

Bericht

zum internationalen Symposium

***Roads to Paradise:
Eschatology and Concepts of
the Hereafter in Islam***

Universität Göttingen, 27. - 31. Mai 2009



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1. Das Symposium

Das internationale Symposium *“Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam”* fand vom 27. bis 31. Mai 2009 an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen statt.

Die Konferenz war ein Kooperationsprojekt, welches von Herrn Professor Dr. Sebastian Günther, Seminar für Arabistik/Islamwissenschaft der Universität Göttingen, in enger Kooperation mit seinem kanadischen Projektpartner, Herrn Professor Dr. Todd Lawson, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations der University of Toronto, inhaltlich konzipiert, vorbereitet und organisiert wurde.



ZIEL DES SYMPOSIUMS war es, die komplexen islamischen Vorstellungen zur Eschatologie und zum Jenseits sowie zur Vollendung des Einzelnen und der gesamten Schöpfung möglichst weitgehend zu erfassen, zu systematisieren und im Kontext ihrer Bedeutung für muslimisch geprägte Gemeinschaften und

Gesellschaften in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart zu analysieren. Das bedeutete zum einen, dass vor allem zentrale Inhalte und Spezifika dieser Vorstellungen sowie deren geistesgeschichtliche und gesellschaftliche Relevanz in Einzeluntersuchungen konzentriert vorgestellt und untersucht wurden; zum anderen wurden auf der Tagung Kategorien und Begriffe zu Eschatologie- und Jenseitsvorstellungen eingehend beleuchtet, die nicht nur für den Bereich der Islamwissenschaft, sondern auch für die jüdische und christliche Theologie sowie für die vergleichende Religionswissenschaft bedeutsam sind. Dieser Diskurs während des Symposiums war von den Organisatoren durch gezielte thematische Fragestellungen im Vorfeld der Veranstaltung detailliert vorbereitet und den Konferenzteilnehmern in entsprechenden Zirkularen als Anregung für ihre Konferenzbeiträge zugesandt worden.

DAS KONFERENZPROGRAMM, welches dem Bericht in Anlage beigelegt ist, verdeutlicht den interdisziplinären Ansatz und das breite Spektrum der Themen dieser Tagung.

Die schwerpunktmäßige Aufteilung der Vorträge auf insgesamt sechzehn, nach Themen geordnete Arbeitskreise mit je drei Präsentationen stellte sicher, dass die hier aufgeworfenen Fragen ausführlich erörtert werden konnten. Diese

Gliederung ermöglichte darüber hinaus, dass Einzelaspekte bestimmter Themen adäquat in die Gesamtstruktur des Konferenzablaufes eingebunden waren.

Die Hauptergebnisse der Konferenz wurden am letzten Konferenztag auf einer Podiumsdiskussion durch speziell vorbereitete Kurzbeiträge der *Panel Chairs* präzisiert und im Plenum zur nochmaligen Diskussion gestellt. Da das Englische die alleinige offizielle Konferenzsprache war, war eine umfassende Einbindung aller Konferenzteilnehmer in den fachlichen Meinungsaustausch zu jeder Zeit gewährleistet.

TEILNEHMER: Mehr als 100 renommierte Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler aus dem In- und Ausland nahmen mit Vorträgen, durch die Leitung eines Panels oder mit Diskussionsbeiträgen aktiv an dieser Fachtagung teil; unter ihnen waren 66 promovierte Fachvertreter (davon 33 Professoren).



Die Mehrheit der Teilnehmer kam aus Kanada und den USA. Zu ihnen gehörten auch die Fachvertreter für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft der Universitäten Chicago, New York, Yale und Toronto. Wissenschaftler aus Europa (insbesondere Deutschland und Großbritannien), der arabischen Welt und dem Iran waren ebenso prominent vertreten.

Die Einladungen zum Symposium waren gezielt vor allem an Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler ergangen, die sich bereits in unterschiedlichen Kontexten mit dem Thema der Eschatologie- und der Jenseitsvorstellungen im Islam auseinandergesetzt hatten. Eingeladen waren des Weiteren mehrere Nachwuchswissenschaftler, die durch z.T. besonders innovative Interpretationen zentraler islamischer Auffassungen die Diskussion besonders bereicherten.



Aus der Politik, dem religiösen und sozialen Leben Niedersachsens waren mehrere prominente Gäste zur Eröffnungsfeier wie auch in einzelnen Panels der Konferenz anwesend. Zudem waren zahlreiche Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler der Philosophischen und Theologischen Fakultäten der Universität Göttingen der

Einladung zum Göttinger Paradies-Symposium gefolgt.

Das Symposium wurde eröffnet durch Herrn Professor Dr. Sebastian Günther, Lehrstuhl für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft der Universität Göttingen. Danach überbrachte Herr Professor Dr. Galal Elgemeie, Kulturattaché der Arabischen Republik Ägypten, ein Grußwort von Herrn Professor Dr. Mahmoud Zakzouk, dem Minister für Religiöse Angelegenheiten Ägyptens. Herr Professor Dr. Reinhard Kratz, Direktor des Centrums Orbis Orientalis in Göttingen, begrüßte die Teilnehmer im Auftrag des Präsidenten der Universität Göttingen, Herrn Professor Dr. Kurt von Figura.

Zentraler Programmpunkt der Eröffnungsveranstaltung war der Festvortrag von Herrn Professor Dr. Tilman Nagel mit dem Titel *Paradise Lost?*

Die Göttinger Presse wie auch lokale Radiosender berichteten detailliert von der Eröffnung und dem Fortgang der Konferenz.



DIE PUBLIKATION der überarbeiteten Konferenzbeiträge wird 2010 erfolgen. Diese ist als ein zweibändiges Referenzwerk zur Eschatologie und zu den Jenseitsvorstellungen im Islam konzipiert. Eine Publikationszusage liegt vom niederländischen Verlag BRILL ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS vor. Brill plant, dieses Buch in die Reihe *Islamic History and Civilization* (hrsg. von Prof. Dr. Wadad Kadi, University of Chicago) aufzunehmen.

2. Thematischer Hintergrund und Fragestellungen

Gläubige Muslime sehen sich aufgrund der bewegenden Aussagen des Korans über Paradies und Hölle mit den für sie essentiellen Fragen konfrontiert, ob sie im Jenseits Verdammnis oder Lohn, Verurteilung oder Fürsprache, Hölle oder Paradies zu erwarten haben. Diese im Koran vermittelten eindringlichen sprachlichen Bilder einer bevorstehenden Apokalypse und des damit einhergehenden Endes der bekannten Welt, die koranischen Darstellungen vom Jüngsten Gericht und von den Freuden des Paradieses, aber auch Szenarien der Abrechnung in der Hölle prägen seit Jahrhunderten sowohl die Lebens- als auch die Glaubenswelt der Muslime nachhaltig. Die daraus hervorgegangenen ontologischen Fragen und Diskurse zum „Leben nach dem Tod“ wurden in der islamischen Welt immer wieder thematisiert, sei es in theologischen, juristischen, philosophischen, polemischen und literarischen Texten oder in Zeugnissen der Architektur, Kunst und Musik.

Vor diesem vielschichtigen thematischen Hintergrund wurden auf dem Symposium vor allem zwei zentrale Themenkomplexe untersucht: Der erste betraf all jene Fragen, die sich im Koran und in den arabischen und persischen Werken der autoritativen mittelalterlichen Gelehrten sowie in den Texten einiger moderner muslimischer Autoren konkret auf die Existenz des Menschen nach dem Tode beziehen. Ausgehend von den genannten Schriftzeugnissen wurden hierbei u.a. folgende Fragestellungen diskutiert: Gibt es eine körperliche oder lediglich eine seelische Wiederauferstehung nach dem Tode? Wie gelangt der Mensch bzw. seine Seele in das Jenseits bzw. in das Paradies? Welche praktischen



Erwägungen spielen beim Übergang vom Diesseits in das Jenseits eine Rolle? Wie wird über das Erdendasein gerichtet?

Der zweite große Themenkreis berührte zum einen die vielfältigen Vorstellungen vom Ende der bekannten Welt sowie die koranischen und außer-koranischen islamischen Visionen und Heilserwartungen von einer gottverheißenden neuen Welt. Zum andern wurden hier die Konzeptionen muslimischer Gelehrter zum Jüngsten Gericht und dem „ewigen Gottesreich“ untersucht.

Der zeitliche Bogen der inhaltlichen Auseinandersetzung umspannte die Anfänge des Islams bis hin zur Gegenwart. Dies gewährleistete, die Entwicklung der islamischen Geistesgeschichte in möglichst vielen Facetten zu berücksichtigen. Die in den Einzelbeiträgen vorgestellten Forschungen untersuchten deshalb nicht nur islamische Jenseitserwartungen in ihren „historischen“ Zusammenhängen, sondern z.T. auch ganz „aktuelle“ Bezüge (etwa im Hinblick auf die Problematik der sogenannten Selbstmordattentäter und ihrer Erwartung, durch ihre Tat direkt ins Paradies einzugehen).

Diese große thematische Vielfalt der islamischen Endzeit- und Paradiesvorstellungen machte es zwingend erforderlich, in den Vorträgen und Diskussionen auch jenen einschlägigen Vorstellungen Raum zu geben, die neben der etablierten religiösen Gelehrtenliteratur der verschiedenen islamischen Glaubensrichtungen stehen: mehrere Konferenzbeiträge widmeten sich dem mystischen Erbe im Islam, den Zeugnissen der islamischen schöngeistigen Literatur, der Kunst und Architektur sowie bestimmten Fragen aus dem Bereich der islamischen Naturwissenschaften, insbesondere der Astronomie.

Um die Analysen und Diskussionen zu diesen Problemkreisen während der Konferenz mit möglichst maximaler Effektivität zu gewährleisten, war bei der

Vorbereitung der Veranstaltung besonders viel Wert auf thematisch schlüssige Panels sowie eine klar strukturierte Programmfolge gelegt worden. Diese Entscheidung trug maßgeblich zum Erfolg der Konferenz bei.

Abschließend lässt sich noch feststellen, dass gerade die Teilnahme von Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern „aus Orient und Okzident“ dieses internationale Symposium, das sich einem religiös so sensiblen Thema wie „Eschatologie- und Paradiesvorstellungen im Islam“ widmete, zu einem in jeder Hinsicht erfolgreichen wissenschaftlichen Ereignis werden ließ.

Ein festlicher Empfang für alle Konferenzteilnehmer am ersten Konferenztag in der Gips-Abguss-Sammlung des Archäologischen Instituts der Universität Göttingen und ein Ausflug bei wunderbarem Wetter zur historischen WARTBURG mit anschließendem Besuch in der BACH-STADT EISENACH rundeten das Göttinger „Paradies-Symposium“ ab.



Weitere Einzelheiten zur Tagung finden sich auf der Website des Seminars für Arabistik/Islamwissenschaft:

<http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/113739.html>

Anlagen:

1. Bericht zum Symposium auf Englisch
2. Konferenzprogramm des Symposiums „Roads to Paradise“

Symposium

Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam”

University of Göttingen, 27 – 31 May 2009



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Paradise and the afterlife are among the key issues of Islamic religiosity. For centuries, Muslim scholars have been contemplating the many verses in the Quran that speak to these themes while attempting to achieve a better understanding of such topics as the fate and condition of individual souls after death, the nature of the afterlife, the resurrection of the dead to face divine judgment, and the signs and portents that will precede the Last Days. In modern times, paradise is sometimes used as a metaphor by secular thinkers to express their vision of a just and prosperous society within an Islamic framework. Suicide bombers, on the other hand, often refer to themselves as martyrs who are promised eternal reward in the afterlife.

The international symposium, *"Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam,"* convened at the University of Göttingen, Germany, was concerned with analysing these and other important features of Islamic thought. The five-day conference in May 2009 was organised and chaired by



Sebastian Günther, Director of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Göttingen, and Todd Lawson, Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Toronto. The meeting offered a unique opportunity to discuss some of the most salient issues of Muslim eschatology and to relate them to the religious and socio-political matrix in which they appeared. More than sixty prominent senior Islamicists and young scholars of Islam from Europe, North America and the Middle East took part in the conference. Participants represented a broad variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, providing for an exciting and unique exchange of perspectives based on the common ground of academic principles.

At the opening ceremony held in the beautiful medieval Lecture Hall of the State and University Library of Göttingen, Sebastian Günther welcomed participants on behalf of the organisers while Reinhard Kratz, Professor of Theology and Director of the Centrum Orbis Orientalis, greeted the gathering on behalf of the President of the University of Göttingen, Kurt von Figura. Galal Elegemeie, Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of the Arabic Republic of Egypt in Germany, then conveyed the best wishes of Mahmoud Zakzouk, Egyptian Minister of Religious Affairs to the participants. At the ceremony's conclusion, Professor Emeritus Tilman Nagel (Göttingen) delivered the distinguished inaugural lecture, "Paradise Lost." Based on a close reading of certain quranic passages and an analysis of such texts as *al-Fatāwā al-hadīthiyya* by Ibn Hajar al-Haythamī (d. 1567), Nagel stressed

the fact that in Islam, the boundaries between this world and the hereafter are often blurred. He demonstrated, on the basis of the work mentioned above, that events which are supposed to happen in the next world are sometimes already foreshadowed in the here and now or, indeed, that they even occur “beforehand” in this world.

Following Tilman Nagel’s lecture, the first six conference papers were presented in two simultaneous panels. Panel 1, entitled “*Paradise and its Pleasures*” (chaired by Stefan Wild, University of Bonn), opened with Asma Afsaruddin’s (University of Notre Dame) paper, “*Dying in the Path of God: Martyrdom, Celestial Rewards, and the Construction of Moral Excellence.*” Afsaruddin examined the development of the cult of martyrdom in Islamic thought, based on two quranic statements that are often interpreted as promising celestial reward and paradisiacal pleasures for those who die in the path of God while defending Islam. In her presentation, she stressed the fact that the diversity of interpretations found in the exegetical literature has to be seen as an important corrective to such a cultic reverence for martyrdom suffered in battle. In his “*Paradise and Pasture*,” Jaako Hämeen-Anttila (University of Helsinki) compared the quranic image of Paradise with scenes of nature found in pre-Islamic poetry and descriptions of gardens found in later works of Arabic literature. His paper studied the reciprocal influences between these texts vis-à-vis garden imagery. Finally, Nerina Rustomji (St. John’s University) in her “*Reconfigured Pleasures: Functions of Families and Servants in the Paradisiacal Household*,” analyzed the structures of the paradisiacal household and the role of family, male servants and female companions, while highlighting an apparent dialectic between reuniting the various branches of the believer’s family and the sensual pleasures promised to the believer in Paradise.

The second panel, “*Comparative Eschatology*” (chaired by Josef van Ess, University of Tübingen), was dedicated to a discussion of concepts about Paradise and the afterlife in Islam and Christianity in comparative perspective. Sidney H. Griffith’s (The Catholic University of America, Washington), “*St. Ephraem the Syrian, the Quran, and the Grapevines of Paradise: An Essay in Comparative Eschatology*” explored the ongoing controversy about the Syriac origins of the word *hūrī* and the paradisiacal concepts connected with it, an issue notoriously taken up by Christoph Luxenberg. Focusing on the works of Ephraem the Syrian, Griffith suggested that Christian Aramaic texts offer a useful context for understanding the imaginative world of the quranic Paradise. In her paper, “*The Messiah in Arabic Praise Poetry*,” Beatrice Gruendler (Yale University) presented an overview of the depictions of Jesus in selected Arabic poems. She showed that the Messiah is a many-faced figure in these texts, serving at times as an emblem of identification and at others as the object of polemics. Barbara Roggema (John Cabot University, Rome) discussed in her paper, “*The Ins and Outs of the Other World: The Interdependency of 9th and 10th Century Christian and Muslim Views on the Afterlife*,”

texts that shed light on the inter-religious debates of the early Abbasid period concerning Muslim and Christian concepts.

The second day of the conference commenced with session 3, *"Visualizing Paradise"* (chaired by Osama Abi-Mershed, Georgetown University). In her contribution, *"Visualising Encounters on the Road to Paradise,"* Karin Ruehrdanz (University of Toronto) analysed images from the Persian and the Ottoman Empires that illustrate Paradise as the first abode of man, as the destination of privileged travellers and wayfarers, and as the final home of believers after the resurrection. Present-day paintings were addressed by Silvia Naef (University of Geneva) in *"Where is Paradise on Earth? Visual Artists from the Middle East and the Construction of a Mythic Past."* Naef explained how a largely stereotypical concept of a glorified past has been used by



artists in the modern Middle Eastern to construct a vision of a lost earthly Paradise that has profound implications for contemporary societies. In his paper, *"Issues of Vision and Visuality in Paradise,"* Simon O'Meara (American University of Kuwait) took up the issue of visuality, a concept that has been rarely applied to the field of Islamic art history. Based on a study of certain hadiths concerning visuality in Paradise, O'Meara emphasised that the Muslim Paradise is depicted as a place in which nothing is hidden, thus forming a clear contrast to the earthly life of the believers in labyrinthine medieval Muslim cities which can be characterised as largely limiting the vision of their inhabitants by means of their architectural structure.

Complementing the papers on art history featured in panel 3, the presentations in panel 4 (chaired by Lutz Richter-Bernburg, University of Tübingen) examined the various ways of *"Travelling to Paradise."* First, Monika Mühlböck (University of Vienna) dealt with Islamic obligations and customs carried out in Muslim communities to ensure Paradise for a dying person in her contribution, *"Before Entering Paradise: Islamic Religious Norms and Cultural Traditions at the Point of Death."* In the second paper of the session entitled *"Description of Paradise in Mi'rāj narratives,"* Robert Tottoli (University of Naples) analyzed the traditions and descriptions of Paradise in works dedicated to the Night Journey and the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and demonstrated the interesting fact that the wealth of ornate detail in such tales is actually a product of the pre-modern

period. Focusing on one of the most famous books of medieval Italy, Samar Attar (Sidney) showed in her paper, *"An Islamic Paradiso in a Medieval Christian Poem: Dante's Divine Comedy Revisited,"* the extent to which Dante used Islamic sources to write his masterpiece. Furthermore, she discussed the question of why some Western scholars have been reluctant to study the clear connection between Islamic and Arabic civilization on the most sophisticated and influential products of Christian European culture.

Session 5 was entitled *"Images, Symbols, and Concepts of Eschatology"* (chaired by Susanne Enderwitz, University of Heidelberg). The first paper by Sebastian Günther (University of Göttingen), *"God does not disdain to strike a similitude (Q 2:26): Images and Symbols from Quranic Eschatology as Theological Axioms,"* explored the quranic portrayal of Doomsday, Paradise and Hell. By analyzing the functions of similitudes, metaphors and figures of speech in quranic descriptions of the Hereafter, Günther demonstrated how the relevant passages not only attest to a specific diction and aesthetics in treating a crucial theological creed of Muslim faith, but are also intended to serve a didactic purpose as well. Günther shed light on the ways in which medieval eschatological works illustrate the quranic perceptions of Doomsday and the Hereafter and occasionally merge them with ideas from other religious systems such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Egyptian religious traditions. The discussion of quranic paradisiacal imagery was continued by Andrew Lane (University of Toronto) in his paper, *"Robed in Green Garments of Silk and Brocade (Q 18:31): Quranic Imagery within Rationalist Exegesis."* Lane outlined how the more "rationalist" thread of quranic exegesis, associated with such commentators as al-Tūsī and al-Zamakhsharī, interpreted verses in the Quran that employed rich imagery to speak about the Day of Judgement and the Hereafter. Finally, Fred Donner (University of Chicago) introduced *"A Typology of Eschatological Concepts,"* formulating a set of categories of basic features found in many eschatological schemes. Donner observed that polarities such as other-worldly vs. this-worldly eschatologies, religious vs. secular eschatologies, moral vs. amoral eschatologies function as primary categories in the description of eschatological concepts in various religious traditions.

"Considerations of the Hereafter in Literature and Art" was the topic of panel 6 (chaired by Jens Scheiner, Free University of Berlin). In his paper, *"The Hereafter in Islamic Popular Imagery,"* Ulrich Marzolph (University of Göttingen) spoke about popular Shi'ite depictions of Paradise and the Hereafter related to important events in Shi'i history such as Karbala. He showed how these pictures are used as the backdrop for posters and murals produced in post-revolutionary Iran. Focusing on the narrative strategies of classical Islamic historiographers, Ghada Jayyusi-Lehn (American University of Sharjah) examined historical accounts about the caliphs on their deathbeds and highlighted the ways in which medieval authors used notions of Paradise and Hell to characterize important personalities

of Islamic history. Her paper, *"The Death of a Caliph: Medieval Muslim Historians on Eschatology and Paradise,"* demonstrated how a critical reading of historical accounts can help determine the historian's biases. Taking the audience with her to Mamluk Cairo, Tehnyat Majeed (The Cleveland Museum of Art) analyzed in her paper, *"The Chār Muhammad Inscription, Shafā'a and the Mamluk Qubbat al-Mansūriyya in Cairo,"* the metaphysical and religious meaning of the Chār Muḥammad inscription in the mausoleum of Sultan al-Mansūr Qalāwūn. Majeed discussed the profound relationship, both spiritual and physical, between this building and the Qubbat al-Sakhra in Jerusalem, a monument that is featured in some of the traditions about Resurrection and the Last Day of Judgement.



The papers of panel 7, (consisting of two presentations and chaired by Martin Jagonak, University of Göttingen) examined *"(Inter)-Dependencies in Viewing the Other World."* The first contribution, Walid Saleh's (University of Toronto) *"Beyond al-Qazwīnī: Two Unstudied Mirabella Islamic Treatises and their Depiction of the Afterlife"* provided a detailed discussion of two 'ajā'ib or Mirabella texts by Muhammad b. Sa'īd al-Sunhājī and Mar'ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī, which had so far been mostly neglected by Western scholars. Next, Alexey A. Khismatulin (Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg) drew attention to the Ahl-i Haqq religion in his paper, *"A Step from Paradise: Barzakh in the Ahl-i Haqq Teachings."* Khismatulin offered a vivid description of the intermediate world, focusing on the fate of the individual soul when entering and leaving the isthmus.

In session 8 (chaired by Verena Klemm, University of Leipzig), participants heard three papers on the theme of *"Shi'i, Philosophical and Esoteric Contemplations of*

Paradise and the Eschaton." In his "And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord (Q 39:69): Qā'im and Qiyāma in Early Twelver Shi'ism," Omid Ghaemmaghami (University of Toronto) examined the eschatological role of the Qā'im. Ghaemmaghami explored the implications of several early texts that declare the appearance of the Qā'im to be the Day of Resurrection as opposed to an event that precedes it. Omar Ali-de-Unzaga (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London) concentrated in his paper, "Spiritual Vision, Resurrection and the Adamic Drama Actualised: The Linguistic and Esoteric Understanding of the Afterlife in the Epistles of the Pure Brethren (Rasā'il ikhwān al-Safā')," on the concepts of resurrection and spiritual vision put forward by the Brethren of Purity of medieval Iraq, explaining the ways in which this group understood religious language. The last paper in this panel, Elizabeth Alexandrin's (University of Manitoba) "Paradise as the Abode of Pure Knowledge: Reconsidering al-Mu'ayyad's 'Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism'," dealt with the paradisiacal concepts of al-Mu'ayyad, the important 11th-century Ismā'īlī scholar. Special emphasis was laid on his understanding of the celestial rewards as being intellectual (as distinct from physical), while discussing the sources of his philosophical teachings.

The central topics of session 9: "*Paradise, Eschatology and Philosophical Speculations*" (chaired by As'ad Khairallah, American University in Beirut) were philosophical reflections of Resurrection, Eschatology and the Hereafter. In his paper "*'Being-Towards-Resurrection' as a Theme of Philosophical Shi'ism*," Hermann Landolt (Institute of Ismaili Studies) reflected on the philosophy of existence laid down by the great Safavid-era polymath, Mullā Sadrā. Landolt situated Sadrā's speculations on 'bodily resurrection' in the rich tradition of Islamic mystical-philosophical thought, raising the question of what was "Shi'i" and what was "philosophical" in the great scholar's thought. Next, Wilferd Madelung (Oxford University) showed in his "*Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Interpretation of Traditional Islamic Eschatology in his Masā'il al-Madnūn*," how al-Ghazālī tried to reconcile traditional Islamic dogmas about the resurrection and the hereafter with the doctrines of the philosophers. Madelung explained that in his still unpublished *Masā'il al-Madnūn*, al-Ghazālī discussed eschatological dogmas like resurrection, the temporary recomposition of body and soul for questioning in the tomb and the intercession of the Prophet, against the background of Avicennan and frankly Aristotelian philosophical doctrines. The third paper of the panel by Thomas Würtz (University of Zürich) was entitled "*Emphasizing the Orthodox Conception of the Hereafter: Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 1390) Examination of Certain Mu'tazilite and Philosophical Objections*." Here, Würtz demonstrated how the Muslim scholar Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, whose work is still highly appreciated in the Islamic world, dealt with philosophical objections against orthodox Islamic eschatological convictions.

Session 10 (chaired by Lale Behzadi, University of Göttingen) was dedicated to descriptions of *"The Landscape and Composition of the Hereafter."* Ingrid Hehmeyer (Ryerson University, Toronto) showed in her *"The Configuration of the Heavens in Islamic Astronomy,"* how Islamic astronomy approached topics such as celestial motion and geometrical models of the heavens, thus establishing a rich and lively debate in the course of which advancements were made to explain the configuration of the heavens. In his paper *"Al-Nahsa's Paradise: Aesthetics and the Botanical Imagination in the Arabic Renaissance,"* Jens Hanssen (University of Toronto) analysed the botanical metaphors used in names of newspapers, journals and organizations during the early Arab renaissance, linking them to the general political and aesthetic reform discourse of this period.

Panel 11 (chaired by Irene Schneider, University of Göttingen), *"Paradise and Utopia,"* opened the third day of the conference. In his paper *"Proximities to Paradise,"* Jamel Velji (University of California, Santa Barbara) discussed the interplay between apocalypse and authority in medieval Ismā'īlism. In his paper, *"Strategies of Paradise: Paradise Virgins and Utopia,"* Maher Jarrar shifted the focus back to quranic descriptions of Paradise and undertook a detailed study of the beautiful pure companions and their reception in Muslim literature. He shed light especially on the rhetorical and allegorical usage of the paradise virgins in various branches of Islamic thought, exploring the religious and social milieus in which this part of the quranic paradisiacal narrative was deployed. In her paper, Ruth Mas (University of Colorado at Boulder) addressed *"Secular Utopias and Personal Paradises in Contemporary Islamic Thought"* and demonstrated how contemporary Franco-Maghrebi Muslim intellectuals use elements of classical Islamic paradisiacal descriptions in the context of utopist notions of a heaven on earth based on secular liberal norms.



Session 12 (chaired by Karen Bauer, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London) focused on heterodox concepts of *"Reincarnation, Afterlife, and the Awaited Mahdī."* Mohammad Hassan Khalil (University of Illinois-Champaign) introduced the audience to perceptions of *"Reincarnation in Islamic Thought"* and outlined how certain quranic statements could

be reread by Sufi interpreters to support ideas of reincarnation. Khalil also showed that it was possible to derive concepts of rebirth in Islam by discussing classical problems in theodicy. In his paper *"The Awaited Mahdī in the Works and Thought of*

Sunni Mystics: the Case of Ibn al-‘Arabī,” Issam Eido (University of Damascus) examined how the famous Andalusian mystic perceived the Mahdī in his mystical system. Based on a close reading of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, Eido posed the possibility that Ibn al-‘Arabī was convinced that the Mahdī would usher in a new religious system as opposed to simply revivifying the Islamic shari’a. Mystical concepts of the eschaton were also thematized by Shahzad Bashir (Stanford University) in his paper “*Paradise and Hell Materialized: Life and Afterlife in the Works of Fadl Allāh Astarābādī*.” The Persian Fadl Allāh Astarābādī, founder of the Hurūfī sect, set forth in his works what he thought to be the true esoteric meanings of quranic pronouncements regarding the afterlife, defining his own time as an apocalyptic period characterized by a diminishing distinction between life and afterlife.

The conference program continued with panel 13 (chaired by Arnim Heinemann, Free University of Berlin), which was dedicated to “*Myths and Motifs of Eschatology and the Hereafter*.” The first presentation in this panel was “*Paradise as Apocalyptic Motif in the Quran*” by Todd Lawson (University of Toronto). Lawson discussed the Paradise motif as part of a set of themes and topics in the



Quran that constitute apocalypse as this literary genre has come to be examined and understood in religious and literary studies. Given the fact that scholarship of apocalypses has so far rarely taken note of Muslim textual, social and historical phenomena and expressions, Lawson’s paper suggested new approaches and methods both for quranic studies and for the study of apocalyptic in general. Feras Hamza’s (American University of Dubai) paper described “*The Development of the Concept of ‘Temporary Hell’ in Early Islam*.” He showed how this concept found its way into the early Muslim orthodox theology of the early second century (AH). As a motif with a likely Judaeo-Christian background, it faced resistance from ‘scripturalists’ within Muslim society, just as it was later the case with the concept of the eschatological intercession (*shafā’a*) of the Prophet. Consequently, early Muslim theology preserves a controversial debate about the validity of these two concepts. The panel closed with Christian Lange’s (University of Edinburgh) contribution, “*Taxonomy and Ideology: The Muslim Hereafter as Myth*.” Lange explored the ways in which structuralist and post-structuralist models of analysing myth can be used to study Muslim narratives of Paradise and Hell.



Concepts of Paradise in Persian Sufi traditions was the topic of session 14 (chaired by Philip G. Kreyenbroek, University of Göttingen), entitled "*Paradise through the Eyes of the Mystics*." Katja Föllmer (University of Göttingen) illustrated in her "*Paradise through Spiritual Experience: The Mystical Way to God in*

'Attār's Allegorical Work The Conference of the Birds" how the Persian Sufi poet Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār deployed the idea of Paradise in his work. Mohammad Sadegh-Zahedi's (Imam Khomeini International University, Teheran) paper focused on the "*The Concept of Paradise in Rūmī's Thought*," describing the mystical interpretation of Paradise offered by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. In her presentation "*A Paradise Above and Beyond the Janna*," Maryam Moazzen (University of Toronto) introduced the audience to the descriptions and discussions of Paradise in the works of 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadhānī. She highlighted especially the centrality of ardent love in Hamadhānī's writings and meditations on paradise.

In the afternoon, two papers on "*Popular Discourses about Paradise and the Afterlife*" were presented in panel 15 (chaired by Jens Peter Laut, University of Göttingen). Ludmila Hanisch (Berlin) traced the history of Islamic and Arabic studies in Göttingen and other major German academic centers in her "*Perceptions of Paradise in the Writings of Julius Wellhausen, Mark Lidzbarski and Hans Heinrich Schaeder*." Martin Riexinger's (University of Göttingen) paper "*Eschatology as Science Fiction – Resurrection, Doomsday, the Intermediate World and the Hereafter in Recent Nurcu Literature*" demonstrated how concepts from Western popular culture such as works of science fiction or fringe movements such as parapsychology have found their way into contemporary Turkish Muslim thought on eschatology and the Afterlife.

The conference's final panel was entitled, "*Paradise Meets Modernity*" (chaired by Umar Ryad, University of Leiden). In her "*Expulsion from Paradise: Granada in Radwa Ashur's Gharnata (1994) and in Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh (1995)*," Suha Kudsieh (University of Toronto) analyzed two depictions of Muslim ruled al-Andalus as an earthly Paradise juxtaposed with the bleak socio-political realities of the Middle East and India. Edwin Wieringa (University of Cologne) examined in his contribution, "*Paradise is in the Shadow of the Swords: Paradisiacal Imagery in 19th-century Acehese War Propaganda*," the paradisiacal motives in Acehese literature vis-a-vis holy war against the Dutch and explored

the ways Paradise is described as a stark contrast to life on earth. Finally, Liza Franke's (University of Leipzig) "Notions of Paradise in Contemporary Palestinian Thought" shed light on the usage of Quranic Paradisiacal concepts in present-day Palestinian discourse. Based on field work conducted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Franke demonstrated how images of the gardens of Paradise are used both in everyday communication and in the context of suicide operations.

Saturday, the fourth day of the conference, was dedicated to an Excursion to the historic sight of Wartburg Castle and the nearby city of Eisenach.

On Sunday, in the concluding session (chaired by Todd Lawson and Sebastian Günther) the panel chairs of the conference summarized the major themes of their panels and commented briefly on the papers. It became clear that Islamic notions of eschatology and the afterlife as seen by the various



scholars, are remarkably varied and diverse. Taking the quranic descriptions of Paradise, Hell and the eschaton as points of reference, Muslim religious thinkers and intellectuals of every period have arrived at their respective individual understandings of the fate of the deceased and the end of the world as we know it. While some of them occupied themselves with rational analysis and logical argumentation, others embarked on a mystical contemplation of a deeper understanding of this and the other world. Whereas some of the concepts they put down on paper can only be understood against the background of the religious history of the classical period, others reveal conversations between modern Western thought and classical Muslim meditations. Paradise and Hell have proven not only to be fascinating objects of religious scholarship, but attractive themes taken up by medieval and modern Muslim artisans and painters. Of course, notions of both earthly and otherworldly paradises are also among the topics most popular with "Islamicate" writers through the ages. It was, moreover, obvious that questions about the afterlife and the end of the world cannot be separated from other important questions of human life and thought in general and religious speculation in particular.

After the plenary discussion, Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson expressed their gratitude to the conference participants for their contributions. They also acknowledged the contribution of the numerous student volunteers without whose assistance the conference would not have been possible. Finally, they took

the opportunity to draw the participants' attention to the projected volume, "Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam," which will include the conference proceedings and is scheduled for publication in 2010 as part of Brill's *Islamic History and Civilization* Series.



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For additional information about the conference, visit the website of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Göttingen, at:

<http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/113739.html>