

Practical Research Information

**Department of Middle Eastern Studies,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague**

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General overview

The Department of Middle Eastern Studies is the successor of a centuries-old interest in the Middle Eastern region at Charles University where as early as in the 16th century Matthäus Aurogallus-Golthan (1490–1543) worked as a professor of Hebrew. The beginning of our programmes' modern history is paved with prominent figures, such as Saul Isaac Kämpf (1818–1892), who was interested in the comparative study of Semitic languages, and Arabist Max Grünert (1849–1929).

Today, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies produces excellent multidisciplinary research that ranges across various historical periods from Middle Ages to contemporary times and surpasses the focus on the core regions of Maghrib and Mashriq by concentrating also on the interactions between the broadly defined areas of the Middle East and the West, its people and ideas. The department is host to researchers working within a broad array of scholarly disciplines and approaches including history, politics, literature, linguistics, and the study of religion. Apart from research, we strive to deliver high-quality teaching in Middle Eastern Studies on both the undergraduate and graduate level. The Department of Middle Eastern Studies holds accreditations for B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. programmes in Middle Eastern Studies and in Hebrew and Jewish Studies. The undergraduate programme of Middle Eastern Studies combines a wide range of content courses on history, literatures and religions of the Middle East and North Africa with thorough language instruction in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. With around 80 applicants every year, the programmes can afford to remain relatively selective, resulting in some 150 students enrolled in all the degrees simultaneously. The Ph.D. programmes, both unique within the Czech Republic, are accredited together with two different institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences, namely, with the Oriental Institute (Middle Eastern Studies) and with the Institute of Contemporary History (Jewish Studies).

Although teaching represents naturally a substantial part of our work, its quality, reflected both in the number of applicants and in the successful careers of our graduates in academia or without it, is based on the diversity of academic specializations of our faculty members and their active involvement in research.

To begin with religious studies, our colleagues have investigated Islam, Judaism, and

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Christianity both in their internal variety and their interactions with one another. In particular, Pavel Ťupek's research explores Salafism and the way how classical Islamic legacy is reflected in the thought of radical Salafists. His most recent book, *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry* (co-authored with Ondřej Beránek, 2018) explains the current destruction of graves in the Islamic world and traces the ideological sources of iconoclasm in their historical perspective, from medieval theological and legal debates to contemporary Islamist movements including ISIS. The book has been coined "[o]ne of the most engaging of works on Salafism in recent times" (L. Ridgeon, *British J. of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2019).

Moving from Salafism to Judaism, Daniel Boušek's current work focuses on a critical study of the Samaritan literature within the context of the medieval interreligious polemics between Rabbinic Jews, Karaites, and Samaritans. The outcome of this research pursued together with Stefan Schorch (Institut für Bibelwissenschaften at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) will be a German translation of and a commentary to *Kitāb al-buḥūl wa-masā'il al-ḥilāfīmā baina millatai al-Yahūd wa-s-Sāmira* (*The Inquiry of Differences between the Samaritans and the Two Jewish Sects*), a Samaritan polemical treatise composed in the 12th century by Munaḡḡā b. Šadaqa. Boušek's previous research includes Muslim-Jewish polemics and encounters between Jews and Muslims at sacred sites as portrayed in medieval Jewish travel writing.

Travel writing has been thoroughly analysed also by Jitka Malečková, this time as a source for an inquiry into the identity of late Ottoman travellers. Her book *Z Istanbulu až na konec světa : osmanské cestopisy z přelomu 19. a 20. století* (*From Istanbul to the End of the World: Ottoman Travel Writings from the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*) (2019), co-authored with Petr Kučera, contributes to the understanding of the roots of the complicated manoeuvring between Eastern and Western allegiances that characterizes Turkish viewpoints to this day. Her forthcoming book *"The Turk" in the Czech Imagination (1870s–1923)*, to be published by Brill, then turns to explore Czech perceptions of Turks in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Manuscript and documentary studies are firmly embedded in the research of Josef Ženka whose extensive work on late Andalusī manuscript books and documents explores the relationship between materiality and the legal and intellectual heritage of Nasrid Granada in the 14th and 15th century. His recent article focused on the fate of the Royal library of the Nasrid Sultans at the Alhambra and disapproved the long standing argumentation of its destruction by the Christians after the conquest of Granada. In the framework of a joined Spanish-Czech research project on Andalusī documents, led by Ana María Carballeira (Escuela de Estudios Árabes of Granada, CSIC: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) and Amalia Zomeño (Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo,

Madrid, CSIC), he is preparing the edition and translation of the Granadan notary documents of the Archives of the Marquess of Santa Cruz. Additionally, his archival research also covers the history of Orientalism and Oriental Studies and it is represented by *Alois Richard Nykl: Padesát let cest jazykozpytce a filosofa (His Two-Volume Edition of the Memoirs of Czech-American Linguist Alois Richard Nykl)*.

Turning more squarely to politics, Tereza Jermanová focuses on democratization in the Arab world, and especially the question of how political actors navigate the intricate period that begins when autocratic leaders are forced to give up their power. Her current book project provisionally titled *Coming Together and Falling Apart: Constitution-making and Democratization in Egypt and Tunisia* probes one aspect of this question by investigating constitutional negotiations after popular uprisings in Egypt (2011–2012) and Tunisia (2011–2014). Based on original, in-depth research comprising dozens of qualitative interviews conducted in the two countries between 2014 and 2020, the manuscript brings a much needed specificity to the current enthusiasm for inclusive constitution-making. Her recent journal article “Before Constitution-making: The Struggle for Constitution-making Design in Post-revolutionary Egypt” (2019 online, *Acta Politica* 55 (2020), pp. 648–669) brings conceptual innovation to the study of constitution-making by shifting analytical gaze to the overlooked early stage of constitutional change when political actors debate and set the rules for how a constitution will be made.

Another major project pursued at the department investigates the architecture of the Saharan synagogues and Mellahs, or the Jewish Quarters. Most of the Jews left the region in the late 1940s and the early 1960s. Some buildings were abandoned, while others are occupied by non-Jews. As a result, many original Adobe buildings lack regular maintenance, gradually deteriorate and will soon completely disappear. Yet, despite their historical significance and imperilled existence, neither the mud-brick synagogues nor the Mellahs have ever been systematically documented. Initiated in 2018, the project aims to document the endangered Jewish buildings and urban complexes in the Draa Valley and in the Saharan Region of Morocco and to analyse these monuments from an architectonic, urbanistic, historical and cultural point of view. The team of Daniel Ziss, Adam Pospíšil, and Tobiáš Smolík works with comparative and historical methods, reconstructing the functions of the original buildings based on an inquiry into Jewish culture and archival visual sources, while technical scientists use methods of digital visualization.

Apart from the above-mentioned research, our doctoral students engage with exciting new research avenues that include, among others, environmental politics in the Middle East or European architects’ inspiration in earlier artistic traditions of the Islamic World and their imprints on the architecture of Cairo during the 20th century.

Selected recent publications¹

Boušek, Daniel, “Entangled Arguments: A Survey of Religious Polemics between Islam and Judaism in the Middle Ages,” in: Alexander Dubrau et al. (eds.), *Transfer and Religion: Interactions between Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, pp. 3–58.

The Muslim-Jewish polemics is a phenomenon as old as Islam itself and the Qur’ān was its very first source. Its sūras contain, explicitly or implicitly, a germ of major topics of the Muslim medieval polemics against Judaism and Hebrew Bible that the later generations of Muslims will further develop and reformulate. While the Muslim side of the polemical encounter between the Muslims and Jews in the Middle Ages has been already sufficiently studied, the Jewish apologetical response has received comparatively little attention. The chapter, based on the wide range of the Muslim and Jewish polemical literature, therefore juxtaposes the entangled arguments and motifs of the Jewish response and explores their inter-religious transmission. It focuses mainly on Ibn Ḥazm’s polemics in his *Book of Opinions on Religions* to whose thorough and scathing arguments responded Solomon ibn Adret of thirteenth-century Barcelona in his Hebrew Treatise against the Muslims. Similarly, the specific Spanish background can be assumed for the anti-Islamic polemical treatise *Bow and Shield* of Shim‘on b. Šemaḥ Duran that is contrariwise rooted in the Christian-Islamic polemics.

Boušek, Daniel, “The Story of the Prophet Muḥammad’s encounter with a Samaritan, a Jew, and a Christian: the version from Abū l-Faḥḥ’s *Kitāb al-Tārīkh* and Its Context,” in: Jan Dušek (ed.), *The Samaritans in Historical, Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 105–130.

In the year 756/1355 Abū l-Faḥḥ ibn Abī l-Ḥasan al-Sāmīrī al-Danafī wrote the Samaritan chronicle *Kitāb al-Tārīkh*, which concludes with a cycle of legends narrating the rise of Islam. The narrative focuses on the story of the prophet Muḥammad’s encounter with three astrologers, representatives of three Abrahamic religions: a Samaritan, a Jew, and a Christian, who negotiated with Muḥammad full protection for Samaritans under Islam. Abū l-Faḥḥ’s narrative presents a unique Samaritan version of a polemical story that was widespread among the Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. The chapter compares the Samaritan version of the story with the Christian and Jewish ones and sets the story of Muḥammad’s pact with Samaritans into the context of the mid-14th century Mamlūk society and the Samaritans’ position in it. The claim is that the Samaritan version responds to the increasing social and religious pressures present in Islamic society directed towards the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam and the expropriation of their houses of worship.

¹ Each abstract / description / introduction is from original publication.

Boušek, Daniel, “... And the Ishmaelites Honour the Site’: Images of Encounters between Jews and Muslims at Jewish Sacred Places in Medieval Hebrew Travelogues,” *Archiv orientální* 86, 1 (2018), pp. 23–51.

This paper presents several images of encounters between Jews and Muslims at sacred sites, as portrayed in medieval Jewish travel writings stemming from the Crusades and the Mamlūk period. These images range from examples of shared ownership and practices to situations where different parties vied for control and ownership. The narratives contained in these sources, written predominantly by European authors for a European readership, strive to confirm the Jewish identity of the sacred sites in the Holy Land and Babylonia and the Jews’ rights of ownership to them. They not only reverse the relationship between the ruler and the ruled but, at the same time, they convey the message that the real owners of the holy places connected with the narratives of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish history, and *ipso facto* of the true religion, are the Jews. Jewish travel writings, therefore, served European Jewish readers not only as a vehicle for spreading the knowledge of the sacred topography but also as one of the avenues for conducting polemics against Islam.

Jermanová, Tereza, “Before Constitution-making: The Struggle for Constitution-making Design in Post-revolutionary Egypt,” *Acta Politica* 55 (2020), pp. 648–669.
<<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-019-00137-4>>

Scholars have recently become attentive not only to the institutional designs that constitutions set up, but also to the constitutional change processes. Most authors, who are concerned with the effects the design of constitution-making processes have on outcomes, have focused on the main constitution-making bodies and their characteristics, leaving aside the question of what happens before members of constituent assemblies meet to deliberate. This article makes the point that to better understand constitution-making and its outcomes, we need to take into account the overlooked early stage of constitutional change when political actors debate and set the rules for how a constitution will be made. Building on various political science perspectives and the case study of the 2011–2012 constitutional reform in Egypt, it underscores the inevitably contentious nature of the design of a constitution-making process. It also highlights the impact that unresolved conflicts over the design can have for the agreement on a constitution between political opponents in the context of a democratic transition. In Egypt, adoption of a broadly accepted constitution was hindered by on-going struggles between Islamists and non-Islamists over their preferred constitution-making designs. The article also outlines the factors that make the settlement on constitution-making rules unlikely. Earlier version of the paper received the ‘Best Paper’ Award at the Political Studies Association (PSA) Graduate Network Conference in 2015.

Malečková, Jitka, “The Turk” in the Czech Imagination (1870s–1923), Leiden: Brill (2020).

The book addresses Czechs’ views of the Turks in the last half-century of the existence of the Ottoman Empire, from the 1870s, marked by uprisings in the Ottoman Balkans that were closely watched by the Czechs, to 1923, when the Turkish Republic was founded. It asks whether it is possible to identify a specific “Czech” perception of the Turks and shows that the primary interpretative framework through which the Czechs viewed the Turks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was nationalism.

Malečková, Jitka, “‘Our Turks’, or ‘Real Turks’? Czech Perceptions of the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *World Literature Studies* 10, 1 (2018), pp. 15–26.

The article examines Czech views of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and compares them to their opinions on the Ottoman Turks. It asks to what extent Czech perceptions of these two groups correspond to the distinction between “good” and “bad” Muslims suggested by Andre Gingrich in his concept of “frontier Orientalism.” Special attention is devoted to images of Muslim women who, according to Gingrich, hardly figured in the frontier version of Orientalism. Czech experiences with the Ottoman Empire differed from those of other Central and South East Europeans, and Czechs’ views of the Ottoman Turks were influenced by Western Orientalist discourse. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in contrast, the Czechs’ position was closer to the Austrians’ civilizing mission and their frontier Orientalism, but it was complicated by the fact that the local population was Slavic, like the Czechs themselves. Thus, Czech perceptions of the Slavic Muslims were ambivalent and oscillated between identifying the Muslims with the Ottoman Turks, and viewing them as Slavic brothers. The ambivalence concerned also Muslim women, who were portrayed as different from (Ottoman) Turkish women, but at the same time often seen through Orientalist lenses.

Malečková, Jitka (with Petr Kučera), *Z Istanbulu až na konec světa: Osmanské cestopisy z přelomu 19. a 20. století* [From Istanbul to the End of the World: Ottoman Travel Writings from the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries], Praha: Academia 2019.

The book follows the journeys of Ottoman men and women who travelled in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from Istanbul to the West, mostly to Western Europe, and from Istanbul to the East, to the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. It examines the images the authors created in their travel books of the places they visited and the inhabitants of these places. It asks how the encounter with a new milieu affected the identity of late Ottoman travellers and more specifically whether the way they perceived themselves differed when they travelled to the East and to the West. Focusing on the liminal area between the East and the West, the book aims to contribute to the understanding of the roots of the complicated manoeuvring between

Eastern and Western allegiances that characterizes Turkish viewpoints to this day.

Ťupek, Pavel (with Ondřej Beránek), *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

For the introduction of this book see page 411.

Ženka, Josef, “A Manuscript of the Last Sultan of al-Andalus and the Fate of the Royal Library of the Nasrid Sultans at the Alhambra,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9, 2–3 (2018), pp. 341–376. <<https://doi.org/10.1163/1878464X-00902013>>

The article addresses the fate of the Royal Library of the Nasrid Sultans at the Alhambra. Several royal manuscripts once belonging to the Nasrid sultans of Granada survive to this day, despite having been thought burned by the cardinal Cisneros (d. 1517). One of the volumes is a personal manuscript of the last sultan of al-Andalus, Muḥammad XI² (Boabdil; reigned 887–888/1482–1483, 892–897/1487–1492) and is currently held in the Royal Library of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. This codex abounds with manuscript notes telling the story of its creation and its first owner, the Sultan, until it was incorporated into the current collection. The author examines its journey in the context of the Sultan’s life and the Nasrid manuscript and book culture, arguing that it was this ruler who moved the royal books out of the Alhambra to his place of exile in North Africa. The article is accompanied by an edition and translation of an *ijāza* given to Muḥammad XI by the mufti and *khaṭīb* of Granada al-Mawwāq (d. 897/1492). It is the sole surviving royal teaching certificate from the Nasrid period of Andalus history.

More details about the department can be found at <<https://kbv.ff.cuni.cz/en>>.

² Muhammad XI had been known as Muḥammad XII. cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_XII_of_Granada>.