



Course Description: NISIS Masterclass



Title	The Past and Future of Islamic Studies
Academic year	2019-2020
EC	1
Level	600
Language	English
Keynote Speakers	t.b.a.
Hosted by	Junior Council: Luca Bruls, Alon Dar, Arash Ghajarjazi

Admission requirements

PhD candidates and research master students active in the field of Islamic Studies may apply by getting in touch with any of the Junior Council representatives:

Luca Bruls (l.r.bruls.2@umail.leidenuniv.nl)

Alon Dar (a.dar@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Arash Ghajarjazi (a.ghajarjazi@uu.nl)

NISIS junior members qualify automatically and do not need to apply for participation. However, they are required to register for the Masterclass.

In order to gain 1 EC, participants must prepare a reaction sheet and show active participation in the Masterclass. It is possible to earn 4 additional EC by writing a paper.

Please note that participants from outside of the Netherlands who are not a member of NISIS pay a fee of 50 euros per EC.

Description

In the past decades, Islamic and Middle Eastern studies have evolved in many ways. We are now experiencing a period in this development, in which the thematic, conceptual, and



methodological boundaries of the discipline have expanded quite far from the orientalist zeitgeist of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Not only have academics found ways to break down established orientalist tropes, conceptual innovation and technology also improve the accessibility of research materials and their variety in geographical scope. Researchers no longer limit their methods to philology. They have advanced so far as to include, among others, social and media ethnographies, cultural theories and discourse analysis. But it seems that the field is still struggling, quite sluggishly to say the least, to stay relevant and up to date in the present academic landscape. While the humanities is changing today—innovative research methods, themes and concepts are growing and pushing the research vanguards rapidly—Islamic Studies has remained slow in adapting to the academic demands and ambitions of the present. Moreover, this slowness parallels asymmetrically the relevance and importance of Islamic cultures to the twenty-first century. Societies, techniques and technologies in the Islamic world are no longer things Islamic but materials of global significance.

In this series of masterclasses, convened by the NISIS Junior Council, we examine and interrogate the changing scholarly landscape in Islamic Studies so as to understand its limits and potentials. How will research on Islamic traditions and cultures look like in the future? And how is it evolving in the present? How do we creatively and critically imagine alternative worlds of research and aspire new sets of methods?

In thinking about the future in and of this discipline, during this masterclass together we explore the extent to which scholars in the field have developed new methods and strategies to deal with the changing academe and the increasing insecurities and uncertainties that it is inevitably involved in. When we speak about the future, we are thinking about ways in which the field can be opened up to its outside, be radicalized and transformed, and consequently become more adept at dealing with the present. Can the knowledge produced in this discipline be relevant to scholars in other fields of the humanities? In imagining how the field could look like in the future, can we think of Islamic Studies as an open field capable of making new connections with neighboring fields such as religious studies, anthropology, history of science and philosophy as well as remoter fields such as psychology, artistic practices, urban studies and even hard sciences? Can we think of this future in such a way that the knowledge produced in Islamic Studies would not be a knowledge exclusively about Islam, but a contribution to academic knowledge at large?

In this course participants and speakers venture to respond to these pressing questions with a series of lectures and seminar sessions offered by leading experts in the field. Each session focuses on a specific theme from the vantage point of the past and the future. Participants will be offered two perspectives on the same theme: one is rooted in the scholarly traditions of

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studying the past in Islamic studies, while the other focuses on new methodological/conceptual approaches and ways to move beyond the already-experienced towards the un-explored and un-thinkable.

Session #1: Interdisciplinarity in the study of Islam and of Islamic history (7 July)

In our introductory session we begin by giving an overview of the field as it evolved from the past to the present. The idea is to first get a general view of the main developments and then move towards grasping the interdisciplinary potentials in the field. Ideally, we want to know how scholars shifted their views, how research materials changed—the kinds of texts that were examined and the methods of examination.

[Prof. Christian Lange](#) is our speaker for this session. His works have pushed the field to its limits by raising new questions and rethinking concepts while perfecting the classical historical research methods. Advancing both fresh thematic issues as well as novel conceptualizations, his works have redefined what the field can do. Both in his *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (2016) and *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* (2008), he not only sheds light on certain aspects of Islamic traditions but also, and much more importantly, upgrades the research methods in the field. In so doing, he has both re-thought the old concepts given in the past scholarly traditions about Islam and proposed new concepts to think with about that past. By considering a much broader textual spectrum in the study of Islamic traditions, Lange is among the scholars who have radicalized the field by encouraging the examination of not only the traditional canons in Islamic scholarship but of "areas such as religious mythology, apocalypticism, and eschatological thought, in short, the religious imagination in Islam". In this way, the past is not merely reconstructed in the present academia, but more consequentially, made relevant to the ongoing researches across the humanities.

In this session, we engage with Lange's historical methods as he reflects on two major themes in his works, namely, the history of violence in premodern Muslim societies, and the history of the imagination in the premodern Islamic world, with a particular focus on hell and paradise.

[Dr. Edmund Hayes](#) will be our second speaker in this session (tbc).

The idea is to understand how historians in Islamic Studies are and should be dealing with future research in the field. In what ways can history be connected to other fields in the humanities? Lange's work give us an outline of such possibilities.



Session #2: The Arts and media

Second half of September 2020 (exact date, time and place will be announced soon)

For this session, we will approach art and media from two points of view. In one approach, having [Dr. Valerie Gonzalez](#) as our speaker, we look at how art and media in the Islamic traditions have been studied. In her research, Valerie Gonzalez deals with issues of aesthetics and visuality in Islamic traditions with a special interest in the interrelatedness between theory and practice in Islamic art. In her works, she problematizes the disciplinary implications of using the term Islamic art and argues that “the designations “Islam” and “Islamic” signify and refer to objective facts of history. They do not exclude “the many” from “the one” and vice versa; the one being the Quranic revelation and the distinct mode of world-apprehension it created, and the many consisting of the plural interpretations and adaptations of this revelation in diverse geocultural spaces as well as the incorporation in these spaces of the non-Islamic and the pre-Islamic”. In her reflection on art history in Islamic studies, we engage critically with the scholarly practices in the field and think of ways it can survive in the future academia.

From the other standpoint, we get a glimpse of how Islamic Studies can feed into artistic/creative practices. [Dr. Azadeh Emadi](#) will be our speaker for this part of the session as her works are on one hand informed by materials that fall into the scope of Islamic Studies, while her methods are radically distant from what we know in the field. She creates videos and installations to produce a different kind of knowledge and perspective. In her conceptual writings, she draws on Mulla Sadra’s notion of “substantial motion” and at the same time she thinks the concept through her engagement with video-making media. In her own words, she approaches “the digital moving image and technologies in term of perception and becoming ... via investigating historical Persian/Islamic art and philosophy alongside modern Western thinkers and media theorists.” With her presentation, we would like to consider how creative methods can be plugged into academic work. What are the limits and challenges? What modes of knowledge can be explored with such creative moves?

Two more sessions will be organised in Spring and Autumn 2021, for which we have tentatively chosen two themes: environmental studies and secularity in Islamic Studies. The details for these latter two will be announced in due time.

The format will be digital, using Zoom as our preferred platform. We begin the sessions with two lectures, each half an hour long, followed by questions and discussions of the speaker's suggested texts/other materials.



Course objectives

- Enlarging and deepening the already existing knowledge of Islam and Muslim societies
- Providing insight and participation in the current academic debate
- Introducing the candidates to an international network of scholars in the field
- Creating an academic community in which research in the field of Islam and Muslim societies can be optimally pursued
- Mediating between a new generation of researchers and innovative disciplinary and interdisciplinary developments, theoretical and methodological initiatives and explorations in the field
- Training presentation, writing and reflection skills.

Time Table

T.b.a. Please make sure to be informed about programme details and updates via our website: www.nisis.nl.

Mode of instruction

- Lecture
- Paper (optional)

Course load

Total course load for the course is 28 hours + 112 hours

Attendance seminar: 28 hours

Paper: 112 hours



Assessment method

The examination of PhD candidates and research master students is based on:

- attendance of the meeting and participation in the discussion (1 EC)
- paper (optional: 4 EC)

Reading list

T.b.a.

Application

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Website

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