



PROPHEET

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Between God and Man: Representations of the Prophet in Literature, Arts, and Media



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Venue: Beckmanns Hof, Room Tokyo

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НАЦИОНАЛЕН ЦЕНТЪР ЗА ИЗСЛЕДОВАНИЕ НА
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Between God and Man: Representations of the Prophet in Literature, Arts, and Media

Based on its doctrinal and historiographical foundations, the Muslims' relation to the Prophet Muhammad was and still is strongly articulated in the spheres of literature, arts, and also in the modern media. Along with the rise of Prophetic piety since the 12th century, the literary and artistic focus on the Prophet equally gained in importance as a medium of orientation towards him, a process that has continued ever since and became a central element of Muslim culture in the early modern and modern periods. Literary and artistic forms of representation of the Prophet expanded in various temporal, spatial and cultural contexts, creating a wide range of literary, calligraphic, iconographic and media-related forms of expression. With their different cultural, communal and sectarian colouring, and with the fierce contestations that have sometimes gone along with them, the highly variegated literary and artistic expressions of Prophetic piety still lack a comparative framework of study.

This second workshop of the ANR/DFG Project "The Presence of the Prophet: Muhammad in the Mirror of His Community in Early Modern and Modern Islam", will examine the different modes of literary, artistic and media-related representations of the Prophet Muhammad and their continuity and transformation since the later middle ages and early modernity, up to recent times. It will complement the analytical perspective drawn from the prophetic representations created within Islamic knowledge, the subject of the first workshop. Its major question of research, which focuses on the tension between the divine and human realms connected in the person and message of the Prophet, and their mediation in different forms of representation, will be extended to the literary and artistic fields. Here, the Prophet's function as messenger of divine wrath and mercy, majesty and beauty, and his elevation to human perfection, sometimes even to superhuman status, find central expression in the literary and poetic visualizations of his birth (*mawlid*), his night journey and ascension to heaven (*isrā' wa-l-mi'rāj*), and of his perfect bodily appearance and personality (*hilya*) which were in congruence with the perfection of the divine message. Questions about the mediation between the human and the divine aspects of the prophetic imagery and message, and about the evocation of his presence in memory and ritual, also include the aesthetics of his representation, its location in public and private spaces, and its performative enactment. It would appear that the development of sacrality in Islam was firmly linked to this mediation of the human and the divine in the representation of the Prophet.

A central theme of the workshop is the vast amount of Islamic poetry and prose in praise of Muḥammad which is documented for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages and which since the early modern period came to form an important focus of the newly emerging Muslim literary languages in different parts of Africa and Asia. The largely performative character of this literature, and its combination of literary and devotional functions and values promises important insights into the working of the rhetoric of praise as a crucial way of mediating the divine and the human dimensions of the prophetic image. At the same time, the appeal of the human personality of the Prophet appears to be much stronger here than in the doctrinal literature.

Calligraphy certainly provides the closest link between the divine message and the human artistic sphere in Islam. This also pertains to the evocation of the Prophet and his names, to the expressions of praise and benediction for him in architectural and scriptural contexts, to the presentation of prophetic pedigrees, and to the evocation of his appearance and his noble character in calligraphic iconic forms that emerged as a special genre of devotional art since the 17th century. The increasingly subjective patterns of piety that were supported by these aesthetical forms still have to be clarified.

Images of the Prophet made their appearance in Arabic and Iranian illustrative painting since the 13th century, with a particularly rich development within the literary culture of the late medieval/early modern courts of the Muslim empires. The standardization of these images of the Prophet – first with his face unveiled, later increasingly veiled - and their divine symbolism of light, colour, space and angelic companions - shall again be discussed together with the mediating functions and the artistic and devotional uses of these images, and – in Sunni milieus – their increasing replacement by more abstract symbols and by the mentioned calligraphic icons. The tension between the divine and human dimensions of the Prophet, in personal attitudes as well as in public life, has also shaped the modern attempts to produce films on his life, which often remained highly controversial. The difficult compromises between devotional edification and the demands of media entertainment have remained hard to work out; on the other hand, a seizable shift in religious tastes and expectations has developed in the different Muslim mediascapes of the world, which still awaits a thorough analysis.

The changes in the Muslims' literary representation of the Prophet, which can be noticed since the late 19th century, will form an equally important focus of the workshop. Apart from the enhancement of religious and devotional literature which was triggered by the spread of printing and which can also be observed in literary as well as performative forms in the cyberspace, the shift towards new literary genres and to a more mundane portraying of the Prophet will also be discussed. A diminishing emphasis on the divine dimension of his life can be noticed, with a novel elaboration of his human and political qualities, in the writings of modernist and nationalist authors. This development has yet to be fully assessed, as it even led to some critical accounts of the Prophet's life and, finally, in Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses", to the highly challenging and revolting portrait of the rise of Islam, and of the Prophet as a nightmare haunting the dream-world of a Muslim Indian migrant in Britain who had lost his faith. These modern engagements with the Prophet by modernist Muslim authors of different ideological outlook, often committed to nationalist or socialist ideology and at times clearly leading beyond the Islamic narrative, still need a proper assessment for their roots in the traditional Islamic imagery of the Prophet, and their sometimes radical departures from it.

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 9 November 2017	
Morning	
9.00-9.30	Welcoming Coffee and Opening of the Workshop
Session I: Poetical Approaches to the Prophet	
9.30-10.00	Ève Feuillebois-Pierunek: Praising the Prophet in Nizāmi's Quintet (12 th c.)
10.00-10.30	Brigitte Foulon: The Praise Poems Composed by Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khatīb (d. 1374) for the Celebration of the Birth of the Prophet (<i>al-mawlidīyyât</i>)
10.30-11.00	Discussion
11.00-11.15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11.15-11.45	Francesco Zappa: Praising the Prophet in West African, especially Malian Islamic Literatures and their Current Mediatized Performances: A Preliminary Survey
11.45-12.15	Rüdiger Seesemann: "The Splendid Jewel in Praise of the Most Eminent Beloved": Glimpses from the Diwan of Shaykh Ibrahim b. Sidi Muhammad al-Tijani (d. 1999, Darfur, Sudan)
12.15-13.15	Discussion
13.15-14.45	<i>Lunch Break</i>

Afternoon	
14.45-15.15	Torsten Tschacher: Another Rama? Modern Responses to the Depiction of the Prophet in Tamil Devotional Poetry
15.15-15.45	Gianfranco Bria: Reinvent and Translate the Islamic Tradition in Contemporary Albania: The Mevlud Between Community Demands and National Aspirations
15.45-16.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>
16.00-16.30	Stephan Milich: Prophecy and War: Images of Saddam Hussein in the Poetry of 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Abd al-Wāḥid
16.30-17.00	Discussion
18.00	<i>Dinner in the Campus Restaurant 'Q-West'</i>

Friday, 10 November 2017

Morning

Session II: The Prophet in Calligraphy and Art

9.00-9.30	Tobias Heinzelmann: Visualizing the Prophet – Rhetorical and Graphic Aspects of Three Ottoman-Turkish Poems
9.30-10.00	Christiane Gruber: The Prophet as a ‘Sacred Spring’: Late Ottoman Hilye Bottles
10.00-10.15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
10.15-10.45	Hiba ‘Abid/Francesco Chiabotti: The World of al-Qandūsī (d. 1861): Calligraphy and Prophetology in 19 th -century Fes
10.45-11.15	Discussion
11.30-13.00	<i>Lunch Break</i>

Afternoon

Session III: The Prophet in Music

13.00-13.30	Ines Weinrich: Ḥabīb - Ṭabīb - Shaḫī‘ (Beloved, Healer, and Intercessor): The Creation of Muḥammad’s Qualities through Contemporary Chant in Syria and Lebanon
13.30-14.00	Sajida Fazal: Image of Prophet Mohammad and Female Representation in Sufi Performing Arts, ‘Qawwali’ in Pakistan
14.00-14.30	Discussion
14.30-14.45	<i>Coffee Break</i>

Session IV: The Prophet in Audiovisual Media

14.45-15.15	Max Stille: Auditive Dimensions of Prophetic Presence and Divine Compassion in Bengali Wa’z Mahfils
15.15-15.45	Dilek Sarmis: The Recent Diffusion of the Film "The Message" in France: Debates on the Web on an Indirect Representation of the Prophet
15.45-16.45	Discussion and Conclusions