

# ***Islamic Studies Team***

*We are excited to share a roundup of the most important events and activities from the Islamic Studies team at the Department of Middle Eastern and African Studies!*

*This document highlights our participation in international conferences, the organization of workshops, field research endeavors, and notable academic visits that have taken place recently.*

*Take a glimpse behind the scenes of our team's work!*

# International Conference: Shi'ite Islam and Contemporary Challenges

On June 12, 2024, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies hosted the second edition of the international interdisciplinary conference *Shi'ite Islam and Contemporary Challenges*, held at the Náprstek Museum in Prague. The event focused on current issues surrounding the role of Shi'ite Islam in today's world and featured a diverse range of expert contributions.

The conference explored topics such as the relationship between Shi'ite religious thought and state or society, developments in jurisprudence and legal theory, and the experiences of Shi'ite communities in the European context.



While Shi'ite Islam remains still relatively underexplored, this conference provided a valuable platform for international scholarly exchange. It significantly deepened our understanding of contemporary Shi'ism and served as a strong catalyst for future collaboration—both through the sharing of personal research experiences and the forging of new institutional ties.



# Workshop: Anthropology of Islam – Death

On April 25, 2024, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies hosted a workshop titled *Anthropology of Islam: Death*, aimed at offering a deeper anthropological perspective on Islamic understandings of death and funeral practices. The event explored the religious, spiritual, and cultural dimensions surrounding death and dying across various Islamic societies.



## Graveyard Architecture

One of the key themes was the remarkable diversity in burial sites and cemetery architecture across the Muslim world, including their symbolic meanings and regional styles.



## Regional Practices

The workshop also focused on the contrast between the normative frameworks of Islamic law—such as legal guidelines regarding grave design—and how these are interpreted and practiced in different cultural and regional contexts.



## Hands-On Demonstration

A highlight of the workshop was a live demonstration of the ritual preparation of the body before burial. This offered participants an intimate look into the symbolic and deeply personal aspects of Islamic funerary rites.

# Death in Islam – Field Research by Students and Scholars

During autumn 2024, the next phase of fieldwork for the forthcoming publication *Death in Islam* was carried out by both faculty members and MA students from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies. The project focused on documenting funeral customs and related religious and cultural practices in selected Muslim-majority countries.

## Research Locations

- Tunisia
- Morocco
- Egypt
- Türkiye
- Afghanistan



The City of the Death, Cairo

## Research Outcomes

The research offers a nuanced look at how different Islamic cultures approach death, farewell rituals, and the spiritual dimensions of burial practices. The resulting material includes a rich collection of photographs alongside valuable insights gathered through direct engagement with local communities, interviews with participants in funeral rites, and detailed observations of everyday practice.



For students, this fieldwork marked an important first step into hands-on research. It provided an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, build relationships with local communities, and gain meaningful experience in conducting anthropological research in an international context.



# Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Lecture by Dr. Andrej Mentel

On Thursday, April 17, 2025, we had the pleasure of hosting a unique guest lecture by Dr. Andrej Mentel from Comenius University in Bratislava. Drawing on his long-term fieldwork in the region, Dr. Mentel offered not only rich anthropological insights but also compelling visual material that brought the topic to life.



## 1 Sufi Orders

A significant part of the lecture was devoted to Sufi orders, with a particular focus on the Rifa'i-Badawi tradition. Dr. Mentel explored their dhikr rituals and the distinctive ways in which important religious seasons are experienced and celebrated within these communities.

## 2 Religious Practice

Through a detailed account of the order's practices, attendees gained a rare glimpse into the spiritual life of Bosnian Sufi communities—offered from an insider's, deeply contextualized perspective.

## 3 Cultural Context

The lecture also painted a broader picture of Bosnia and Herzegovina's vibrant religious and cultural landscape, offering valuable insights into the complexities and diversity that shape the region today.

# Saints' Cults in Islam – Field Research in Morocco

As part of a series of research stays in Morocco, Veronika Sobotková and Václava Tlilí visited four key cities: Rabat, Rabat-Salé, Fez, and Marrakesh. Their fieldwork focused on local mausoleums and shrines, as well as practices associated with the veneration of saints.



## Mausoleums and Shrines

Throughout their stay, they documented a wide range of religious sites and collected rich visual material capturing the architecture and layout of these sacred places.



## Rituals and Practices

The research explored not only the histories of individual saints but also the specifics of local rituals, forms of devotion, and the broader religious imaginaries tied to saintly cults.



# International Conference in Nouakchott, Mauritania

## African Conference for the Promotion of Peace

From January 21 to 23, 2025, the fifth edition of the conference *The African Continent: The Necessity of Dialogue and the Importance of Reconciliation* took place in Nouakchott, Mauritania, under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah. Scholars from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies also took part in the event.



This international gathering is one of the flagship initiatives of the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum and serves as a vital platform for dialogue and cooperation across cultures, religions, and disciplines. Each year, the conference brings together political leaders, state representatives, experts, and youth from around the globe to explore ways to promote peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding.



[www.forumforpeace.net](http://www.forumforpeace.net)

# International Conference at the Faculty of Sharīʿa wa Qānūn, Al-Azhar University

On April 26–27, we took part in the fifth annual international academic conference organized by the Faculty of Sharīʿa wa Qānūn at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Held under the patronage of Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the conference was titled *Building Sound Human Consciousness in Light of Contemporary Challenges*.



The event addressed pressing questions surrounding the formation of human consciousness in a rapidly changing world, particularly from legal and societal perspectives. Special attention was given to the role of religious and legal frameworks in shaping a balanced and ethically grounded sense of human awareness.



Václava Tlili, together with her co-researcher Dr. Mohamed Badredin Tachouche from Anglo-American University, contributed to the conference with a comparative analysis of approaches to human consciousness in Islamic and Western philosophical traditions. Their presentation also examined its foundations within Islamic jurisprudence.



Participating in this conference offered a valuable opportunity for international dialogue and knowledge exchange across the fields of law, theology, and philosophy. It also provided important insights for further research and collaboration in the study of Islamic law and intercultural dialogue.



# Presentation by Scholars from Ez-Zitouna University, Tunisia



In February, our department had the pleasure of hosting an academic visitor from the prestigious Ez-Zitouna University in Tunisia. Dr. Elias Gouissem, Vice-Rector of the university, delivered a specialized lecture focusing on contemporary methodological approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'anic text.

His presentation covered not only traditional exegetical schools but also addressed current challenges and opportunities presented by the modern context and interdisciplinary perspectives in Qur'anic studies.

