



## The Nehemia Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies

### Opening Remarks by the Director of the Center

The current bulletin covers the activities of the Center during the 2010-2011 academic year. These activities were diverse and intensive despite the severe cut to its annual budget by the Hebrew University authorities and the need for external funding. Endowed with a broad historical perspective and an interdisciplinary approach, the Center holds a unique position in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in Israel, all the more so following "the Arab Spring" of 2011 and the cultural and socio-political processes that have emerged.

Nevertheless, the financial issue is a pressing one and has engendered concrete fund-raising steps. A major initiative is the launching of research programs, to be named for donors, on key issues in the Arab-Islamic agenda and their historical

and modern implications, including popular uprisings, the Sunni-Shi'i schism in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, Muslim-Christian encounters, and women's activism. Placing the Center on a solid financial basis will enable us to put greater emphasis on research, the publication of academic studies, and the support of younger-generation scholars through fellowships and academic recognition. The Center also seeks to extend its activity beyond the academic sphere by holding a series of lectures for the general public. This year, the Center, together with the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and the Magid Institute for Continuing and Adult Education at the Hebrew University, are collaborating in presenting a series of lectures on the topic: "Revolutions in the

Modern Middle East: Historical and Comparative Perspectives."

The year 2010-2011 marks my first year as director of the Center. I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Ron Shaham, the former director, for his valuable contribution to the vital work of the Center. Special thanks are due to the academic committee for their contributions to the Center: Professors Rachel Milstein (chair), Amikam Elad, and Elie Podeh, and Drs. Brouria Bitton-Ashkeloni and Nurit Stadler. Last but not least I want to thank Ms. Jenia Yudkevich, coordinator of the Center, for her effective administration of the Center.

With best wishes for a fruitful academic year,

Prof. Meir Hatina  
Director of the Center

### The Levtzion Center's Mission

The Nehemia Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies was established at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2004. It aims to encourage and initiate research relating to Islam as a religion and a civilization, from its advent in the seventh century C.E. until today in the Arab world, elsewhere in the Middle East, in Asia and Africa, and in the West. To fulfill this goal, the Center organizes research groups, conferences, seminars and lectures; supports

individual and group research; grants scholarships; and encourages dialogue between scholars of Islamic studies and related fields. Islam is approached not only as a religion, but, more broadly, as a culture and a civilization. As such, the Center deals with a range of subjects that include religious thought and practice, material and intellectual culture, politics, society and economics, and interfaith relations. To this end, the Center supports interdisciplinary

research in religious studies, history, the social sciences, law and other fields. Innovative research projects within specific disciplines are also encouraged and supported. The Center directs some of its activities to the general public with the aim of bringing about greater understanding of the Islamic faith and civilization. The Center's publications seek to reach a wide audience of scholars as well as the public at large.

# The Annual Nehemia Levtzion Lectures

## Background

The Nehemia Levtzion Lectures bring noted scholars to the Center to discuss central themes in the field of Islamic studies. The lectures are held in collaboration with leading academic institutions in Israel, and are later published by the Levtzion Center. The first Levtzion lecture was held in 2005, in cooperation with the Ben-Zvi Institute and the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University. Prof. Michael Brett of SOAS (London) lectured on "The Islamization of Egypt and North Africa." The second Levtzion lecture was held in 2006, in cooperation with Tel Aviv University. Prof. Andre Wink, of the University of Wisconsin (Madison), lectured on "Perspectives on the Indo-Islamic World." These two lectures were published by the Center and may be ordered from the Center's offices. The contents of these lectures are also available on the Center's website. The third Levtzion lecture was held in 2007. Prof. Baber Johansen of Harvard University lectured on "The Transformation from Islam as Cosmic Order to Islam as Legal Order." The fourth Levtzion lecture was held in 2008. Prof. Dale F. Eickelman, of Dartmouth College, (USA), lectured on "Whatever became of the Islamic Reformation." The fifth Levtzion lecture was held in 2009. Prof. Haggai Erlich of Tel Aviv University lectured on "Muslims, Christians and Ethiopia: First Meeting, Last Meeting."

## The Sixth Annual Nehemia Levtzion Lecture, April 4, 2011, The Hebrew University

The sixth annual lecture, by Prof. Christoph Schumann of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg,

Germany, took place on April 4, 2011, titled: "Identity and Normativity of Muslims in Transnational Spaces: Between the Middle East, Europe and America." The lecture was part of an event at which the Center announced its annual recipients of scholarships and research grants (see below).

Prof. Schumann's lecture compared two diaspora communities: the Arab-American community in the United States and the Turkish community

demise of the Ottoman Empire, "Syria" became the main reference for the collective identity of the "diaspora." The first decades of the 20th century saw the zenith of the Arabic press, which became the lingua franca for the exchange of poetry and literature between Arabs in the Middle East, Europe and North and South America.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a new wave of immigration from the Arab world to the United States changed the



*Prof. Christoph Schumann*

in Germany. Methodologically, the lecture highlighted the connection between collective identity and political causes, thereby dismissing the notion that language and ethnicity translate directly into collective identities. From this perspective, the two cases are of particular interest, since they allow for analyzing the formation and change of "Middle Eastern identities", i.e. Arab and Turkish identities, outside the Middle East.

The identities of the Arab immigrants in the United States who came from the Levantine provinces of the Ottoman Empire were contested ever since the late 19th century. While American immigration officers categorized the incoming migrants as "Turks," the imperial embassy in Washington demanded their recognition as "Ottomans." After the

collective identity significantly. "Arabness" (al-'uruba) became the defining concept of a new "Arab-American" identity that replaced the old reference to Syria. However, the political core of the new Arab identity was not based on a new linguistic or ethnic awareness, but rather on the political significance of the Palestinian issue and the quest for decolonization in the Arab world. Thus, leading Arab-American intellectuals did not see any contradiction in embracing the English language in their discourse. The "Arabization" of their identity went hand-in-hand with the "Anglicization" of the Arab-American media and organizations. The emphasis on the American side of the hyphen became even stronger from the 1980s onward with the intensification of the political

struggle against discrimination and the vilification of Arabs in the media.

By contrast, the Turkish identity in Germany emerged much later and took different forms. Due to treaties between Germany and Turkey, the immigrant community was more or less dependent on the paternalistic support of German bureaucrats, German organizations (such as the labor unions), and the German media, which produced Turkish-language programs. In addition, organizations and media from Turkey successfully vied for support in Germany from the 1970s onward. As a result, Turkish domestic politics

dominated the discourse among Turks in Germany: right vs. left, laicism vs. Islamism, and nationalism vs. secessionism. Turkey remained the main reference – positively or negatively – for political identities as expressed in Turkish public discourse. A hyphenated Turkish-German identity never captured the imagination of the community. This absence of a shared political identity explains why the Turkish community still has problems in defining its political goals with regard to German politics.

In conclusion, Prof. Schumann argued, collective identities in

the diaspora do not emerge simply around ethnic or linguistic differences. The Arab-American case shows that political causes have always been at the core of the Arab-American identity. This seems to be different in the Turkish-German case. Moreover, the subtle support by the Turkish Republic in preserving the linguistic and Islamic (Sunni) identity of the Turkish community in Germany reinforces its political fragmentation, alienating those groups with a Kurdish or Alevi background.

## Workshops and Conferences

### 1. Saints and Believers

The Levtzion Center and the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University conducted a collaborative research workshop on the topic of saints and believers consisting of six encounters during 2010-2011. The workshop was aimed at doctoral students and senior lecturers researching saints in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in different periods and places. The encounters were typified by a comparative historical approach to religious, cultural and social aspects of the phenomenon of saints, such as the process of sanctification, the image of the saint, the patronage of saints by various elites, the saint as an interfaith facilitator, and changes in saintly rituals in modern times.

The research workshop encounters were led by the following scholars:

- Dr. Uriel Simonsohn (The Hebrew University), "Sacred Space and Religious Segregation in the Early Islamic Period." Discussant: Dr. Milka Levy-Rubin, The Hebrew University.
- Mr. Michael Ebstein (The Hebrew University), "Friends of God – Between Sunna and Shi'a." Discussant: Dr. Ehud Krinis, The Hebrew University.
- Mr. Sergey Minov (The Hebrew University), "The Use of Relics in Syrian Christianity." Discussant: Prof. Aryeh Kofsky, The University of Haifa.
- Mr. Jonathan Cahana (The Hebrew University), "The Holy An/Undrogyne: Queering the Gnostic Myth." Discussant: Dr. Michael Mach, Tel Aviv University.
- Dr. Yair Furstenberg (The Hebrew University), "Sanctity and Purity in the Mishna." Discussant: Prof. Steve Kaplan, The Hebrew University.
- Ms. Einat Klepter (Tel Aviv University), "The Atypical Treatment of Popular Devotional Practices and Religious Artifacts: The Book of Margery Kempe in its Historical and Cultural Context." Discussant: Dr. Tamar Herzig, Tel Aviv University.

## 2. The Attitude to The Deceased and to Cemeteries in Judaism and Islam

This conference, organized by the Levtzion Center, the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, and al-Qasimi College, was held on November 25, 2010, at the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem. The conference offered a comparative analysis by clerics and scholars of issues of death and cemeteries in Judaism and Islam with references to debated contemporary issues in Israel ranging from human organ transplants to clearing/dismantling cemeteries.

**The first session** was devoted to religious and medical aspects of honoring the dead. Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, head of the Petach Tikva Hesder Yeshiva, discussed the dual attitude in Judaism toward the dead: respect for the body of man, created in the image of God, and the duty to bury him; alongside a recoil from the deceased and a distancing from him in viewing him as defiled, giving more importance to the living than to the dead. With this, the aspect of honoring the dead strengthened in Jewish history, and graves became pilgrimage sites for prayers and requests. The Islamic view was provided by Qadi Muhammad Zibde, the qadi of Jaffa, who emphasized the sanctity of the dead and his grave, the

prohibition of opening the grave or clearing it out so long as the bones have not turned to dust. Dr. Israel Katz, a lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine at the Hebrew University and a physician in the Clalit Health Fund, discussed the relationship between religion and medicine in the context of three controversial topics both in Judaism and Islam: terminal patients and their right to end their life, which raises the issue of the value of life vis-à-vis the suffering of the individual and his autonomy regarding his body; the determination of the time of death as the moment the heart stops, or brain death; and postmortem procedures to establish cause of death.

**The second session** was devoted to cemeteries and their status, and related contemporary issues. Rabbi Shlomo Brin, of the Har Zion Yeshiva and the Herzog College, spoke about the importance of the cemetery on three levels: religious, in closing the circle of the return to dust; familial, as a memorial site and a place of communion with the deceased; and as a value, with the cemetery representing the past, tradition, and the set of values in society perceived as threatened by progress. This explains the opposition by certain

Jewish sectors to dismantle cemeteries, as demonstrated in the affair surrounding the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon in 2010. Mr. Mahmud 'Umari of al-Qasimi College, discussed the laws of purification and burial of the dead in Islam, emphasizing the sanctity of the cemetery site, to the extent that changing the use of such land is prohibited, as reflected in the protest that broke out in 2005 regarding the construction of the Museum of Tolerance over the remnants of a Muslim cemetery in the center of Jerusalem. Prof. Itzhak Reiter, of the Ashkelon Academic College and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, presented a different position, arguing that both Judaism and Islam permit relocating graves if there is concern about the durability of the grave, for example in the event of flooding or due to development plans. Attorney Ahmad Balha, of the Municipal Authority for the Development of Jaffa, concluded the discussion by confirming the status of the Muslim cemeteries in Israel as a wakf endowment, and challenging the Israeli judicial system to guard against treating cemeteries as negotiable real estate.

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## 3. Contested Authorities and The Quest for Collective Identity in Modern Egypt

Modernization in the Middle East from the nineteenth century onward encompassed not only state institutions but also lifestyle and modes of thinking. New educational systems, increased literacy, an expanding bureaucracy, and a proliferation of print and electronic media engendered two related processes. One was the rise of new social and intellectual forces, mainly professionals, as agents of change.

The other was the emergence of a vibrant public sphere in which sacred values and conventions were debated, contested and even altered.

These developments were especially evident in Egypt, the first Arab land to undergo an accelerated process of state building and a redefinition of its collective identity. The unfolding Egyptian public discourse was accompanied by new patterns

of authority which challenged traditional religious, social and political norms and propagated alternative visions.

In using the term authority, the conference, held on March 29, 2011, at the Mt. Scopus campus, focused primarily on forms of authority derived from non-coercive sources, such as professional expertise, charismatic leadership, patronage, social altruism, social networks,

personal courage, dissidence and even martyrdom. The extensive research literature on modern Egypt has tended to overlook this typology of non-coercive authorities, which in many ways were closely tied to the struggle over collective identity.

The conference sought to fill this lacuna by an in-depth examination of the new patterns of authority from different perspectives, based on a theoretical discussion and on largely unexplored primary sources.

Three sessions were held, as follows:

- Commemoration and Authority in the Public Sphere (Prof. Israel Gershoni and Prof. Hana



*Prof. Israel Gershoni and Prof. Hana Taragan of Tel Aviv University*

Taragan of Tel Aviv University; Dr. Shmulik Bachar of the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center; and Prof. Elie Podeh of the Hebrew University).

- The New Intellectuals and Crises of Authority (Prof. Uri M. Kupferschmidt of the University of Haifa; Dr. Liat Kozma and Prof. Ron Shaham of the Hebrew University; and Prof. Haggai Erlich of Tel Aviv University and the Open University).
- Political Protest and the Development of Authority (Prof. Shaul Mishal and Dr. Mira Tzoref of Tel Aviv University; Prof. Rami Ginat of Bar-Ilan University; and Prof. Meir Hatina of the Hebrew University).

#### 4. The Other Iran: Culture and Civil Society under the Islamic Revolution

The conference, organized collaboratively with the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, Hebrew University, was held on April 7, 2011, at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem.

Scheduled to coincide with the publication of the book by the Hebrew University's Dr. Eldad Pardo, *Predicting Revolutions: Iranian Cinema and the Islamic Revolution*, the conference featured the participation of prominent researchers of modern Iran. It had two aims: The first, to present a different picture of Iran – its civic life, with its vital intellectualism and rich culture, in which religious scholars, students, women and minorities all play active roles and challenge the puritanical code dictated by the clerical regime. The second aim, which stems from the first, was to compile an interim summation of the Islamic Revolution, in existence for over three decades at this time.

**In the first session**, titled "Religion and Political Protest," Prof. Meir Litvak and Dr. Uri Goldberg, both of Tel Aviv University, discussed dissident voices in the Shi'i establishment who opposed the approach of the rule of the jurist and demanded the establishment of a representative democracy, albeit based on Islamic foundations. Dr. Zvi Barel of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Mr. Menahem Merhavi of Tel Aviv University illuminated the vitality of the civil opposition to the regime as well as the complex dilemmas and challenges it faced.

**The second session**, titled "Society and Revolution," examined manifestations of protest and dissidence in three public sectors: the student sector, which did not rush to adopt the martyrdom cult promoted by the regime, exacerbated by its practice of

burying martyrs at the universities. Instead, this sector called for reinforcing the living rather than



*Dr. Liora Handelman-Baavur*

the dead (Dr. Soli Shahvar, the University of Haifa); young people who promoted an alternative culture through the Internet and blog sites (Dr. Liora Handelman-Baavur, Tel Aviv University); and the Jewish community as a religious minority which oscillated between loyalty to and defiance against the Iranian state (Ms. Orly Rahimian, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev).

The third session, titled "Film, Revolution and Political Prophecy," led by Prof. Emanuel Sivan of the Hebrew University, examined the extent to which Iranian films, as well as Arab films, can provide a barometer for understanding and even predicting revolutionary events. Dr. Eldad Pardo, of the

Hebrew University and the Truman Institute, who surveyed Iran's film production in the 1953-1978 period, held that this output reflected social change and distress which a few of the film directors used as a warning, and which ultimately paved the way for the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution. Dr. Shariel Birnbaum, also of the Hebrew University,

arrived at a similar conclusion in tracing the first signs of the "Nile Revolution" in 2011 as reflected in Egyptian films made during the 1990s, showing the distress of the masses and rioting in the streets in light of price rises of basic commodities and criticism of the authoritarian nature of the regime.

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## 5. Shattered Dream? Jewish Iraqi Literature in Israel

On May 17, 2011, the Levzion Center, together with the Institute for African and Asian Studies, Misgav Yerushalayim: The Center for Research and Study of the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage, and the Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq, held a conference on this topic at the Mt. Scopus campus. Speakers included Prof. Shmuel Moreh and Dr. Ronen Zeidel of the Hebrew University, Dr. Sigal Goorji and Prof. Haviva Fadia of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Author Eli Amir, and Ms. Osnat (Muallem) Levi.

The event, which marked the posthumous publication of the book by Meir Muallem, "A Piece of Life: Memories from Iraq" (Hebrew), explored the role of Iraqi Jewish literature written in Hebrew in the Israeli cultural and literary milieu, and through this prism the extent of integration of the Iraqi Jewish community in the life of the state, in comparison with its impressive historical role in Iraq. The research discourse perceives the Jewish Iraqi community in Israel as having made an important contribution to the country, whether in the economic, public, academic or cultural spheres. Authors and poets of Iraqi origin such as Shimon Balas, Eli Amir, Sami Michael, Rony Somek and Almog Bahar; and musicians such as Yair Dalal and Dudu Tasa enriched Israeli culture, fostered

social sensitivity, and paved the way for an understanding of the Arab legacy.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether this rich pool of creativity has metamorphosed, after 60 years of immigration, integration and rootedness, into an organic component of Israeli culture, recognized as such by the country's cultural arbiters, or whether it is still perceived as an ethnic niche identified with the culture of

local milieu, reflected as well in the literary field. These assets included education, political awareness, and a readiness to marry out of the ethnic fold. Dr. Sigal Goorji discussed identity and faith in the works of the Jews from Iraq. Prof. Haviva Fadia discussed migration, identity and place in the poetry and prose of this community. Dr. Ronen Zeidel explored the link between language and audience and the acceptance of Iraqi novels in Hebrew. Author



the east. The various discussants present in the conference offered several important perspectives. Prof. Shmuel Moreh, who chaired the conference, pointed to the assets which allowed the Iraqi Jewish community, following a difficult period of acclimation in an atmosphere of deprivation, to integrate relatively quickly in the

Eli Amir widened out the discourse by discussing the contribution of the writers from all the Muslim countries to Hebrew literature. The evening closed with reminiscences of her father, Meir Muallem, by Ms. Osnat (Muallem) Levi. Elad Gabai, musician and liturgical hymnist, performed works from the musical heritage of the Babylonian Jews.

## Guest Lectures

On December 20, 2010, **Prof. Robert Gleave** of the University of Exeter, UK, lectured on "Rituals and Messiah in Modern Shi'ism: Debates within the Shi'i Seminaries of Iran and Iraq."

On February 28, 2011, **Dr. Necati Alkan** of the University of Erfurt, Germany, lectured on "The Nusayri Awakening in the Late 19th Century."

On May 1, 2011, **Dr. Miriam Frankel** of the Hebrew University and Yad-Ben Zvi lectured on "Anguish and Salvation: Time, Identity and Historical Conscience among the Jews of the Islamic Lands in the Medieval Period." The event, co-sponsored by the Levzion Center and the Institute of African and Asian Studies, was held in memory of Prof. William Z. Brinner (1924-2011), professor emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Prof. Brinner was a prominent scholar of medieval Islamic history and Muslim-Jewish cultural interaction, as well as modern Arabic literature. He was, inter alia, a visiting scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and in the early 1970s served as the director of the Overseas Study Center of the University of California.



*Prof. Robert Gleave*

## Book Panel Discussion

On 29 December 2010 the Levtzion Center dedicated an evening to discussing the new book by Prof. Ron Shaham, *The Expert Witness in Islamic Courts: Medicine and Crafts in the Service of Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). The book deals with the institution of expert witnesses (physicians, architects, builders and merchants) in Islamic societies in comparison with Jewish legal law and with Western law. Following an analysis of the function of expert witnesses in traditional courts, the book shows how the rise of the modern nation state led to a change in the role and functioning of the expert witness, with special emphasis on the relationship between traditional religious knowledge and modern science, particularly in the fields of biology and medicine.

The event was moderated by Prof. Meir Bar-Asher of the Dept. of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University. Panel members were Dr. Nurit Tsafrir of Tel Aviv University, Prof. Avner Giladi of the University of Haifa, and Prof. Elimelech Westreich of Tel Aviv University.

Dr. Tsafrir discussed the institution of witnesses in non-judicial contexts. In the theological context, the testimony of non-Muslims, and sometimes of non-orthodox Muslims as well, was perceived as unreliable. In the political context, expert witnesses in Muslim cities in the Middle Ages constituted a political pressure group which sometimes managed to bring about the annulment of unworthy appointments made by the ruler. Prof. Giladi focused on various aspects of the role of the midwife in pre-modern Islamic societies, ranging from the autonomous female arena to the patriarchal judicial arena. Prof. Westreich introduced a comparative perspective in discussing the meeting of Jewish legal tradition and modern science, which reveals a number of similarities to its Islamic counterpart.

## Scholarships for Advanced Students in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

Each year the Center grants awards for excellence to M.A. and Ph.D. students. The following students won scholarships for the year 2011:

**Mr. Nir Shabo**, M.A. student, Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. "Jalal al-Din (d. 1231): The last Khwarazm-Shah."

**Mr. Guy Ron-Gilboa**, M.A. student, Department of Arabic Language and Literature. "Brigand Stories in Arabic Historiography: Fasl fi Dikr Lusuf al-'Arab from Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi's al-Habar 'an al-Bashar – Critical Edition, Commentary and Discussion.

## Co-Sponsorship of Academic Activities

### Women in The Middle East

The conference, co-sponsored by the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies of the Hebrew University, and the Levtzion Center, took place on March 8, 2011, at the Mt. Scopus campus.

### The Annual Meeting of The Middle East and Islamic Studies Association of Israel (Meisai)

The conference was hosted by the Open University on May 25, 2011. The Levtzion Center organized a panel on Revisiting Arab Liberal Discourse.

# The Center's Staff

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