

Conferences

Islamic Law Faces the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century

The three-day international conference which took place at the Jerusalem Van Leer Institute on 19-21 October 2009 was the culmination of a two-year research workshop on the same topic, directed by Prof. Aharon Layish of the HU (Emeritus) and Dr. Ron Shaham, Director of the Nehemia Levtzion Center for the Study of Islam, as a collaboration between the Center and the Jerusalem Van Leer Institute. The workshop was aimed at scholars and advanced students working on various aspects of the changes that have taken place in Islamic law from the late nineteenth century up to the present day. The workshop is an attempt at a comprehensive and integrative analysis of these changes from the combined perspectives of history, law and the social sciences, including comparisons with Jewish law, where possible. Among the topics that were discussed are Islamic law in the late Ottoman period, the codification of Islamic law in the nation-state and its significance, family law reforms, the application of Islamic law in civil courts, the revival of Islamic law in the nation-state, Islamic law in Saudi Arabia, the application of Islamic law in non-Muslim states and radical Islamist legal interpretations.

During the 2007/2008 academic year, the workshop convened for four introductory sessions at the Jerusalem Van Leer Institute (see report in the Center's bulletin no. 4). During the academic year 2008/2009 the workshop convened for six meetings. Each meeting, focusing on a pre-circulated paper

written by one of the participants, included a short introduction by the author, comments by a discussant and an open discussion.

The international conference, following the pattern of the workshop, started with an opening lecture by Prof. Aharon Layish, titled: "Islamic Law in the Modern World: Challenges and Prospects," which set out the general historical and thematic framework for the conference's themes. The seven following sessions were:

- Islamic Law in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and in Modern Turkey (Dr. Avi Rubin of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Prof. Haim Gerber of the HU and Dr. Nicholas Foster of the University of London; discussants: Dr. Eyal Ginio of the HU, Dr. Anat Lapidot-Firilla of the HU and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Prof. Haim Gerber of the HU).
- Renewal of legal theory (Prof. Eric Chaumont of the French Research Center in Jerusalem

and CNRS, and Dr. Muhammad al-Atawneh of Ben-Gurion University; discussants: Prof. Robert Gleave of the University of Exeter and Dr. Nimrod Hurvitz of Ben-Gurion University).

- Islamic law, human rights and gender (Prof. Irene Schneider of Gottingen University and Dr. Raquel Ukeles of the HU; discussants: Dr. Noga Efrati and Dr. Liat Kozma of the HU).
- Developments in Shi'i law (Ori Goldberg of Tel Aviv University and Prof. Robert Gleave of the University of Exeter; discussants: Dr. Eldad Pardo of the HU and Prof. Eric Chaumont of the French Research Center in Jerusalem and CNRS).
- Islamic law and medicine (Dr. Ron Shaham of the HU and Prof. Aref Abu Rabia of Ben-Gurion University; discussants: Prof. Vardit Rispler-Chaim of Haifa University and Oren Asman of the HU).
- Islamic law in Europe (Prof. Mathias Rohe of Erlangen University



and Dr. Ian Edge of the University of London; discussants: Prof. Amikam Nachmani of Bar-Ilan University and Prof. Haim Sandberg of the College of Management in Rishon Le-Zion).

- Islamic law in Israel (Dr. Moussa Abou Ramadan of the Carmel Academic Center in Haifa; Prof. Haim Sandberg of the College of Management in Rishon Le-Zion and Dr. Adam Hofri-Winogradow of the HU; discussants: Iyad Zahalka, Director of the Shari'a Courts in Israel and Dr. Nurit Tsafir of Tel Aviv University).

The conference ended with a panel discussion on the status of Islamic

law in a non-Muslim state, chaired by the President of the HU, Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson, and with the participation of Dr. Nicholas Foster of the University of London, Prof. Mathias Rohe of Erlangen University, Prof. Aharon Layish of the HU and Mr. Iyad Zahalka, Director of the Shari'a Courts in Israel. The discussions on the status of Islamic law in non-Muslim states were of particular interest, because the European cases (e.g., the United Kingdom and Germany, which have considerable Muslim minorities) and the Israeli case (in which Islamic law is the applicable family law for the Muslim minority) beg for comparison. From another perspective, it seems that

the pressing need to find legal solutions for these minorities, who strive to maintain their Islamic identity in an alien environment, draws an impressive measure of creativity from those legal scholars who are developing the novel legal field of "Islamic minorities' jurisprudence" (*fiqh al-aqalliyyat al-muslima*).

A collective volume composed of articles based on papers submitted to the conference, as well as on solicited articles, is currently being edited by the directors of the workshop.

The Shi'a: Theology, Law and Culture

During the last decades, scholarship on the Shi'a has been overshadowed by the focus on modern Iran, especially its political system and relationships with its neighbors and with the West, with special emphasis on regional and global security concerns and on the supply of oil. Concurrently, Shi'i communities in the Middle East have undergone important transformations, from political empowerment in Iraq and Lebanon, through vibrant debates on a host of religio-theological issues. The organizers of the conference, Prof. Meir Bar-Asher and Dr. Ron Shaham of the HU and Prof. Meir Litvak of Tel Aviv University felt, therefore, that there was a need to discuss more neglected topics concerning the Shi'a, such as religious theory and practice, Sunni-Shi'i encounters, including ecumenical

enterprises, developments in Shi'i religious and state laws and gender.

The conference, which was held on 2-3 June, 2010, was organized as collaboration between the Levtzion Center and the Center for Iranian Studies of Tel Aviv University. The first day took place at the Mt. Scopus campus of the HU and included two sessions:

- Religion and law (Michael Epstein and Roy Vilozy of the HU; Prof. Rainer Brunner of CNRS Paris).
- Representation of Shi'i figures in literature and art (Dr. Julia Rubanovitch and Dr. Raya Shani of the HU; Dr. Liora Hendelman-Baavur of Tel Aviv University and Prof. Zeev Maghen of Bar-Ilan University).

The second day took place at Tel Aviv University and included four sessions:

- The Iraqi Shi'a between tradition and change I (Dr. Ronen Zeidel and Prof. Isaac Hasson of the HU and Dr. Elisheva Machlis of Cambridge University).
- The Iraqi Shi'a between tradition and change II (Prof. Amazia Baram and Dr. Liad Porat of Haifa University and Rachel Kantz-Feder of Tel Aviv University)
- Post-revolutionary Iran (Orly Rahimiyan of Ben-Gurion University and Dr. Ori Goldberg of Tel Aviv University).
- Traditional and novel thinking in the Iranian Shi'a (Prof. Meir Litvak of Tel Aviv University, Dr. Eldad Pardo of the HU and Dr. Daniel Tsadik of Yeshiva University).