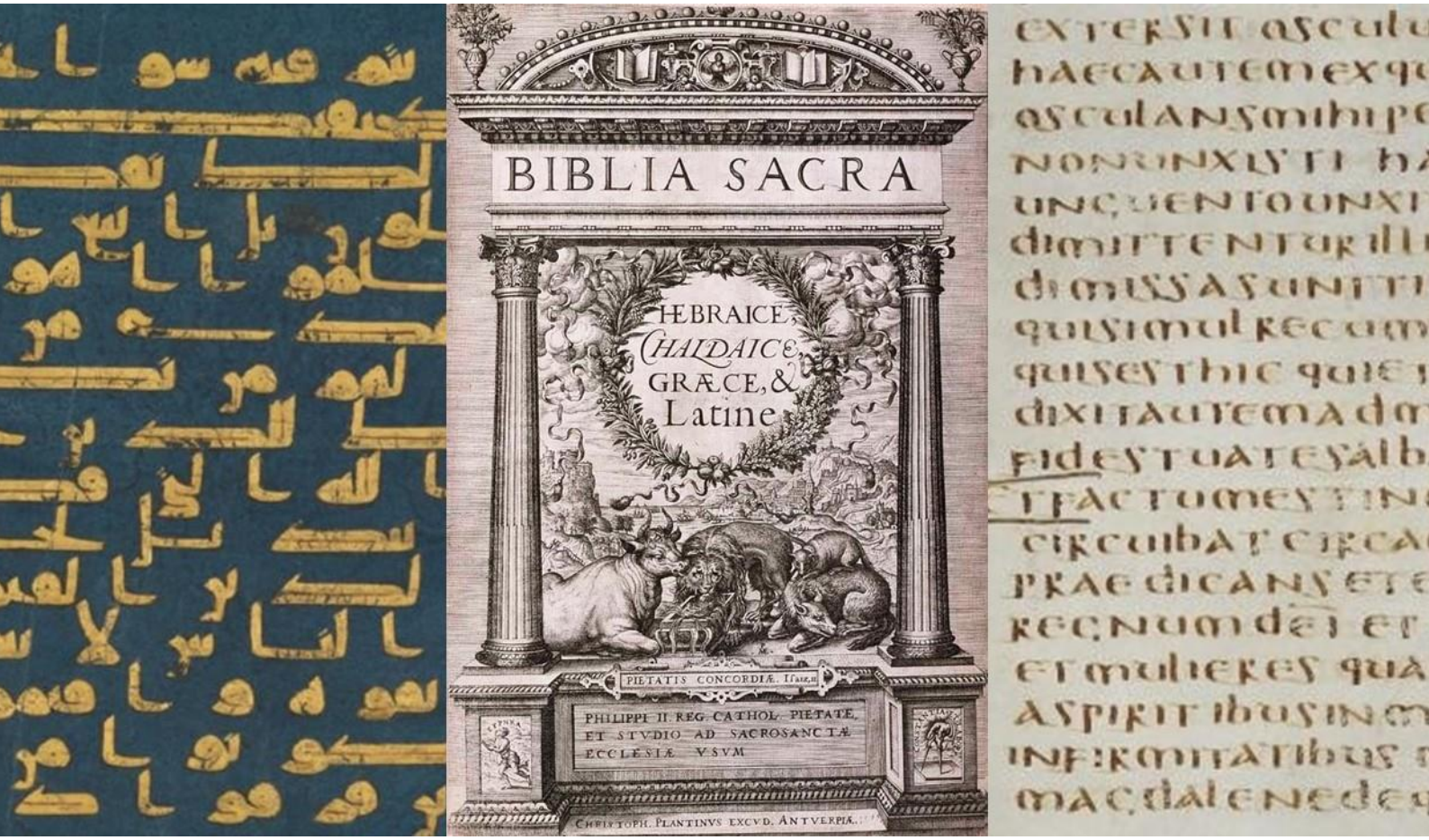
Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

Funded by
DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

RomanIslam
Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies

Imperial Transformation – Comparative Strategies in Empires of Salvation Religions



Program and Abstracts

November 11 – 14, 2026

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

Front Page (from left to right):

Islamic Empire: Blue Qur'an; second half 9th–mid-10th century, probably Qayrawān
© THE MET

Spanish Empire: Biblia sacra, Hebraice, Graece & Latine: Philippi II Reg. Cathol. Pietate, et studio ad sacrosanctae Ecclesiae vusum, Antwerp
© Biblioteca Nacional de España

Roman Empire: Lucas 7 Codex Bezae; ca. 400 CE
© Cambridge University Library, MS nn. 2.41

Content

Program 5

Abstracts and Short Profiles 9

Alan Strathern (University of Oxford)
Abrahamic Transcendentalism and the Imperial Management of Religious Pluralism 9

Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg)
Empires of Salvation Religions 11

Lutz Berger (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel)
Religion and Empire in Early Islam 14

Michaela Konrad (Universität Bamberg)
The Rise of Salvation Religions in the Roman Empire 17

Andrew Marsham (Cambridge University)
The Umayyad Empire as a Syro-Mesopotamian Pastoralist Empire and its Ecological Context? 20

Javier Francisco (Universität Basel)
The Contributions of "Religion" to Empire-Building: The Spanish Case 23

Clifford Ando (The University of Chicago)
Religion, Citizenship, and Social Cohesion 26

Christian Müller (CNRS Paris)
Islamic Law in the First Islamic Empire: From Caliphal to Juridical Authority 28

Johannes Meier (Universität Mainz)
The Church's Role in Spanish Rule Over the Americas..... 31

Kristian Kanstrup Christensen (Stellenbosch, Western Cape University)
Christianity and the Administration of the Later Roman Empire..... 34

Philip Wood (King's College London)
Appropriating Difference: Christian Sectarian Discourses and the Construction of Islamic Imperial Ideology 37

Amira K. Bennison (Cambridge University)
The Almohad City and its Integrative Functions 40

Federico Tavelli (Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina)
Indians as Protestants? The Transformation of Ancient America through European Christian Social Models in the Sixteenth Century 43

Stanislaw Adamiak (Nicolaus Copernicus University at Toruń)
Augustine's Language of Power and Weakness 45

Caroline Cunhill (EHESS)
A Patchwork of Languages? The Scope and Reach of the Indigenous Languages in the Spanish Empire 47

Ulrich Gotter (Universität Konstanz)
Empire(s) of the Mediterranean 49

Marie Legendre (University of Edinburgh)
Imperial Wealth: Between Caliph, Court and Province 51

Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg)
The Integrative Role of Imperial Currencies in Comparison 53

Contact 55



The Roman Emperor Constans II on an Islamic Coin from the Garrison City Ḥimṣ/Emesa
© Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena OMJ-303-C08

Program

Wednesday, November 11, 2026

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

18.00 **Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)
Introduction

18.30 **Alan Strathern** (University of Oxford)
Abrahamic Transcendentalism and the Imperial Management of Religious Pluralism

19.30 Reception

Thursday, November 12, 2026

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

Empire and Salvation Religion – Conceptual Approaches

Chair: **Katharina Mewes** (Universität Hamburg)

10.30 **Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)
Empires of Salvation Religions

11.15 **Lutz Berger** (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel)
Religion and Empire in Early Islam

12.00 Coffee Break

The Ritual and Religion in the Empire

Chair: **Katharina Mewes** (Universität Hamburg)

12.15 **Michaela Konrad** (Universität Bamberg)
The Rise of Salvation Religions in the Roman Empire

13.00 Lunch Break

15.00 **Andrew Marsham** (Cambridge University)
The Umayyad Empire as a Syro-Mesopotamian Pastoralist Empire and its Ecological Context

15.45 **Javier Francisco** (Universität Basel) – *Online*
The Contributions of "Religion" to Empire-Building: The Spanish Case

16.30 Coffee Break

16.45 Discussion: Ritual and Religion in Comparison

18.00 End of Day One

Friday, November 13, 2026

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

10.00 Registration & Coffee

Providing Justice in the Empire

Chair: **Max Schlimm** (Universität Hamburg)

10.15 **Clifford Ando** (The University of Chicago)
Religion, Citizenship, and Social Cohesion

11.00 **Christian Müller** (CNRS Paris)
Islamic Law in the First Islamic Empire: From Caliphal to Juridical Authority

11.45 Coffee Break

12.00 **Johannes Meier** (Universität Mainz) – *Online*
The Church's Role in Spanish Rule Over the Americas

12.45 Discussion: Law and Justice in Comparison

13.15 Lunch Break

Integration of Conquered Local Populations

Chair: **Kurt Franz** (Universität Hamburg & Universität Göttingen)

14.30 **Kristian Kanstrup Christensen** (Stellenbosch, Western Cape University)
Christianity and the Administration of the Later Roman Empire.

15.15 **Philip Wood** (King's College London)
Appropriating Difference: Christian Sectarian Discourses and the Construction of Islamic Imperial Ideology

16.00 Coffee Break

16.15 **Amira K. Bennison** (Cambridge University)
The Almohad City and its Integrative Functions

17.00 **Federico Tavelli** (Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina) – *Online*
Indians as Protestants? The Transformation of Ancient America through European Christian Social Models in the Sixteenth Century

17.45 Discussion: Questions of Integration in Comparison
Discussant: **Kurt Franz (**Universität Hamburg & Universität Göttingen)

18.15 End of Day Two

20.00 Dinner

Saturday, November 14, 2026

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

9.15 Registration

Spread of Imperial Language(s)?

Chair: **Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)

9.30 **Stanisław Adamiak** (Nicolaus Copernicus University at Toruń)
Augustine's Languages of Power and Weakness

10.15 **Caroline Cunill** (EHESS)
A Patchwork of Languages? The Scope and Reach of the Indigenous Languages in the Spanish Empire

11.00 Coffee Break

11.15 Discussion: Imperial Language(s) in Comparison

Economic Integration – Formation of the Empire?

Chair: **Katharina Mewes** (Universität Hamburg)

11.45 **Ulrich Gotter** (Universität Konstanz)
Empire(s) of the Mediterranean

12.30 **Marie Legendre** (University of Edinburgh)
Imperial Wealth: Between Caliph, Court and Province

13.15 Lunch Break

14.15 **Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)
The Integrative Role of Imperial Currencies in Comparison

15.00 Discussion: Economic Integration of Empires and the Wealth of Elites in Comparison

15.45 End of the Conference

Abstracts and Short Profiles

Alan Strathern (University of Oxford)



Abrahamic Transcendentalism and the Imperial Management of Religious Pluralism

Abstract

This talk will suggest some ways forward in the comparative analysis of the relationship between salvation religions and the exercise of imperial dominion, especially with regard to what fundamentally shaped or circumscribed the options open to elites in managing religious pluralism. It will begin by outlining a theoretical paradigm which can be used to understand global religious-political history in general, based on a distinction between 'immanentist' and 'transcendentalist' forms of religiosity. Transcendentalism applies to the Abrahamic and Indic salvation religions, insofar as they all aimed to liberate adherents from the human condition towards another-worldly form of existence. Many of the societies

over which the Roman and Spanish empires came to rule had purely immanentist religious traditions which were instead aimed at ameliorating the human condition through appropriate ritual relations with metapersons. Indeed, such societies had no concept of 'religion' per se, and have been frequently referred to using outsider's terms such as paganism. Of course, immanentist systems could also be used to articulate and legitimate imperial expansion. These circumstances often generated a henotheistic drive to the imperial cult, as we see in the period leading up to the conversion of Constantine in Rome. Yet that momentous conversion also indicates how irresistible salvation religions could appear to imperial elites.

The late Roman, Islamic and Spanish empires were all oriented by their allegiance to the Abrahamic subset of the salvation religions, and these were marked by unusually strong forms of religious identity construction based upon what Jan Assmann referred to as the Mosaic distinction. Yet, early modern Spanish and Islamic empires (the Ottomans and the Mughals) took notably different attitudes towards religious pluralism. The Spanish and Portuguese worked towards the Christianization of their subjects while Muslim empires, most spectacularly the Mughals, tended to be predicated on religious diversity. This talk will outline three rather structural reasons to explain this divergence, including the nature of Islam as a successor to earlier iterations of Abrahamic tradition; the consequences of the period of Mongol dominion (which meant the most powerful imperial entity in Eurasia was ruled by an immanentist elite); and the geopolitical situation of Islamic empire in what Vic Lieberman refers to as the 'exposed zone' of Eurasia. European Christian societies, however, could gestate in the 'protected zone', where they were in the historically unusual position of being able to enforce or cultivate religious homogeneity before the Reformation. This fundamentally shaped the nature of empire once relative seclusion was traded for extravagant overseas expansion. The talk will also relate the slow but eventually complete dominance of Christianity over the entirety of the New World and the Philippines to the entirely immanentist nature of the indigenous religious systems of these regions. If there is time, the talk may also offer a brief contrast with how the Indic salvation religions shaped imperial ideology and policy.

Profile

Alan Strathern is Professor of Global History at the Brasenose College at the University of Oxford. His research focusses on the global history of religious change and its relationship with politics, particularly in the early modern period. His recent book, *Converting Rulers: Global Patterns 1450-1850* (2024), helps explain the religious map of the world today by analyzing why rulers of some regions converted to Christianity and others did not. Its central case studies are Kongo, Japan, Thailand and Hawaii. This is a companion to a more theoretical book about religious change and its relationship with politics across all of world history, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (2019). He first specialized in Sri Lankan history, as in his first monograph, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Sri Lanka* (2007), and articles on such themes as origin myths, source criticism, sacred kingship, and ethnic identity.

Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg)



Empires of Salvation Religions

Abstract

For the past six years, the RomanIslam Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies has promoted research and discussion on how the Roman and Islamic empires and civilizations transformed the societies they conquered and how they changed in the process. The conquered societies adapted to imperial cultures in complex ways (Romanization and Islamicization). Salvation religions, such as Christianity and Islam, which were adopted by the empires or developed during their creation, became dominant in regions where they were not indigenous. Latin and Arabic, the languages of the empires, became the languages of the regions. However, in regions with older, more urbanized cultures, such as Greek-Hellenistic and Iranian-Sasanian cultures, Greek and Persian languages and cultures persisted in the long run.

To study these processes, we examined regions where Hellenism and Sasanian culture were nearly nonexistent before the empire and where Roman and Islamic imperial

culture were foreign before the conquest: the Western Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula. Despite their shared Hellenistic background, both empires were paradigmatic in their own right. All successor states and future empires and cultures, whether they be Roman or Islamic, refer to the legacy of the former in one way or another. Latin remained the origin language in the post-Roman world. Similarly, Arabic fulfills this function in the post-Islamic world. Romance languages and Roman Catholicism are still part of Western Europe's identity, while Arabic and Islamic beliefs are prevalent in North Africa and beyond.

At our final conference, we will test our findings and include the Spanish Empire, which, in many ways, we believe shared similarities with the other two paradigmatic empires. The conquistadors arrived in a region where their language and religion of salvation were previously unknown. They conquered regions with an earlier imperial tradition. They established Spanish as an imperial language and Christianity as the dominant religion. The Spanish Empire was as transformative in the New World as the Roman and Islamic empires were in the larger West. Spanish and Portuguese, as well as Catholic beliefs, are part of the identity of Central and South America.

This presentation reflects how a colonial culture in Western Europe, Northern Africa, and the Americas became so transformative that it essentially became the identity. This occurred either through taking over the empire or perpetuating its culture after the empire's fall.

Profile

Stefan Heidemann (Islamic Studies) is professor at Universität Hamburg and director (early Islam) of the Center for Advanced Study 'RomanIslam Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies' since 2020. Before, between 2014 and 2019, he directed the ERC-Advanced Grant Project, 'The Early Islamic Empire at Work – The View from the Regions Toward the Center'. The project looked at the regions of the early Islamic Empire to study the governance and development of the multiethnic and multireligious empire from Ifrīqiya to Khurasan. It focussed on economic resources, transregional and regional elites. The ERC Project has developed new understandings of the distinction between regional and transregional developments and has provided a conceptual apparatus essential for transcending contemporary tendencies of "nationalizing" early Islamic developments.

Stefan Heidemann is also co-director of the Center for Advanced Study "RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines working on Romanization and Islamication in Late Antiquity with a focus, though not exclusive, on the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa during the first millennium CE. The overall purpose of the Center is to explore new approaches to Romanization and Islamication in this period and set the scholarly debate on a new footing through diverse scientific activities such as a series of workshops on the three empires of salvation religions, such as this one.



Dirham, Imitation, Walīla (Volubilis), 174/790-1
© Uni Hamburg SB 11557



Denar, Eastern Europe, imitation, 3rd-4th c.
© CoinArchives/Marciniak Auction



8 Reales, Philip IV, Mexico City, (1622-34),
export coin to the Ottoman Empire
© CoinArchives/Stack's

Lutz Berger (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel)



Religion and Empire in Early Islam

Abstract

There can be little doubt that, without the religion preached by Muhammad, the empire that stretched from the Atlantic to Central Asia in the eighth century would never have come into being. Religious identity created the bonds that brought together people from the Arabian Peninsula and beyond as the ruling elite of an imperial polity. The importance of religion—of what had become Islam by the end of the seventh century at the latest—for the identity of the imperial elites, combined with the prominence of religion in the written cultures of Late Antiquity and subsequent periods, has encouraged us to view the history of the MENA region after 600 to a considerable extent through the lens of Islam. This fits well with current notions of "Empires of Faith" and "imperial monotheism."

Outside the Muslim world, however, empire-building around a religious identity does not appear to have occurred very often in world history, as we will have an opportunity to discuss during the workshop. Indeed, I doubt that many comparable cases can be found—perhaps ancient Egypt or Assyria might provide examples. Neither the Roman nor the Sasanian Empire, nor the empires of China or India, were products of religion. European empires in the modern period, meanwhile, were centred more on states than on religions—

another point that we can discuss during the workshop. This should prompt us to examine critically the central role that religion plays in our understanding of the MENA region after 600.

Certainly, Late Antique political powers tended to cloak themselves in religious garb, or at least to seek religious legitimation. Yet a closer examination reveals that, even in the seemingly obvious case of Islam, the relationship between religion and empire was considerably more complicated than is often assumed. As this paper will argue, it was as much the relative absence of religion as its presence in the political practice of the early Muslim polity that enabled its expansion before 700 CE. Moreover, within the Muslim community itself, religion was as much a destabilising factor as a stabilising one. At the same time, we should be careful not to overestimate the role of religion as a cause of political discontent, as opposed to a language through which such discontent was expressed.

Having considered the role of religion in imperial statehood, we should also reverse the question: what did imperial statehood mean for the development of Islam as a religion? Although early Islam was a religion shaped in important ways by conceptions of imperial rulership, this form of Islam had largely disappeared by the tenth century (apart from the Fatimids). The imperial dimensions of early Islam did not survive the demise of the empire, except indirectly. To be sure, the emergence of religious sub-identities within Islam was partly the product of power struggles within the Muslim imperial polity. In this respect, politics shaped religion more than religion shaped politics. In the long run, however, confessionalized political divisions survived independently of the political arena in which they had originated and came to be associated with a wide range of issues that had little or nothing to do with politics. Muslim normative thought—the sharia—likewise developed, from an early stage, to a considerable extent independently of the political sphere.

Thus, although imperial statehood and conflicts surrounding it shaped certain aspects of the Islamic religious tradition, the fragmentation of the imperial state in the late ninth and tenth centuries was largely irrelevant to the continued existence of Islam as a religion. By that point, the Late Antique conception of an imperial religion was effectively dead, at least within what had become mainstream Sunnism and Twelver Shiism.

Profile

Lutz Berger is Professor for Middle Eastern and Turkish studies at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, since 2007.

He studied Middle Eastern Studies, Central Asian Studies and Medieval and Modern European history at Göttingen. His PhD 1998 studied late classical Sufism. *Geschieden von allem außer Gott. Sufik und Welt bei Abū ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī* (Hildesheim 1998).

His research lies on pre-modern Middle Eastern history with a focus on the Early Islamic and Ottoman periods and on the modern MENA-region including Turkey. He has published widely on the history of Islam and on processes of social, cultural, and political change and stability in Middle Eastern societies (monographs on classical Sufism, the

history of Islamic theology, the cultural history of Syria during the Ottoman period, a social history of the Mediterranean world in the context of the emergence of Islam). In his most recent publication *Die Entstehung des Islam: Die ersten hundert Jahre*, (München, 2016) he explains how Islam developed as a result of the transformations within Late Antique societies and vividly describes how it took shape along the Arab conquests.



Umayyad Dinar, Damascus, 93/711-2, with a version of the Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ as symbol of the sovereignty of God
© Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena OMJ 306-A02

Michaela Konrad (Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg)



The Rise of Salvation Religions in the Roman Empire

Abstract

At the height of its expansion in the 2nd century CE, the Roman Empire comprised over 40 provinces. These were administrative entities that usually have been established after the military conquest of a region. The organization of the Roman Empire in provinces ensured uniform political and administrative structures across a vast territory stretching from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from Scotland to the Maghreb. Provincial governors – high-ranking officials from the Roman equestrian or senatorial classes who were personally accountable and loyal to the Roman emperor – administered the provinces and ensured the enforcement of Roman rule, in some cases with the support of the Roman army. Gradually, the Roman way of life became established in nearly all aspects of the provincial population's daily life. The population in the provinces included not only the indigenous populations conquered by Rome, but also, to a considerable extent, groups of people from other parts of the Roman Empire who came to a province as newcomers for a wide variety of reasons and circumstances: as officials as part of the governor's staff, as part of the garrisoned troops, as slaves, or as civilians, driven by economic interests, prospect of

advancement, or just having a pioneering spirit. Career opportunities and social mobility, alongside the political and administrative framework, were the clue reasons for the assertion of Roman rule.

Considering the heterogeneity of the population in the Roman provinces, the various efforts of Rome not only to rule the Empire and administer it uniformly, but also to establish a kind of "dominant culture," prove to be an effective means of integration. This "integration package" also included the cult of the Roman emperor and the imperial house, which Rome strictly enforced in all provinces of the empire. For the local elites the engagement in the imperial cult opened up opportunities for social advancement and enabled them to build up networks with influential and wealthy persons. In contrast to the Roman East, where the emperor could be venerated as a "*savior*" and a benefactor in the Hellenistic tradition, the cult of the ruler in the west is better understood as a gesture of honor and an unrestricted declaration of loyalty. This was primarily due to the rules of deification, which granted divine status only to a deceased emperor following his apotheosis. It was also mandatory to worship the Capitoline Jupiter – transferred from Rome – and the Capitoline Triad as a sign of the legitimacy and legitimization of Roman rule.

A more subtle form of binding the local population to Rome emerged in the realm of provincial religion. This was possible because the religious systems and the structures of religious principles in Rome and the provinces were similar in various aspects: they were based on the principle of individual relationships and forms of communication with the gods in which the principle of "*do ut des*" governed the rules. The gods of the Roman and provincial pantheons were endowed with human traits and assigned specific fields of responsibility for various aspects of life. The "*interpretatio Romana*" made it possible to merge gods with the same functions, with the result that all segments of provincial society could identify with a deity now bearing a double name, such as Apollo Grannus.

This lecture discusses why and under what social, political, and historical conditions from the late 1st and especially from the second half of the 2nd c. on new religious movements gained popularity within the preexisting religious-political structures. Using selected examples, the lecture will demonstrate that, during the Roman Empire, Christianity was merely one of several religious movements in which (the promise of) salvation, spirituality, mystical rituals, collective experiences, and mystical experiences within worship played a central role. The lecture will also examine the criteria used by the state to take measures aimed at either integrating these new cults into existing religious structures or suppressing them, and to what extent these measures were intended to stabilize the political system and the legitimacy of rule even in times of complex crises.

Profile

Michaela Konrad studied Archaeology of the Roman Provinces, Prehistory and Ancient History at the Universities of Munich and Freiburg. Since 2007 she is professor for Archaeology of the Roman Provinces at the University of Bamberg (Germany). She is

member of the German Archaeological Institute and member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Austrian Archaeological Institute at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

She has extensive experience in archaeological fieldwork. Her research includes the development and transformation of settlement patterns within the Roman *limes*. Questions of identity with particular regard to funerary practices and forms of religious expression. Questions of continuity, especially during the transition from the Roman period to the Early Middle Ages as well as Roman frontiers as spaces of interaction and transculturality. Her regional focus are the Northwestern and Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Her monograph on the kingdom of Emesa (Homs) 1st cent. BC and AD., (*Emesa zwischen Klientelreich und Provinz. Identität und Identitätswandel einer lokalen Fürstendynastie im Spiegel der archäologischen Quellen* [*Emesa: Between a Vassal Kingdom and Provinces. Identity and Identity Change in a Local Princely Dynasty as Reflected in Archaeological Sources*], Rahden/Westf. 2014), has been fundamental for the understanding of Rome's eastern frontier in northern Syria and the Euphrates region. Other notable publications include "The Roman Cemetery of Bregenz-Brigantium I" (1997), "The Late Roman Limes in Syria" (2000), "The excavations under the Niedermünster at Regensburg II, and Buildings and finds of the Roman period. Evaluation" (2005).



Sol Invictus on a coin of Constantin I (306-337 C.E.)
@ CoinArchives/Numismarket.pl

Andrew Marsham (University of Cambridge)



The Umayyad Empire as a Syro-Mesopotamian Pastoralist Empire and its Ecological Context

Abstract

This paper considers key features of the military and the projection of governance in the Umayyad Empire (644–750 CE), paying particular attention to the distinctive combination of settled leadership and pastoralist military forces in the empire. It argues that the early Islamic empire was historically unique in this combination, and in its leveraging of the human resources of the Arabian Peninsula and the Syro-Mesopotamian steppe. This also made the early Islamic empire an ecologically unique phenomenon, which had significant consequences not just for arable agriculture (the precise impact of which remains debated) but also for animal husbandry and the migration of new animal species as a consequence of the technologies of war and governance.

The preferences of this new military elite shaped the geographical reach of the empire—subtropical steppe corridors linked all main provinces of the empire, and a preference for military and administrative centres on the edges of steppe zones is evident. Hence, another consequence of the structures of power of the early empire was the distinctive pattern of land use in the conquered territories. This quickly had a significant impact on agriculture, not only with respect to the well-attested and much-debated agrarian crops, but also the less scrutinized but equally important migration of animal

species and the introduction of new forms of animal husbandry in several of the conquered regions. These impacts are just beginning to be explored in the archaeology and, importantly, in the early texts.

Finally, it is important to note that the distinctive approach of the imperial leadership to settlement and pastoralism contributed to the unique character of the early Caliphate: a preference on the part of the predominantly settled West Arabian leadership for their pastoralist armies' migration and settlement is prominent in the sources and is reflected in the crucial importance of the 'garrison towns' (*amṣār*) in the governance of the empire and in the discourse of Umayyad times. At the same time, the peoples of the steppe and desert zones of the empire remained vital reserves of military force; indeed, the limits of these reserves have rightly been noted as one of the factors in the collapse of Umayyad power.

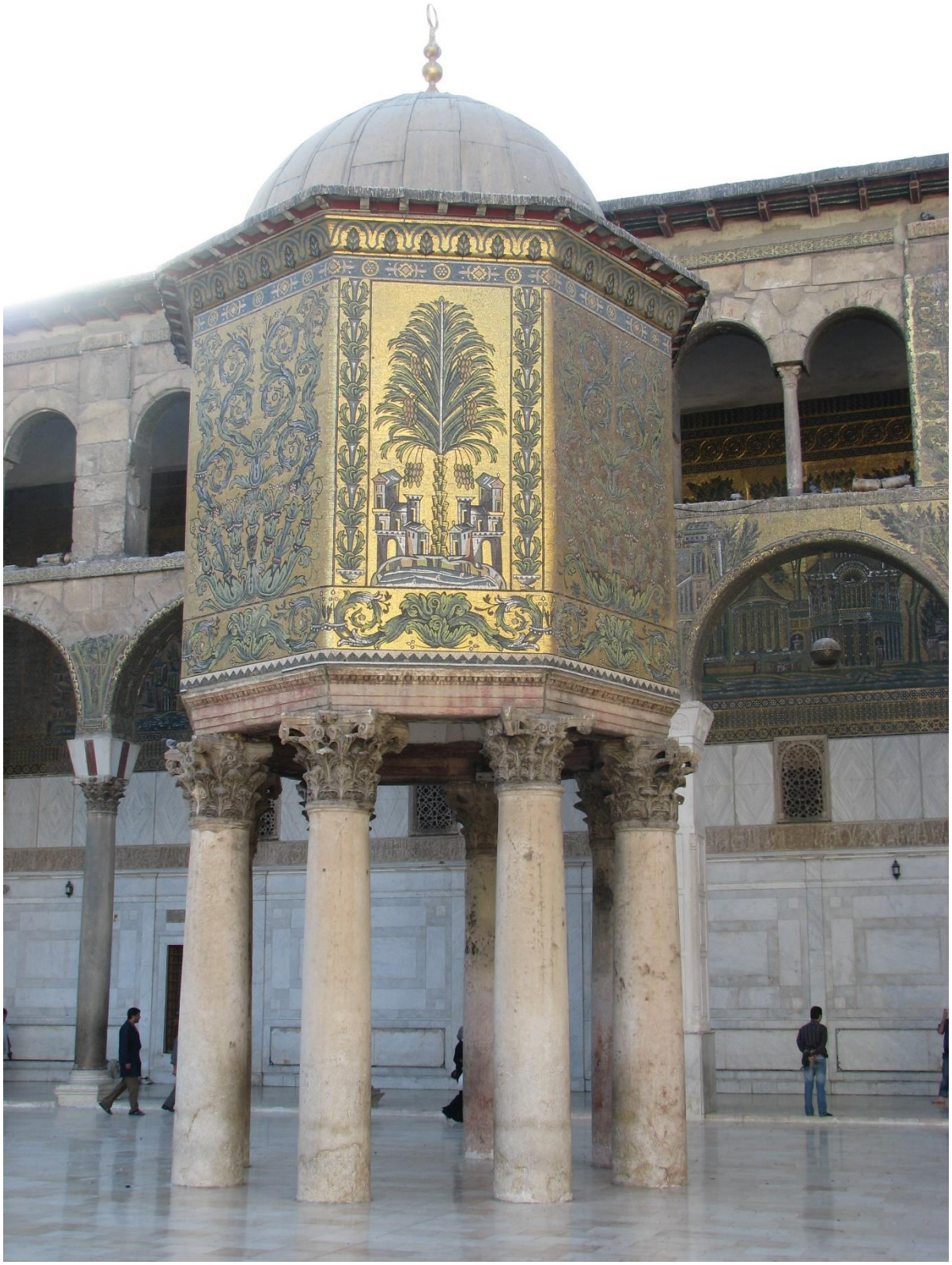
Profile

Andrew Marsham is Professor of Classical Arabic Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge.

His research concerns the formation of the first Islamic political structures and their wider late antique and medieval contexts. His most recent book, *The Umayyad Empire* (Edinburgh, 2024), is a new study of the formation in Late Antiquity of the first Islamic empire, under the leadership of the Umayyad branch of the Prophet Muhammad's tribe. His first monograph, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh, 2009), is the only full-length study of the pledges of allegiance given to the rulers of the early Islamic empire. He has also written on the execution of rebels, on history writing in Arabic, and on the comparative history of medieval political culture. He co-edited *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam* (Oxford, 2018) with Professor Alain George and edited *The Umayyad World* (Routledge, 2021).

Khirbat al-Mafjar, Umayyad residence @ Stefan Heidemann





The Dome of the Treasury (Qubbat al-Khazna) in the Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus
© Stefan Heidemann

Javier Francisco (Universität Basel)



The Contributions of "Religion" to Empire-Building: the Spanish Case

Abstract

What did religion contribute to the making and maintenance of empires? Taking the Spanish Empire as its case study, this paper approaches the religious structures embodied in the diverse institutions of the Catholic Church as central to processes of empire-building. Rather than treating "Church" and "State" as separate spheres, it examines their structural entanglements and the resulting synergies and obstacles for empire-building. It further asks what religious and secular actors as well as different social groups expected from these structures and how they understood their own place within the empire.

The paper distinguishes five closely interconnected fields of religious involvement. **First**, ecclesiastical institutions provided education through grammar schools, seminaries, universities, and schools for members of Indigenous elites, while missionaries, clerics, and religious educators simultaneously participated in the production, collection, and circulation of knowledge across local, interregional, and transatlantic networks. **Second**, religious actors contributed directly to imperial expansion and frontier security by

accompanying military expeditions, legitimizing conquest through evangelization, establishing missions alongside presidios, providing pastoral care for soldiers, and, in exceptional cases, participating in military leadership themselves. **Third**, ecclesiastical jurisdictions constituted a legal sphere alongside secular jurisdictions, particularly important in matters of marriage, ethnicity, social status, and the position of Indigenous subjects. **Fourth**, religious institutions became major economic actors involved in agriculture, manufacturing, plantations, commerce, credit, property ownership, and coerced labor, generating both cooperation and competition with secular authorities and private economic actors. **Finally**, they produced and mediated cultural forms ranging from literature, architecture, and painting to the codification of non-European languages and new forms of religious syncretism.

Across these fields, however, the interests of imperial administrators, officers, judges, secular clergy, members of religious orders, and the wider colonial population rarely coincided completely. Spaniards, criollos, mestizos and mulattos, Indigenous communities, and free and enslaved Africans approached ecclesiastical institutions with different expectations and used them to pursue protection, status, education, economic opportunities, social mobility, or communal autonomy. Religion could therefore strengthen imperial integration while simultaneously producing institutional conflicts and frictions.

By placing cooperation, competing expectations, and friction at the center of the analysis, the Spanish case offers a basis for discussing and comparing the contributions of religious structures to empire-building in the Spanish Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Caliphate-Emirate.

Profile

Javier Francisco is a historian for European imperial history and its socio-ecological repercussions. Among his research interests are: Global and comparative History, European empires, 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. His cooperation partners worked for the GiZ (development cooperation agency), Fraunhofer Institut and ScientistForFuture. His academic career stages include: the University of Tübingen (master's degree), the Freie Universität Berlin (PhD), Columbia University and Colegio de México (Visiting Scholar), the Max-Weber Kolleg in Erfurt and the University of Freiburg. He has conducted archival work in Buenos Aires, Paris, Sevilla, Den Haag and Vatican City.

In his publication *Imperial Methuselah: A New Theoretical Approach on Europe's Rule in the Americas*. (expected: 2026) he develops a comparative model for explaining the remarkable longevity of European imperial rule in the Early Modern Americas. Comparing eight empires (1492–1867). The book examines how friction and cooperation created entry points for expansion while simultaneously generating structures and mechanisms of imperial cohesion. Rather than treating conflict as inherently destabilizing, it asks how

negotiation, competition, and recurring crises could strengthen imperial systems. By bringing together cases usually studied separately, the project offers a macro-level explanation for how geographically dispersed and internally heterogeneous empires endured for centuries. Further publications are *Die spanisch-amerikanische Jesuitenuniversität in Córdoba, Argentinien. Transatlantische Verflechtungen und gesellschaftliche Verankerung in der Kolonialzeit*. wbg Academic, Stuttgart: 2018, "The Two Faces of the Same Coin: Star Trek's Federation and the Terran Empire," in: Sturgis, Amy; Strand, Emily (eds.). Star Trek: Essays Exploring the Final Frontier. Vernon Press, Wilmington: 2023 and "Conceptual Framework for Biodiversity Assessments in Global Value Chains," in: Sustainability, vol. 11/7: 2019. With: Stephanie Maier and Jan P. Lindner.



4 Reales, Mexico City (1539)
© CoinArchives/Heritage World Coin Auction

Clifford Ando (The University of Chicago)



Religion, Citizenship, and Social Cohesion

Abstract

The paper studies the relationship between religion, citizenship, and social cohesion in the Roman empire. In particular, I explore Roman models of religion and society in city-states and in the empire at large. In city-states, Rome had well-developed practices that segmented society along different axes of social differentiation, only to reconstitute, or construe, those segments as a unitary whole. Rome also understood its empire to an aggregate of parts, but it never crafted a theory by which difference issued in unity. Where religion in particular is concerned, Rome crafted a normative language of theological agnosticism by which to acknowledge and bracket religious difference. This proved useful in motivating lowest-common-denominator forms of religious action but was insufficient to generate a politics of recognition in the empire at large. The very limited utility of traditionalist religion in this domain stands in strong contrast to the success of universalization of Roman citizenship. Although it would be difficult to clinch, what I want to stress are two things: first, the very great problem the Romans set themselves in superimposing a discourse of unity on prior strategies of representation that focused on

difference, and, second, it proved exceptionally difficult to scale up a Ciceronian model of imperial religion from city-state to empire.

Profile

Clifford Ando is Professor in the Departments of Classics and History and in the College, University of Chicago. His research focuses on the histories of religion, law and government in the ancient world. His first book centered on the history of political culture in the provinces of the Roman empire, and he continues to write and advise on topics related to the provincial administration, the relationship between imperial power and local cultural change, and the form and structure of ancient empires. He has also written extensively on ancient religion. Significant themes were the connection of religion to empire and imperial government, especially in relation to pluralism and tolerance; and problems of representation in the use of objects in ritual.

His current projects include a study of Latin as a language of the law and a study of legal theory in contexts of weak state power. His last publication *Religion et gouvernement dans l'Empire romain* examines the sociology of religion and political subjectivity in the Roman Empire: asceticism as a form of civic discipline in Late Antiquity; the imperial government's tolerance of non-Roman religious practices; improvisation in Roman religious and legal rites; and the use of citizenship as a metaphor for religious affiliation, from the Classical world to the Christian empire. The book provides the most detailed modern study of the legal and religious texts relevant to its subject.



Hadrian Greets the City Goddess Alexandria 130 C.E.
© CoinArchives/Harlan J Berk

Christian Müller (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris)



Islamic Law in the First Islamic Empire: From Caliphal to Juridical Authority

Abstract

The origins of Islamic law, as documented in thousands of works from later centuries, remain heavily debated, as does its early content. Coeval sources from its emergence in the 7th century are generally accepted as the Qur'anic text and Prophetic traditions, though questions of authenticity persist. Consequently, most accounts of Islamic law begin with the Qur'an, followed by the Prophet's traditions, and then proceed to the opinions of contemporary Muslims and early jurists. This perspective on early Islamic law aligns with the jurists' hermeneutical logic (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which was formalized from the 10th century onward. However, it raises a series of questions, particularly regarding the variability of early traditions and juridical opinions, which sits uneasily with widely known and commonly accepted "legal rules." These studies leave little, if any, room for the role of the Caliphs—Muslim rulers who governed vast territories conquered after the Prophet's death and formed the first Islamic Empire.

My talk (based on my book '*Recht und historische Entwicklung der Scharia im Islam* [*Law and the Historical Development of Sharia in Islam*]', pp. 71–80 and *passim*) adopts a different perspective, emphasizing the authority of the Caliphs as rulers and lawgivers (who

ultimately decided). Early Caliphs were legitimized as "God's vicar on Earth" (*ḫalīfat Allāh fī l-arḍ*).

Reconstructing the historical situation is no easy task, given the scarcity of sources and their ideological biases, which can be explained by two distinct phenomena:

1) Historiographical sources on Umayyad rule (658–750) underwent revision under the new Abbasid dynasty (750–1258), which portrayed the Umayyads as "worldly kings."
2) References to caliphal legislative acts (from both the Umayyad and Abbasid periods) were omitted by Muslim jurists, for whom only the connection to the Prophet mattered—whether Caliphs as Companions or Successors—placing them on the same footing as other Muslims of their time. The *fiqh* perspective negated caliphal legislative authority, and this became the dominant view.

As a result, we have little evidence of a strong caliphal influence on Islamic law. Yet, without it, many historical phenomena remain unexplained, such as the documentary uniformity of Arabic deeds and the relative uniformity of core concepts in later Muslim jurists' law. The unity of the Umayyad and Abbasid Empire—initially exclusive to the Muslim elite—rested on a legal framework for Islamic identity, based on caliphal legislative acts. These acts were likely grounded in practical considerations and an as-yet unformalized recourse to early Islamic practices. Of the caliphal efforts to codify early Islamic tradition in the 8th century, only negative reports survive.

I propose a reassessment of the "formative period" in Muslim legal thinking (late 7th–9th centuries), characterized by a multitude of often contradictory juridical opinions. These were not "applied law" (impossible due to their variations) but rather "legal thinking" within a shared intellectual framework of diverse juridical considerations. As such, they became formative for the later law school doctrines (and were preserved accordingly). Caliphs of this era were the legislators and sought to link their laws to early Muslim community practices and/or used juridical reasoning by knowledgeable individuals to legitimize their decisions.

Early Historical Context**:** The occupational army settlements evolved into centers of Muslim communities—amid majority non-Muslim populations. The Muslim conquerors utilized local structures for taxation and retained existing local jurisdictions for religious majorities within the multi-ethnic majority population.

For the ruling Muslim Caliphs, Muslim legal thinking (*fiqh*) informed caliphal law, which held supreme authority. *Fiqh* doctrines recognized the jurisdictions of other religious authorities, though the extent remains unclear—particularly in personal status matters of non-Muslims with no connection to a Muslim. As the supreme authority in the caliphal state, Muslim law did not directly compete with other legal traditions. Caliphs may have adopted existing solutions from other systems, which were then debated by Muslim jurists.

The transformation from caliphal to juridical authority in many fields of law is tied to the consolidation of juridical doctrines as a rule system, which was taught, transmitted, and refined within professionalized law schools from the 10th century onward. Jurists developed *uṣūl al-fiqh* hermeneutics to legitimize their rules—without any reference to caliphal authority.

Profile

Christian Müller is Research Professor (directeur de recherche) at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and responsible for the Arabic Section of the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (IRHT) in Paris. He received two ERC advanced grants 2028, and 2024. Islamic Law Materialized (2009-2013) studied the Islamic legal documents of the Early and Middle Islamic Period. He holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from FU Berlin (1997) and a Habilitation from the University of Halle-Wittenberg (2007).

Engaging with the study of Islamic law for over 30 years, his academic interests range broadly across historical periods and topics. His publications, mainly in German, English, and French, include monographs on eleventh-century judicial practices in Muslim Spain based on fatwa literature (1999), the documents of the Haram al-Sharīf in fourteenth-century Jerusalem (2013a), and an exploratory survey on the evolution of the Muslim jurists' law from early Islam until the nineteenth century (2022a). The originality of his approach is a focus on legal practice that combines the study of original documents and juridical literature with sociological approaches of "law". He currently directs the ERC project "Mapping Change in Islamic Law: Rules and Practices" (2024-29) on Muslim legal thinking and the sacralization of rule authority.

Through his research, he ventures to establish the study of Islamic normativity (shariatic law) as a historical discipline distinct from juridical or theological vantage points.



Dirham of the *Khalīfat Allāh* ʿAbd al-Malik,
Damascus, 75 H /694-5 CE
© CoinArchives Morton&Eden

Johannes Meier (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)



The Church's Role in Spanish Rule over the Americas

Abstract

The conquest of the Americas was an initiative from a state, not from the church. However, the papal missionary mandate of 1493 to the Catholic Monarchs—Isabella I of Castile (1474–1504) and Ferdinand II of Aragon (1479–1516)—was regarded as a legitimate legal basis for the occupation of the Americas and the document resulted in significant Church involvement in shaping life in the Americas under Spanish rule.

The establishment of the ecclesiastical political organization of the Americas was prepared by the earlier fight against the Moorish Kingdom of Granada. As early as 1486, the Catholic Monarchs secured the right to nominate candidates for bishoprics and other high-ranking ecclesiastical offices, citing their contributions to the spread of the Christian faith in the Kingdom of Granada. The Pope also ceded to the monarchs the "tithe" that the Muslims were required to pay to the Church as they were gradually converted. A very similar arrangement was later implemented in the "West Indies." In 1501 the Crown received from the Pope in 1501 the ecclesiastical tithe, Citing the high costs of its patronage

over the Church. All inhabitants of "the newly discovered islands and mainland territories" were obligated to pay that tithe. In return, the Crown assumed responsibility for the construction and endowment of churches. In 1508, Pope Julius II granted the Crown of Castile-León a universal right of patronage—that is, the right to propose candidates suitable to him for the leadership of all metropolitan, cathedral, and collegiate churches in the Americas.

In 1524, Charles V (1516–1556) established the Council of the Indies as the supreme state authority, responsible also for ecclesiastical matters in the Americas. He continued the ecclesiastical territorial division that his grandfather Ferdinand had begun in the Caribbean region, extending it to the mainland, and in 1546 he achieved the separation of the American dioceses from the Archdiocese of Seville. Rome elevated Santo Domingo, Mexico City, and Lima to the status of archdioceses. As early as 1539, the emperor had prohibited any direct communication between the American episcopate and the Holy See. The American bishops were required to send their correspondence to the Spanish royal court, which, after review, forwarded it to Rome as a royal petition.

Philip II (1556–1598) wanted to subordinate the Church even more closely to his authority, but now encountered strong reservations from Rome. Following the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the popes of the period promoted the establishment of nunciatures; they also wanted to appoint a nuncio for the Americas and send visitators there. Philip II sharply rejected this. He would have liked to have a patriarchate in the Americas, but Rome did not grant it. Rome was able to secure the "visitatio liminum": the bishops of the Americas were required to appear in Rome every ten years to give an account of their ministry. To prevent the bishops from being absent from their dioceses for too long, the Crown insisted that the bishops be represented by procurators; the Curia agreed to this.

In 1622, Pope Gregory XIV established the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ("De propaganda fide") within the Roman Curia. It, too, sought direct contact with the dioceses in the Americas, but the Council of the Indies prevented this. When a state code of laws for the Americas was created in 1680—the so-called "Recopilación de leyes de Indias"—care was taken to ensure that all state decrees were in accordance with canon law and the decrees of the Council of Trent. However, since general canon law contained no provisions for many tasks arising from the organization of the mission on the ground, the state had to create new laws that would enable the establishment of the Church in the New World.

Appointments were made as follows: The Council of the Indies submitted a list of candidates to the king. The king designated the person he deemed most suitable and requested the pope to appoint that individual. At the same time, the candidate selected by the king received a provisional letter of appointment and was instructed to embark on the journey to America. Before this document was handed over, the future bishop or archbishop had to swear an oath of allegiance to the king. In effect, the bishops thus became state officials who were also entrusted with many secular duties. Because papal confirmation of the appointed bishops was often delayed, the Crown provided them with a letter of recommendation to the respective cathedral chapters, so that the cathedral chapters would entrust the appointed bishop with the provisional administration of the diocese even before the papal bull arrived. Episcopal consecration was generally performed only after receipt of the papal document. Only in extremely rare cases did the Holy See

refuse to accept the bishops proposed by the Council of the Indies and appointed by the king. However, there was virtually never a reason to do so, as the spiritual and intellectual caliber of the Hispano-American episcopate of that era was consistently high.

Profile

Johannes Meier an emeritus professor for medieval and early modern ecclesiastical history. After completing his PhD at the University of Würzburg between 1972-75, he was ordained as a priest and spent the following years as a vicar and researcher in Mexico City and Seville. In 1989 he completed his habilitation in ecclesiastical history in Würzburg and continued teach there until 1992. After a short guest professorship in Sao Paolo in 1991, he became professor at the Ruhr University in Bochum in 1992. From 1997-2013 he held the professorship for ecclesiastical history at the Johannes-Gutenberg University in Mainz. In addition, he is a member of the Academy of Sciences since 2003 and from 2004-2013 he a member of the board of trustees for the Stipendienwerk Lateinamerika-Deutschland e.V.

His research focuses primarily on church history in the early modern period, religious orders such as the Premonstratensians and Jesuits the history of non-European Christianity with a focus on Latin America, as well as the local church history of Westfalia.



Catedral Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México © Wikimedia

Kristian Kanstrup Christensen (Stellenbosch, Western Cape University)



Christianity and the Administration of the Later Roman Empire

Abstract

The present paper investigates the background and context for the establishment of a salvation religion as the unifying principle of the Roman Empire. It does so through the presentation of two brief case studies: one on a pre-Christian community and one on the bureaucracy of the early Christian empire. This juxtaposition of a case on religion with one on governance provides the basis for the paper's central argument: that the religious order of the Roman world reflected the political one and, therefore, that change in one sphere went hand in hand with change in the other.

The Roman state subjected large parts of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa to the rule of a single emperor. Yet prior to the 4th century AD its rule of a population of perhaps 50 million people was achieved with only a minuscule bureaucracy while the imperial armies were stationed far off at the frontiers, partly to limit their interference in civilian politics. For the day-to-day administration of law and order, tax collection and most other tasks, the state therefore depended on the cooperation of provincial elites. This

cooperation was ensured by their self-interest: they relied on Roman might to maintain their local predominance.

Was this decentralised style of government reflected in the religious life of the empire? The paper answers this question in the affirmative. Pre-Christian cults were anchored in their local environments and were as varied as these. Probably our best evidence for this claim is found in the Fayum semi-oasis in Egypt. Here a range of outlying farming settlements were abandoned in Late Antiquity and preserved to modern times by the desert, allowing an unparalleled look at the lives of their inhabitants. In the sphere of religion, the settlements were characterised by the co-existence and partial amalgamation of elements from several sources. The unusual popularity of the Dioscuri and the adoption into their cult of the Egyptian practice of crocodile-worship, for example, shows that Greek mythological labels were applied to beliefs deriving from local tradition. But even the Egyptian material does not constitute a single religion in the modern sense. Familiar deities of pharaonic temple cults such as Amon share space with obscure figures unattested elsewhere. Whether one looks at the Greek or the indigenous material, both reveal a community that acknowledged cosmic deities such as Zeus and Osiris which distant imperial rulers invoked to legitimise their position. Yet these were supplemented with idiosyncratic and re-interpreted figures to satisfy a population of farmers whose day-to-day religious needs were starkly different from those of a ruling dynasty.

This understanding of the pre-Christian empire as a world of heterogeneous cults lays bare the adoption of Christianity as state religion as not merely a change of faith but a crucial aspect of a wider transformation of the Roman state during the 4th century. In order to put an end to the recurring coups of the 3rd century, from Diocletian (r. 284 to 305) onwards the central bureaucracy expanded significantly. Coin evidence proves that new gold veins allowed the state to pay these officials handsomely. As the proportional wealth of those landholders who failed to obtain positions in the bureaucracy declined, the bureaucracy came to constitute a new elite whose members depended for their positions on the imperial court(s) rather than local landholding. Literary evidence such as the complaints of the pagan Libanius (fl. 4th century) brings to light a direct link between this rising new elite and the establishment of a religious ideology that dismantled locally anchored cults in favour of a universal creed.

In sum, the paper argues for the change from polytheism to salvation religion as a prominent symptom of change in the political order from the dominance of local city councils to that of a more centralized bureaucracy. In more abstract terms, it argues that in both politics and religion, the 4th century saw the crucial point of orientation shift from the local to the universal.

Profile

Dr. Kanstrup Christensen studied History at the University of Copenhagen, obtaining a Bachelor's degree in 2012, a Master's Degree in 2015 and a Ph.D. in 2019. After a period as a teaching assistant (2020 to 2021) I have carried out a pair of postdocs, one at St Andrews

University in the UK (2021 to 2023) and my current one at Stellenbosch University, South Africa (2025 to 2026). My monograph *Local and Imperial Cultures in the Roman Provinces* was published on Bloomsbury Academic last year and my research has also come to fruition in three peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal of Ancient History* and *Classica et Mediaevalia* with a fourth recently accepted by *Historia*. My work primarily attempts to excavate the cultural lives of the subaltern population of the Roman Empire. In my various projects, I have pursued this goal through analyses of a broad and diverse range of source materials, from Egyptian papyri petitions to Rhineland grave portraiture, pottery assemblages from Roman Britain, epigraphy from Asia Minor and North Africa and linguistic studies of Gaulish elements in later French place names.



Colossus of Constantine I, Reconstruction, Rome
© Wikimedia Commons

Philip Wood (Agha Khan University London)



Appropriating Difference: Christian Sectarian Discourses and the Construction of Islamic Imperial Ideology

Abstract

The early Islamic Empire emerged in a Near Eastern world already shaped by centuries of Christian competition. Long before the Arab conquests, Chalcedonian, Miaphysite and East Syrian Christians had developed sophisticated repertoires for defining orthodoxy, discrediting rivals and explaining political success and failure. This paper argues that these discourses did not disappear with the rise of Islam. Rather, Muslim authors appropriated existing Christian technologies of differentiation and redeployed them to support a new imperial order. In this sense, the Islamic empire inherited not only territories and populations from the late Roman and Sasanian worlds, but also pre-existing systems of religious classification and exclusion.

The paper examines three case studies drawn from Syriac and Arabic sources between the sixth and ninth centuries. The first concerns Miaphysite representations of Roman rule. Historians such as John of Ephesus portrayed Roman authorities as arrogant,

oppressive and incapable of recognising their own failings, while presenting Arab allies such as the Jafnid phylarchs as pious, moderate and divinely favoured. Similar constellations of themes reappear in Arabic conquest narratives such as the *Futūḥ al-Shām*. There too, Roman leaders are overconfident, morally compromised and ultimately abandoned by God, while Arab conquerors are self-controlled, just and victorious through divine support. What had originally functioned as an intra-Christian critique of Chalcedonian power was transformed into a justification for Islamic conquest.

The second case study concerns disputes over monastic practice. Muslim conquest narratives preserve instructions attributed to Abū Bakr that distinguish between different categories of monks according to their tonsure. These passages are difficult to explain through Islamic legal thought alone, but they become intelligible when read against late antique disputes between Miaphysites and the Church of the East. Here, distinctions developed within Christian sectarian competition appear detached from their original context and incorporated into Muslim understandings of conquered populations. The aftermath of conquest created opportunities for Christians to appeal against rival confessions before Muslim authorities, and these interactions facilitated the transmission of polemical categories into an Islamic framework.

The final case study explores accusations of sexual immorality and heresy. Abbasid authors such as Abū Nuwās and al-Jāḥiẓ deployed stereotypes linking Christians to sexual license, Manichaeism and other forms of deviance. Many of these accusations can be traced to earlier Christian polemics directed against East Syrians, Marcionites and Manichaeans. Once transferred into a Muslim context, however, they ceased to target particular Christian groups and instead became critiques of Christianity as a whole.

Taken together, these examples illuminate one mechanism through which the Islamic empire integrated conquered populations and established new forms of religious authority. Rather than creating its ideological repertoire ex nihilo, the early Islamic empire appropriated local systems of knowledge developed by Christian elites and redeployed them on an imperial scale. Comparison with the Roman and Spanish empires suggests a broader pattern: transformative empires often govern through inherited categories as much as through military force or administrative innovation. The paper therefore contributes to wider debates on empire and salvation religion by showing how local sectarian conflicts could be translated into durable instruments of imperial rule.

Profile

Philip Wood is Professor at King's College London. Before he has been Tejpar Professor of Inter-Religious Studies at the Agha Khan University. He holds a MA in History from the University of Cambridge and a MPhil in Byzantine Studies from Oxford. His research focusses on the position of religious 'minorities' in West Asian empires in the period 500-1000. Much of his work has concerned Christian groups who use Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) and/or Arabic. He uses sources in these languages to study how the leaders of subordinate groups reproduce or adapt discourses produced in the imperial center. His monograph *The Imam of the Christians* examines how Christian leaders adopted and adapted the political practices and ideas of their Muslim rulers between 750 and 850 in the

Abbasid caliphate in the Jazira (modern eastern Turkey and northern Syria). Focusing on the writings of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, the patriarch of the Jacobite church, Philip Wood describes how this encounter produced an Islamicated Christianity that differed from the Christianities of Byzantium and western Europe in far more than just theology. Wood opens a new window on the world of early Islam and Muslims' interactions with other religious communities. His first book *We have no king but Christ - Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400-585)* (Oxford, 2010), analyses the cultural geography of an important segment of the Middle East on the eve of Islam, applying modern nationalism theory to a late antique topic. In *The Chronicle of Seert. The Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford, 2013), he studies the cultural and political history of Christian Iraq, the Church of the East, the so–called 'Nestorians'. He is currently directing a research project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation comparing the formation of ethnic and religious groups in the Abbasid caliphate (750-1000). He is also writing a history of Christians in the Middle East for Polity press.



Lead Seal of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, 12th c., Syriac and Arabic Inscriptions
© Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena OMJ 311-G04

Amira K. Bennison (University of Cambridge)



The Almohad City and its Integrative Functions

Abstract

The Almohad empire (1147-1269) ruled a significant portion of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. Its rise was predicated on the support of the Maṣmūda tribes of the High Atlas and Sus regions of Morocco and it stands out for its radical mahdistic interpretation of Islam, its religio-political use of the Maṣmūda language alongside Arabic, and the striking architecture of its major cities – Marrakesh, Ribāṭ al-Fatḥ (Rabat) and Seville – elements of which also appeared in numerous other towns. The Almohad movement originated in the countryside of the western Maghrib and its military mainstay was tribal, of Maghribi and Arab background, or of foreign origin, either from sub-Saharan Africa or the Christian lands to the north. Subscription to Almohad Islam provided one vector of integration that promised paradise to its adherents but this needed to be demonstrated on a more practical level. The Almohad city provided one of the most important sites for this process.

This paper will explore the way in which the Muʾminid caliphs who ruled the Almohad empire used cities to convey a cluster of messages about their authority and drew on urban resources to run their bureaucracy and complement their rural military support. From introducing new urban orientations and soaring tower minarets to verdant suburban

estates, the Almohads reshaped the urban environment's relation to religio-political power. They then used these spaces to promote their self-image, to shelter and reward their followers, and on occasion to punish them. These actions and encounters – as recorded in primary sources - enabled the integration of religious scholars, men of letters, officials and craftsmen of many kinds into the Almohad imperial elite. I shall use the well-known chronicle of Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, a Sevillan man of letters in the entourage of the caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (r. 1163-84), to illustrate the emerging relationship between empire and city.

I shall also explore how the Almohad entourage moved through the countryside between such cities, using travel from one urban local to another, to project similar messages of power in rural environments. This required the substitution of the palace for the tent but also the use of several items that moved between urban and rural settings, and from town to town to be displayed in urban locations created by the Almohads. These items included copies of the Qurʾān, red royal tents and tabernacles, caliphal banners and drums, whose use in myriad settings reiterated and reinforced what Ghouirgate calls the 'Almohad order' and helped the imperial elite remain in touch with the tribal countryside. However, the eccentricity of Almohadism in relation to Islam writ large remained a problem for the integration of many constituencies and tensions could be generated against the cooptation of urban space by the Almohads. While assessments of 'success' or 'failure' are not a helpful heuristic, I will conclude with a reflection on the limitations of Almohad urban policies as a mechanism for integration.

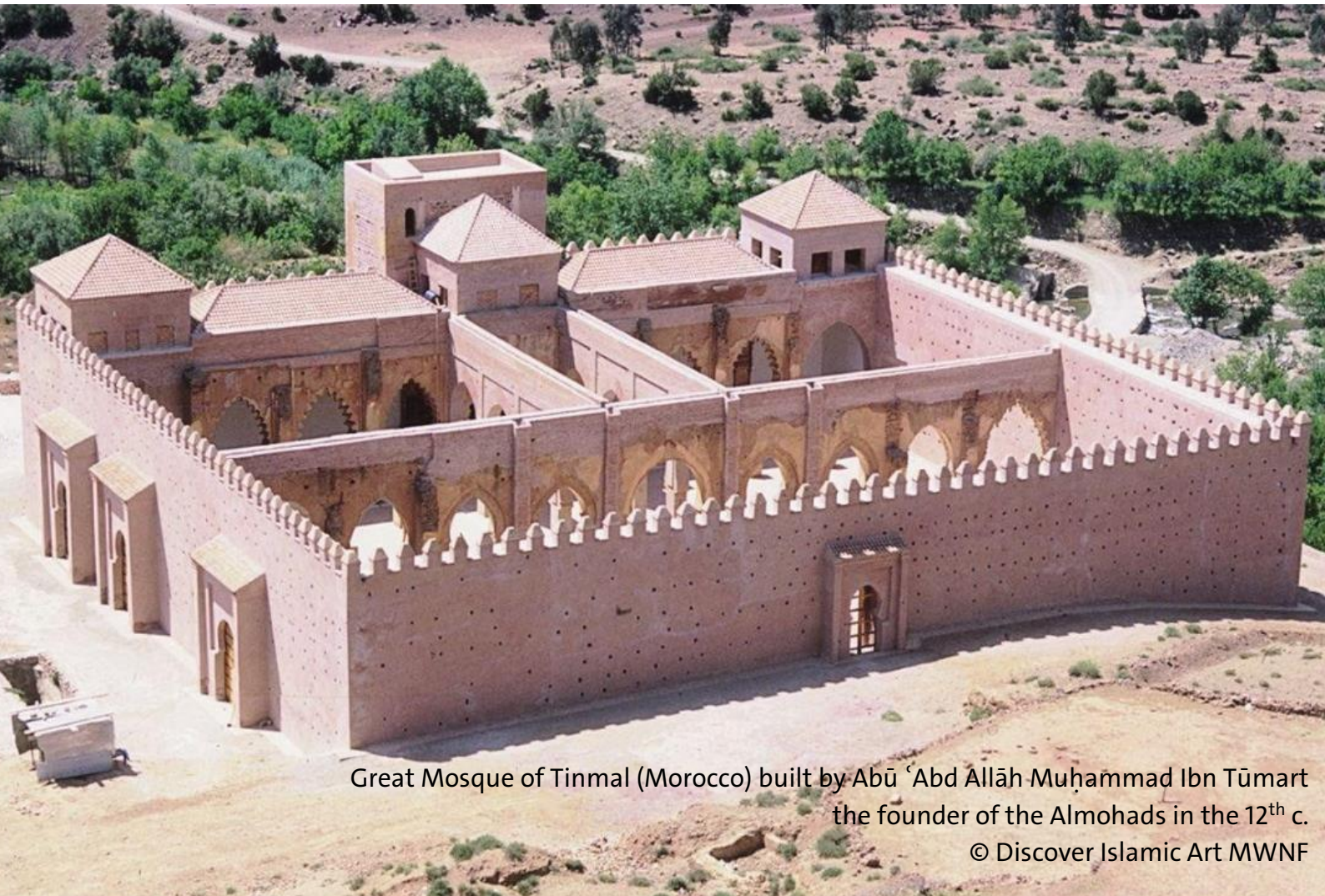
Profile

Amira K. Bennison is Professor in the History and Culture of the Maghrib, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Her research interest focus on the pre-modern history and culture of the Maghrib and the Islamic Iberian Peninsula (al-Andalus); Islamic material culture and urbanism in the western Mediterranean; the encounter with modernity in nineteenth-century North Africa.

Her most recent book, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (Edinburgh, 2016), is one of the first books in English to provide a comprehensive account of the rise and fall of the Almoravids and the Almohads, the two most important Berber dynasties of the medieval Islamic west, an area that encompassed southern Spain and Portugal, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. In her book *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the 'Abbasid Empire* (London, 2009), she contradicts the common assumption that Islam somehow interrupted the smooth flow of Western civilization from its Graeco-Roman origins to its more recent European and American manifestations. Instead, she places Islamic civilization in the longer trajectory of Mediterranean civilizations and sees the 'Abbasid Empire (750–1258 CE) as the inheritor and interpreter of Graeco-Roman traditions. Her first monograph, *Jihad and its Interpretations in Pre-Colonial Morocco* (London, 2002), based on a year's archival research in Morocco. It looked at the impact of the French conquest of Algiers in 1830 on notions of political legitimacy in neighboring Morocco. This involved an exploration of the significance of *jihād* in political legitimation in the western Maghrib published as *Jihād and its Interpretations in Pre-colonial Morocco*. 2016.



Almohads, ʿAbd al-Muʾmin (r. 1130-1163), Dinar, Bījāya (Bougie)
© Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena OMJ 344-A04



Great Mosque of Tinmal (Morocco) built by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart the founder of the Almohads in the 12th c.
© Discover Islamic Art MWNF

Federico Tavelli (Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina)



Indians as Protestants? The Transformation of Ancient America through European Christian Social Models in the Sixteenth Century

Abstract

The arrival of Europeans in America during the fifteenth century has been examined from a variety of perspectives. In general, scholarship has focused either on the historical aspects of the conquest of the Aztec Empire and, subsequently, the Inca Empire by the Crowns of Castile and Aragon, or on the process through which the Christianization of the continent unfolded during the sixteenth century. But how were the social-politico-religious models developed in Christian Europe transferred to America, transforming the indigenous societies and integrating them into a broader European Christian framework?

The models introduced into America were far from homogeneous. During the sixteenth century, two distinct phases can be clearly identified, each corresponding to the transformations taking place in Europe itself. In the first decades of the century, late medieval concepts, Renaissance humanism, millenarian expectations, and the aspiration for a profound reform of European Christendom predominated. Indigenous peoples were

gradually incorporated into the model of Christendom, yet, as in Europe itself, systematic mechanisms of social control over public and private life had not yet fully developed.

The religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, however, profoundly reshaped European society. The unity of Western Christianity fragmented into several confessions that, in order to distinguish themselves from one another and consolidate control over their respective territories, developed mechanisms of doctrinal and social discipline. Each confession emphasized those elements of its identity that set it apart from the others. These models also crossed the Atlantic with the caravels, accompanying royal officials and missionaries. Yet there were no Protestants in America. How, then, could the emerging Catholic confession consolidate its own identity through differentiation from the indigenous peoples? Were the Indians, with their customs and religions, a comparable "other" against which the new Catholic confession could impose its new models of social discipline it had developed in Europe? The second phase of the incorporation of indigenous peoples into European models became far more hierarchical and juridical: virtually every aspect of life was to be regulated, supervised, and recorded.

From the perspective of global and comparative history, the mechanisms of discipline and institutional organization implemented in America formed part of the broader process of confessionalization that was simultaneously transforming European societies. The religious and political reorganization of the Hispanic world thus constituted a transatlantic phenomenon in which new forms of authority, identity, and social order emerged through dynamics shared by Europe and the America. At the same time, however, America possessed their own distinctive historical and cultural identity. Ultimately, Latin America underwent a profound transformation through the transfer and adaptation of these Christian social models during the sixteenth century.

Profile

Federico Tavelli is lecturer in Medieval and Modern Church History at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Freiburg (Germany) and at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (Argentina). He completed his education and studies in Argentina, Italy, the United States, Spain, and Germany. His research approaches history from a geopolitical and global perspective, with particular attention to the role of the Church in processes of violence in both Latin America and Europe. He maintains an active international profile and public presence through lectures and regular appearances in the media across various countries. His recent publication *Res Publica Hispanoamericana. Die Umgestaltung des alten Amerika durch christlich geprägte Gesellschaftsmodelle aus Europa 1520-1620* (Wiesbaden, 2024), he presents an account of the encounter between European-Spanish and transatlantic cultures during the century spanning 1520 to 1620, providing a study conceived and developed with a focus on historical roots.

Stanislaw Adamiak (Nicolaus Copernicus University at Toruń)



Augustine's Languages of Power and Weakness

Abstract

The corpus of the letters of Augustine provides us with a unique possibility of tracing various registers of language not only in the ecclesiastical, but also political and everyday life environments of Late Antique Africa. Augustine himself is appointed as coadjutor bishop of Hippo to help the elderly Valerius who was more at home in Greek than Latin. This shows occasionally the generally utilitarian view of the usage of language in the African Church at the time. No language was considered as sacred or privileged, hence the opposition of Augustine to Jerome's translating the Bible from Hebrew.

For his part, Augustine took care to provide the parishioners in the countryside with the Punic-speaking clergy, with mixed results, as shown by the disastrous nomination of young, Punic-speaking Antoninus, to become a bishop of Fussala. The linguistic differences were also sometimes considered to play a role in the Donatist controversy. Neither epigraphy nor prosopography supports this thesis, but some material from Augustinian letters seem to hint in this direction. The letters of Augustine show also how careful he was in using different registers in dealing with common folk, his ecclesiastical and intellectual

correspondents, and finally with high-ranking officials, wielding the power of life and death.

Augustine was one of the finest rhetoricians of his age. He was able to use the most sophisticated Latin. He plays with rhetorical constructions and literary allusions while writing to his peers. Sometimes, when he addresses the not very well-educated people, he writes in a simple and often stern way; he expects obedience from his clergy and diocesans. Similarly, he writes to the Donatists from the position of power, confident of the justice of his cause and more and more confident with time of the state support behind him. However, when Augustine asks for support or mercy of men in power, we can tangibly feel how precarious and feeble his position before them is. His supplications were not always successful, as we can see from his failure to prevent the execution of his friend Marcellinus.

Profile

Stanisław Adamiak was born in Toruń (Poland) in 1980 and was ordained a priest for the diocese of Toruń in 2004. He continued his studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church, where he defended his PhD thesis *Carthage, Constantinople and Rome: The Imperial and Papal Interventions in the Life of the Church in Byzantine Africa (533-698)* in 2011. Afterwards, he lectured at the Gregorian University and the University of Warsaw, Institute of History. He was granted the *habilitation* in 2019 for his work on the Donatist schism. Since 2019, he has been an associate professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University at Toruń, Faculty of Theology.

He has participated in various research projects, including "The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity" (ERC), where he has been responsible for the North African evidence, and the Polish translation of Augustine's letters. He presented the paper *Maintaining Autonomy and Asking for Intervention: The Relation between the Churches of North Africa and Rome in the Late Antiquity* at the Conference "Still Caput Mundi?" in 2022 organized by the Roman Islam Center.

Caroline Cunill (École des hautes études en sciences sociales)



A Patchwork of Languages? The Scope and Reach of the Indigenous Languages in the Spanish Empire

Abstract

Although, according to Antonio Nebrija, the Spanish language was sought to be an imperial language, the sociolinguistic reality was much more complex in the overseas territories of the Spanish empire. Not only did the missionaries use the indigenous languages —as soon as they could— to preach the Gospel locally, but the Indigenous people were also entitled to use their languages in the courts of justice of America, as well as in their written exchanges with the king and his Council, thanks to the mediation of interpreters and translators. My presentation will therefore be twofold. First, I will focus on the disputes over languages. I will show that the missionaries, the royal officials and the Indigenous people promoted diverse linguistic policies. I will also pay special attention to the arguments used in those struggles. I will then examine how the languages were used on the ground, which will lead me to consider the linguistic learning, but also the interpreting and translating practices and the degree to which they were specialized and institutionalized in the Spanish empire. My presentation will also include some reflections on how the "imperial archives",

that mainly consist in documents written in Spanish, can unveil this patchwork of languages.

Profile

Caroline Cunill is lecturer at the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) since 2021. She has conducted a post-doctorate at the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and has been a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History. Her first monograph *Los defensores de indios de Yucatán y el acceso de los mayas a la justicia colonial, 1540-1600*, (Mérida, 2023) explores a broader range of issues, such as interethnic relations, access to justice, political and economic power structures, and the relationship between the system and the practices of actors in 16th-century Yucatán. Cunill's research analyses the interactions, exchanges, and intersections between the Spanish and Indigenous populations. It presents a critique of dichotomous views of indigenous people and Spaniards, indigenous people and the Crown/State, as well as disciplinary dichotomies, such as that between history (about the Spaniards) and ethno history (about the Indigenous peoples).

Her second book *Uay dzibnoon maya. Escrita en (la tierra llamada) Maya. Análisis de dos cartas inéditas del siglo XVI* (Mexico, 2012) has fundamentally shaped the understanding of the relations between the indigenous local populations and the Spanish colonizers, with a special focus on the translation of local languages and the various offices that developed in this context, as well as the representation of indigenous at the courts. How were local practices integrated into courts and shaped the development of law, how was justice negotiated at the various levels of authority? Her work sheds light on how the system of government and justice of the Spanish monarchy adapted to the presence of indigenous populations in the Americas.



Hatunrumiyoc in Cusco (Peru) © Erdmute Alber

Ulrich Gotter (Universität Konstanz)



Empire(s) of the Mediterranean

Abstract

The Mediterranean was no easy environment for empires. The sheer number of actors and protagonists, including small but highly capable military communities fiercely protective of their independence, normally ensured that the sea at their centre had an almost anarchic character. No one could prevent ventures that brought death, destruction, occupation, and enslavement hundreds of nautical miles away. In this respect, the Mediterranean's expanse of water guaranteed a maximum degree of contingency. Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that, over the course of history, only one empire succeeded in establishing, for at least several centuries, a security architecture that largely neutralised this contingency. At its heart lay the total control of the Mediterranean coastline, a strategy that was also experimentally extended to the adjacent seas (the Red Sea and the Black Sea).

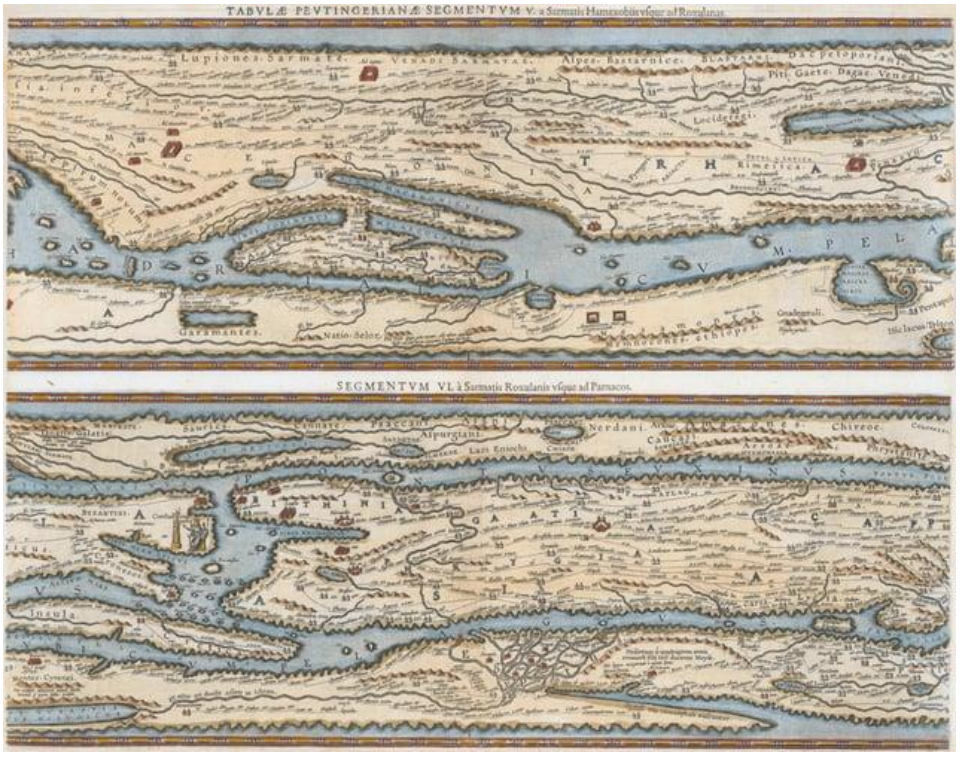
The talk explores, first, the efforts underpinning this security architecture and, second, the price paid by the Roman political class for its establishment (autocracy and imperial reorganisation). It then examines the returns generated by this process as an imperial tipping point: these returns made the imperial expenditure possible in the first place, but at the same time rendered the empire so dependent on its control of the sea that any loss of its total command of the Mediterranean was bound to trigger a downward spiral

Profile

Ulrich Gotter has been Professor of Ancient History at the University of Konstanz since 2004.

He studied Ancient History, Modern and Contemporary History, Political Science, and Classical Archaeology in Berlin and Freiburg/Br. He worked as an Assistant Professor in Freiburg and as a postdoctoral researcher in the Collaborative Research Centre "The Functions of Religion in Ancient Societies of the Near East" at the University of Münster. He was a member of the executive board of the University of Konstanz's Cluster of Excellence "Cultural Foundations of Integration."

His research focuses on the political culture of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, processes of acculturation in the eastern Mediterranean, religious conflicts within the *Imperium Romanum*, and Hellenistic monarchy.



Tabula Peutingeriana Eastern Mediterranean Sea
© Stanford Libraries

Marie Legendre (University of Edinburgh)



Imperial Wealth: Between Caliph, Court and Province

Abstract

A common understanding of the imperial economy of the early Islamic caliphate is that of a centralized empire that monopolized resources from the provinces through taxation and sent tax yield or at least some of that yield to the imperial court. This system is perceived to have broken down in the 9th century as the Abbasid empire disintegrated or gave away its economic monopoly over provincial wealth to autonomous appointees. Tracking the evidence for such a system reveals instead a complex set of economic ties between successive imperial centres and the different regions of the early Caliphate as well as between the regions themselves. The evidence for transfer of taxes from the provinces to the imperial centre is unsystematic and other modes of extraction appear than the fiscal system proper to collect capital from provinces. Examination of Egyptian papyri show the initial conquest economy (c. 640) was built on taxes and requisitions as well as on forced sales. For the Umayyad period (661-750), the belief that the empire would break down if provincial taxes were not sent to the centre is challenged by narratives about caliphs giving away the annual fiscal yield of a province to local stakeholders. For that period, the Egyptian material also points to a close economic entanglement between neighbouring provinces

instead of an economic monopoly of the imperial centre, something that is then lost under the Abbasids after 750. Comparing those two periods of early Islamic history also reveals different logics of how provincial wealth was put to the service of empire: for the Umayyad period, it was through levies in kind and in manpower for the organisation of military campaigns, the building of imperial monuments and the feeding of the holy cities. In the Abbasid era, some provinces moved to extraction largely in cash to the exception of luxury products which points to an increased focus on the accumulation of wealth at the imperial capital through tax and high value tradable goods. In that period, luxury products appear as a key feature of both elite taxation and elite relations between the court and the provinces as well as within the court in the form of reciprocal gift exchanges. In the Abbasid period as well, members of the court would guarantee provincial revenues on their own wealth. In all, this paper will present case studies on the economic contribution of province to the imperial centre, on the wealth of the court and on the personal wealth of the caliphs. The role of taxes and trade in building the imperial economy of the early caliphate is at the centre of this work in progress conducted in the framework of the ERC funded project Caliphal Finances.

Profile

Marie Legendre earned her PhD from the University of Leiden and Université Paris-Sorbonne Paris IV in 2014. Before coming to Edinburgh in September 2018, she worked as Departmental Lecturer in Early Islamic History at the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the University of Oxford (2012-2014) and Lecturer in the History of the Pre-Modern Middle East at SOAS University of London (2016-2018). She was also a postdoctoral researcher at the Laboratoire d'Excellence sur les Études Méditerranéennes (LabexMed), Aix-Marseille Université (2014-2016).

Her research interests include Late Antique and early Islamic history, especially administrative and economic history (500–1200), the early Islamic conquest, administrative and fiscal history of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, women and gender, Arabic and Coptic papyrology and multilingualism. She has conducted her PhD on the administrative hierarchy and the formation of the Islamic State in the Pre-Tulunid Egyptian countryside (2013).

Since September 2021, Marie Legendre is directing the ERC grant project Caliphal Finances: The Finances of the Caliphate: Abbasid Fiscal Practice in Islamic Late Antiquity (2021-2026), which provides for the first time a view 'from below' on Abbasid fiscal history through a study of papyrus documents in Greek, Coptic and Arabic written in Egypt.

Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg)



The Integrative Role of Imperial Currencies in Comparison

Abstract

The prevailing concept of money based on precious metal is a legacy of the early Mesopotamian empires. It persisted in all three empires of salvation religions and proliferated with the Spanish empire all over the world. The concepts of value and money differ in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, pre-modern South Asia was influenced by the larger Western concept. The essence of an empire is extracting wealth for the ruling elite. Every state and empire consist of a fiscal cycle of extraction and redistribution. Historically, extraction includes tribute and taxes, as well as privileged access to mineral wealth in the form of precious metal ore. Money enables empires to transfer large sums of wealth across vast distances to wherever it is needed for the court, urban building projects, the army, fortifications, and so on.

In the larger Western world, money is divided into two different social spheres. The elite, the military, and long-distance trade deal with precious metal coins. The other sphere is largely urban and involves ordinary people making daily or regular commercial exchanges, where money lowers transaction costs. These are the lower-value coins. Unified

currency systems with fixed exchange rates between denominations existed only in theory in the pre-19th-century world and almost never in practice. Historically, these two spheres intersected but remained separate in all empires. Imperial money—high-value silver or gold coins—is usually stable apart from major crises. Authorities have little interest in lower-value money. This is generally organized on a regional level. This is evident in the existence of different circulation zones, even within the same currency. Historically, money changers often linked the two spheres. Another factor in the assessment of imperial money is the availability of precious metals. Pre-modern economies suffer from a bottleneck due to a relative shortage of precious metals. These challenges and their solutions significantly influence economic development and show the integration of empires. Paper substitutions, such as bills of exchange, checks, and *ḥawāla*s, were gradually developed to remedy the shortage. However, they never became important enough to rival physical money or have any detectable macroeconomic effects. This may have been different in the Spanish Empire, but it also remained largely a bullion economy.
All three empires created imperial moneys for the elite, the military, and long-distance trade. These moneys connected far-away provinces with imperial centers and their re-distribution decisions.

The Roman Empire based its financial system on the silver denarius as the currency that facilitated the fiscal cycle of extraction and redistribution. The silver mines in Gallaecia (modern-day Galicia) in the province of Hispania were important for supplementing circulation. Apart from the fiscal cycle, regions within the empire had their own currencies, such as in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Hispania. The Roman silver denarius was used far beyond the empire's borders. During the third-century crisis, spending far exceeded the ability to collect taxes or extract silver ore, which led to a deterioration of the currency. Constantine's reforms of the gold solidus restored balance to the system.

The Islamic Empire operated in a similar manner. ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf created the silver dirham for the former Sasanian regions and the gold dinar for the former Roman regions. Their explicit goals were to extract revenue and ensure swift money transfers across the fast-growing empire. Silver supply and demand soon outstripped gold circulation. The Islamic West also became part of the silver economy before the Aghlabids gained autonomy. Islamic silver integrated Eastern Europe into the empire's economic sphere. The challenge of coin supply for daily commercial use was solved differently in various regions and urban centers, sometimes with copper, debased silver, or fragmented higher denominations.

The Spanish Empire profited more from the mineral supply of silver than from taxation. The discovery of the silver mines in Potosí in the Viceroyalty of Peru (present-day Bolivia) was part of the economic boom of the early modern period. This discovery led to Spain's integration into the world economy or vice versa. The 8-reales coins were imported to the Spanish Netherlands and entered the circulation of the Ottoman Empire via Eastern Europe. These coins were the first currency in North America and also led to the export of the European currency system to East Asia.

Contact

DFG Center for Advanced Study
RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies
Universität Hamburg
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

Prof. Dr. Stefan Heidemann
Universität Hamburg,
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Ost
20146 Hamburg, Germany
T +49 (40) 2395-23181 or 2395 23178, 23180 (administrative office)
T +1 (347) 537 2535
E: stefan.heidemann@uni-hamburg.de

Katharina Mewes
Universität Hamburg,
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, R. 18
20146 Hamburg, Germany
T: +49 40 23952 2994
E: katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de

Registration

In order to attend online or on site please register by **November 2, 2026** with:

maximilian.schlimm@uni-hamburg.de

Funded by DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft German Research Foundation