tendencies within Islam to social unrest and unruly groups who defied the respective empire. In conclusion, I hold that the first century and a half or so from the Hijra are included in the ‘realm of Islam’ and Islamic imperial history only by way of an inappropriate rear projection, but I also suggest that a narrower understanding may help make the Islamic case more suitable for comparison.

Profile

Prof. Dr. Kurt Franz is an historian of the Islamic Middle East and North Africa between 600 and 1600 and a member of Hamburg University’s RomanIslam



Center. His particular research interests lie with the history of Arabic chronical and geographical writing, slavery and the social division of labour, socio-religious rebel movements, nomadism and the Bedouin, communication and traffic networks, and GIS-based historical cartography.

Selected monographs of his include *Kompilation in arabischen Chronicles* (Berlin 2004), *Vom Beutezug zur Territorialherrschaft* (Wiesbaden 2007), a volume co-edited with Wolfgang Holzwarth on *Nomad Military Power in Iran and Adjacent Areas in the Islamic Period* (Wiesbaden 2015), and two forthcoming map-based studies, *Atlas der Beduinen unter Aiyūbiden und frühen Mamlūken*, and, together with Stefan Heidemann, *Historical Maps of the Early Islamic West*.





Eugenio Garosi

Radboud University Nijmegen



The Grammar of Empire: Documentary Evidence for Arabic Scribal Training in the Early Islamic Period

Abstract

The trajectory of Arabic towards becoming the main idiom of public power and administration of the early Islamic empire is a topic that has sparked renewed interest and debate in the last two decades. The advances in the study of documentary texts in Arabic, Greek, Coptic and Middle Iranian languages from the first centuries of Islam in particular, are allowing an ever more fine-grained understanding of the chronology, geographical and social reach, motivations, and degree of coordination (or absence thereof) by the central authorities behind the process of Arabicization of scribal practices in the caliphate.

One of the less frequently explored primary sources on the channels, contexts and media involved in the acquisition and fine-tuning of Arabic literacy in the early Islamic empire are the dozens of writing exercises and school texts preserved on papyri, ostraca and other media surviving from 7th- and 8th-century Egypt, the Levant, the central Iranian lands, and Central Asia. These texts not only enable us to gauge the type of schooling aspiring Arabic

secretaries were subject to but also provide indirect insights in the recruitment of personnel into the ranks of the imperial administration and the interplay of different languages in the early Islamic administration more generally. Furthermore, these documents are uniquely positioned to illuminate the selection and propagation of scribal practices through schooling (and particularly the role played by official sponsorship in both respects). Finally, an examination of the types of texts copied and practiced as school models can give us a measure of which writings were considered benchmarks of secretarial schooling. This, in turn, offers us a glimpse into the domains of Arabic literacy being focused on.

Research into this type of early Islamic documents has so far been unsystematic and characterized by a regional or local focus (mostly restricted to documents on papyrus from Egypt). My paper will offer a selective overview of 7th- and 8th-century evidence for Arabic writing exercises and trials of scribes across different regional contexts.

In the first part of the paper, I will attempt to delineate a broad taxonomy of the surviving texts based on their content, presumable training goals, and proficiency levels of the trainees. Combining archaeological and textual evidence, I will further survey the evidence for schooling infrastructure and its relation to official sponsorship.

In a second step, the paper will delve in greater detail into the material features and content of the examined documents as a window into the social environment of schooling texts including:

- Writing materials, with particular attention to the types of documents regularly reused as writing exercises.
- The cultural and linguistic background of the trainees (differentiating, for instance, between native Arabic speakers learning or perfecting their writing and trainees learning Arabic as a second language).
- The degree of centralization of scribal training in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.
- Diachronic changes in the type of exercises and in the texts used as models during the surveyed timespan.

Particular emphasis will be placed on comparing the more abundant textual sources from the Egyptian theater with complementary evidence from

different corners of the early Islamic empire with the intent of highlighting on patterns of similarity and difference.

Profile

Dr. Eugenio Garosi won his PhD in Arabic Studies and Ancient History from LMU Munich and the University of Basel in 2019, focusing on Imperial Arabic during the Umayyad and Early Abbasid periods. He has filled positions as Research Associate in the SNF Project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society: Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries” at the University of Basel, and assistant to Prof. Dr. Ronny Vollandt for cataloguing manuscripts from Damascus at Staatsbibliothek Berlin. He has also contributed as a research associate to the Arabic Papyrology Database Project at LMU Munich. As of 2024, he is a post-doctoral researcher at Radboud University Nijmegen, running the project “From Mediator to Anchorer: Scribal Innovation in the Early Islamic Empire and Its Curators”.

His publications include *Projecting a New Empire: Formats, Social Meaning, and Mediality of Imperial Arabic in the Umayyad and Early Abbasid Periods* (Berlin 2022) and, together with Sabine Huebner (chief editor) et al., *Living the End of Antiquity: Individual Histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt* (Berlin 2020).

Folio from the "Blue Qur'an" © MET





Stefan Rinke

Freie Universität Berlin



The Empire and Its Elites: The Case of Spanish America

Abstract

The Spanish colonial empire in the Americas was ruled by a small elite Spaniards from Europe. However, in the course of its 300-year history autochthonous elites also played an important role in exerting power in local and regional settings. Until the end of the 18th century, their relevance had grown to such a degree that they were not content to accept subordinate status any longer. How were elites recruited over the course of time? Was there discernible change? What role did indigenous elites play? How did the relationship between European Spaniards and creole elites evolve?

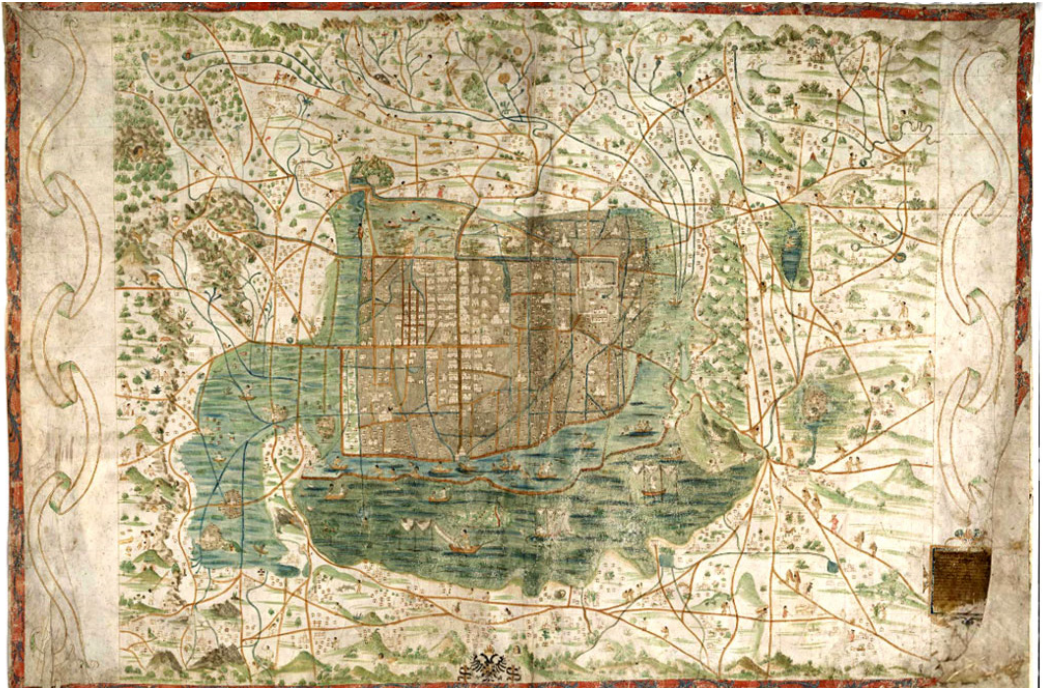
Profile

Stefan Rinke is professor at the Department of History at the Institute for Latin American Studies and the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institute at Freie Universität Berlin. Before coming to Berlin in 2005, he taught at Katholische Universität Eichstätt and at Tufts University. He was awarded the Premio Alzate by the Mexican Academy of Sciences, an honorary doctorate by



the Universidad Nacional de San Martín, as well as the Einstein Research Fellowship. He was speaker of the Collaborative Research Center “Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood” (2009–2018) and since 2019 is speaker of the German-Mexican Graduate School “Between Spaces”. He has published numerous monographs, collected volumes, and articles. His latest book *Conquistadores und Azteken* was published by C.H. Beck in 2019.

Map of Mexico-Tenochtitlan · Source: Uppsala University Library





Notes and Remarks



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In order to attend, please register by **December 6, 2024**
with **romanislam@uni-hamburg.de**

Information and Abstracts

<https://www.romanislam.uni-hamburg.de/events-news/workshops/family-of-empires.html>



The world of nation-states and secular salvation ideologies (Communism, Socialism, National Socialism, Fascism, etc.) is presently being shattered by imperial powers, states, and proto-states, all of which refer to salvation religions, Evangelical America, Orthodox Russia, Orthodox Israel, and the Islamic State. The assurance of political religion contributes to current wars, global migration, and the creation of new societies in the West, including the Islamic world.

The transcultural dynamics of empires with salvation religions of Middle Eastern origin are not yet well understood and are often taken for granted: The Roman, Islamic, and Spanish empires all seem paradigmatic for our understanding of Empire. Subsequent empires and political regimes all drew, in one way or another, on the common heritage of the Roman, Islamic, and Hispanic cultures. They all brought with them a dominant imperial language and a dominant, if not exclusive, salvation religion. These set them apart from other imperial traditions in Asia and Africa. More strikingly, they led to a complete transformation of their colonial subjects, who had other religions and languages to begin with. The new religion and language became an inseparable part of identity: Spanish and Catholicism in the Americas, Romance languages and Roman Christianity in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, Arabic language and Islam in most of the Middle East and North Africa.

In pursuing these comparative questions, we must include the roots: the Sasanian Empire with Zoroastrianism and Persian, and even the Assyrian Empire in some regards. There are obvious differences between the three paradigmatic empires. The Roman Empire was invigorated by Christianity, Islam rose with the Empire, while in the Spanish Empire, Catholicism was an established religion in the 'Old World' at the time of the conquest. One empire was maritime, the other was primarily land-based, and the third was oceanic.

Comparing them allows for a better understanding of the elements of their transformative power. The workshop will compare approximately the first 300 years of each empire, when they functioned as an almost unified imperial body, before entering a state of 'umbrella empire' or their complete dissolution, as in the case of the Americas.