

# ACTIVITY REPORT

FSCIRE

Fondazione per le scienze religiose

La Pira Library and Research Centre for Islamic History  
and Doctrines

via U. Maddalena 112 | loc. Poggio Ridente

90137 Palermo

+39 091 9101866

palermo@fscire.it

www.fscire.it

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ON THE HISTORY  
AND DOCTRINES OF ISLAM



**PALERMO**



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# Contents

The Wednesdays of LA PIRA. Seminars on Islam. Traditions & Translations	p. 4
Workshop on The Immortality of the Soul in Islam and Christianity	p. 10
Conference on Francis, Sufism and Spiritual Poverty: Comparative Insights	p. 12



# THE WEDNESDAYS OF «LA PIRA»

Event

The Wednesdays of «La Pira»

Seminars 2019/2020 on Islam  
Traditions & Translations

Location

Palermo

Organizer

Fondazione per le scienze religiose  
La Pira Library and Research Centre for  
Islamic History and Doctrines

## The Wednesdays of «La Pira»

### ISLAM: TRADITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

18<sup>th</sup> September 2019 (16.00-18.00)

**Mohammed Hashas** (Fscire | La Pira Library and Research Centre, Palermo | Luiss, University of Rome)  
Modern Arab Scholarship on Islamic Ethics and Trusteeship Critique: A Reflective Contextualization

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 (10.00-12.00)

**Patrizia Spallino** (Università di Palermo)  
Testi arabo-islamici nella Ġazīrat al-Šiqiliyya

13<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (10.00-12.00)

**Alessandro Cancian** (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London)  
Esegesi, autorità spirituale e (ri)nascita del sufismo sciita nell'Iran del XIX secolo

29<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (10.00-12.00)

**Ivana Panzeca** (Fscire | La Pira Library and Research Centre, Palermo | Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa)  
La tradizione manoscritta persiana dello Šifā' di Ibn Sīnā in epoca Safavide

25<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (10.00-12.00)

**Víctor Pallejà de Bustinza** (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona)  
Philosophy and Sufism in the Abbasid Period: Meeting or Clash?

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 (10.00-12.00)

**Taraneh Wilkinson** (Fscire, Bologna | Georgetown University)  
Late Ottoman Muslim Religious Ethics: A Few Examples



**Mohammed Hashas**

FSCIRE | Biblioteca e Centro di ricerca La Pira, Palermo | LUISS Rome

## **Modern Arab Scholarship on Islamic Ethics and Trusteeship Critique A Reflective Contextualization**

While various Arab-Islamic modernist projects have targeted particular topics, such as politics and political authority, education, public culture, religious thought and institutions, as the starting points for reforms since the mid-nineteenth century, some other projects have taken ethics to be the issue from which any possible renewal, be it theoretical or practical, political or intellectual, must begin. This seminar-paper contextualizes this discussion and brings to the fore one of the most important, but under-researched, philosophical projects on Islamic ethics, i.e. the project of trusteeship paradigm as initiated by the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944). The aim is to examine the foundations and aspects of this paradigm of thought and how it focalizes ethics in various disciplines, such as philosophy, politics, Quranic interpretations, spirituality, medical sciences, the media, and education.

In the first part, the author refers to the place of ethics in modern and contemporary Arab-Islamic reformist thought since the so-called renaissance (nahda) of the late 19th century, as pioneered by scholars such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Jamal Eddine al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh. That current of thought then ceased in about the mid-twentieth century, and the author describes how two major schools appeared, in particular in the important intellectual scene of Egypt, and began to approach the issue of reform from ethical perspectives. The two leading figures and approaches in this period are led by the Egyptians Lutfi al-Sayyid, who represents the secular-liberal camp, and Mustafa Abdelrazik, who represents a conservative but rational camp of reforms based on the Arab philosophical tradition itself. Third in this first part of analysis is the study of the post-1967 intellectual generation. Here, too, reference is made to three major scholarly camps: a) the liberal one, championed by scholars such as Sadiq Jalal al-Azm and Abdallah Laroui; b) the leftist one, championed by scholars like Hassan Hanafi and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri; c) and a conservative one championed by scholars like Muhammad 'Imara and Taha Abderrahmane.

In the second part, a synthesis of the development of trusteeship paradigm as developed by Taha Abderrahmane, the philosopher examined, is presented by outlining its major themes and intellectual developments since the 1970s. A review of the scholarly reception of this project in the Arab world and Euro-American scholarship is offered. Overall, this seminar-chapter calls for a profounder examination of this genuine, robust philosophical project that re-centers the role of religious ethics in human development and in the renewal of its energies, senses, and relationship with the world and people. At the heart of this philosophical project of trusteeship we find ethics as the essence of human being and humanity; ethics are not separate from religion and human action but are seen rather as the core of human essence, and also as the core of the Islamic message. Based on this ontological-epistemological attitude, trusteeship as a paradigm of thought that is very critical of modernity in its European version, Taha Abderrahmane calls for spiritual modernity as the corrector of materialist modernity that is utilitarian and transcendent-free. Trusteeship paradigm presents a staunch criticism both of modern Euro-American philosophies and of modern Arab scholarship, and calls for new ways of being human. Finally, the chapter ends with a reflective and critical conclusion.

## **Patrizia Spallino**

University of Palermo

### **Arabic-Islamic texts in the Ġazīrat al-Šiqiliyya**

On October 23rd 2019, Professor Patrizia Spallino (University of Palermo) held a seminar on The Arabic Sources in Sicily during the Islamic Occupation at La Pira Library and Research Centre on Islamic History and Doctrines in Palermo. The aim of the workshop was to understand the way in which Sicily was described during the Islamic domination and how the relationship between Islam and Sicily continued, even after the re-Christianization of the territories, through three elements:

- the Arabic geographers who lived in Sicily;
- Sicilian people speaking Arabic;
- the end of Islamic domination.

After a brief introduction concerning the historical context, Professor Spallino analysed various sources to explain the different statements and perceptions.

1) The first document examined was written by Theodosius (date of birth and death are unknown), a Byzantine monk who wrote a letter describing the blockade of Syracuse during the summer of 877. He bears witness to the cruelty in Syracuse's resistance. On 21st May 878, according to the letter, Syracuse was conquered, and after thirty days the prisoners were moved to Palermo, where Theodosius remained in captivity for eight years.

2) Another testimony is offered by Ibn Hawqal (943 - 988), an Arab geographer who wrote about Sicily as an Islamic territory in which every Sicilian desired to build his own mosque or his own prayer hall. The description of Sicily was written from an Islamic point of view and wanted to present an island in which Islam spread quickly.

3) The most particular sources are those found in the writings of Ibn Makkī (d. 1108). He wrote a handbook on the most common mistakes in the Arabic language as spoken by the Sicilian population. He analysed several errors and wrote that the common people could not speak Arabic correctly. The book, composed of fifty-three chapters, did not consider that the terms considered erroneous by the author actually derived from or were expression of dialects ( i.e. they were part of the Tunisian oral language,) or were sometimes Greek terms that had been transliterated into written Arabic and become part of the language of the common people.

4) The last two sources were written during the Islamic domination. The last one analysed by Professor Spallino was written by Ibn Gubayr (1145 - 1217) during the Norman control of Sicily. He expressed his sadness at the re-Christianization of the island, in which Islam was by now agonizing in a city (Palermo) full of infidels. In this source, Professor Spallino noted how strong the relationship between Sicily and Islamic culture, in particular with the Tunisian city of Mahdiyya, was.

**Alessandro Cancian**

Institute of Ismaili Studies, London

## **Exegesis, Spiritual Authority and (Re)Birth of Shiite Sufism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Iran**

On November 13<sup>th</sup> 2019, Professor Alessandro Cancian held a seminar bearing the title “Exegesis, Spiritual Authority and (Re)Birth of Shiite Sufism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Iran: The Case of Tafsir Bayān al-sa’āda fī maqamāt al-‘ibāda”.

The seminar was developed around three main thematic areas, following a precise time frame:

- General introduction to Shiite Sufism.
- Development of Shiite Sufism from its origins to the Safavids.
- From the Safavid era to its rebirth in the eighteenth century.

According to Prof. Cancian, Sufism, which is considered by many as belonging to the Sunni tradition alone, also finds its original development in Shia Islam. The scanty attention that has been paid to the historical development of Shiite Sufism can be traced back to the fact that it was essentially an intellectual tradition, widely neglected not only by the Western academic tradition but also by the Shiite **ulama** themselves, both inside and outside Iran.

The teachings of the Imams constitute the pillars of many doctrines of early Sufism, which however developed independently from Shiism after the great occultation (**ghayba**) took place in 940 CE. Prof. Cancian, following Henry Corbin’s thought, claimed that the destruction and plundering of Alamut by Mongols in 1256 permitted the survival of the Ismailite doctrines in Persia in the form of Sufism. After recalling some major personalities of the Ismailite world, the protagonists of medieval Sufism, Professor Cancian highlighted how this period was characterized by a deep intellectual eclecticism that blurred the separation lines between Sunnism and Shiism, at least from an intellectual point of view. However, there is evidence to show that during the Safavid anti-Sufi movements were formed, while in the same period Shīrāzī founded the philosophical school of Isfahan. Shirazi was the great teacher who summarized the pre-existing philosophical tradition in a synthesis that was deeply influenced by Avicennian ontology.

According to Prof. Cancian, it was precisely in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the publication of the Tafsir Bayān al-sa’āda fī maqamāt al-‘ibāda, that Sufism returned in the Persian context. Fundamental in this sense, among other personalities, was the figure of Sultan Alī Shāh, who contributed to the redefinition of Sufism as “another way of saying Shiism” and allowed Sufi masters who succeeded him to reclaim both the history of duodeciman Shiism and Sufism. With the rise to the throne of Persia of Muhammad Shah Qajar (d. 1848), a felicitous period began for Sufi orders that passed from being excluded from mainstream religion to inclusion. During this period, the heritage of the great Sufi masters was not only maintained but elaborated, and promoted, through a work of majestic and systematic synthesis, the key elements of their thought.

**Ivana Panzeca**

FSCIRE – La Pira Library and Research Centre for Islamic History and Doctrines, Palermo – SNS, Pisa)

### **The Persian manuscript tradition of Ibn Sīnā's Šifā' in the Safavid era**

On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2020, Dr. Ivana Panzeca spoke about the manuscript tradition of Ibn Sīnā's Šifā' (The Book of Healing). Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) is one of the greatest philosophers of Islam, and his thought was deeply rooted in the previous philosophical tradition, both Greek and Arabic, and strongly influential on later philosophy, theology, and science.

The manuscript tradition of Avicenna's Ilāhiyyāt is immense, and many manuscripts preserving the Ilāhiyyāt encompass other parts of the Šifā' (the most important philosophical summa by Avicenna) or the work in its entirety. In these varying formats, the Ilāhiyyāt is transmitted by more than two hundred and sixty manuscripts worldwide. The largest repository of manuscripts is Iran, both in terms of manuscripts produced and of cities and libraries involved, followed by Turkey and India. Iran is also the place where most manuscripts of the Ilāhiyyāt stored in private collections are concentrated, thus attesting a living interest in the text of the work by Iranian scholars, from the recent past until today. The Ilāhiyyāt and the other parts of the Šifā' were copied uninterruptedly from the V/XI century, a few decades after Avicenna's death, to the XIV/XX century, less than one hundred years ago.

The available manuscripts of the Ilāhiyyāt provide precious information not only on the date of copying, but also on copyists, owners, and places where they were copied. Owners of manuscripts, on the other hand, include key-figures in Arabic philosophy, such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 673H/1274), Šadr al-Dīn al-Daštakī (d. 903H/1498) and his descendants, and Mīr Dāmād (950-1041H/1542-1631), along with enlightened rulers who played a pivotal function in the promotion and dissemination of culture in their lands (see the Mughal ruler Aqbar, who reigned 1556-1605 AD).

Occasionally, besides the name of the city where the copy was made, colophons also mention individual madrasas, in whose description the name of the founder, or of the head, of the school is often included; in this way, inspection of manuscripts substantially increases our knowledge of the social and institutional context of the transmission of learning and of the production of texts in the interested cities. The manuscripts taken into account contribute to shedding light on still hazy figures in Arabic philosophy, to corroborating the importance of others, and to determining more precisely the concrete ways in which philosophical knowledge was transmitted in major or minor cultural centers.

The information on copyists, owners, and places of copying provided by manuscripts is complemented by the data conveyed by historical sources: relevant exponents of falsafa of the VI/XII c. are reported to have copied the Ilāhiyyāt, either for remunerative purposes or for personal use; likewise, significant rulers have owned the Ilāhiyyāt in their private libraries (Nādir Šāh Afšār, d. 1160H/1747, the famous founder of the Afšārid dynasty in Iran after the Safavids). Their example attests the wide appeal of the work in the culture of the time and its long-lasting circulation in top-level intellectual and political circles.

The current research focuses on post-Avicennian thought, examining its philosophical, theological and scientific aspects. The attentive study of the manuscript tradition of a highly influential work such as then Ilāhiyyāt is the surest way to map the reception of Avicenna's metaphysics and, concomitantly, to canvass the development of Arabic philosophy. The study of the indirect tradition of the work sheds light on the explanation, endorsement or criticism of Avicenna's metaphysics by subsequent philosophers. This research presents a preliminary study of

the translations into Persian of the Metaphysics section of Avicenna's Šifā'. During the Savafid dynasty (XVI-XVIII), a considerable number of commentaries and translations from Arabic into Persian contributed to the spread of the philosophical works of the complex Islamic intellectual scenario. The manuscripts of these translations are currently preserved in Iran and India.

# Workshop on The Immortality of the Soul in Islam and Christianity

## Event

Workshop on The Immortality of the Soul in  
Islam and Christianity

14<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## Location

Palermo

## Organizers

Fondazione per le scienze religiose together  
with the Research Center for Islamic Philos-  
ophy and Theology of the Islamic Sciences  
and Culture Academy

## Immortality of the Soul in Islam and Christianity

**OCTOBER 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2019 (9.30-13.30)**

**Amos Bertolacci**

(IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca)  
Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the  
Bosy in Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)

**Ebrahim Alipour**

(RCIPT Research Center for Islamic Philosophy and  
Theology, Qom)  
La vita umana prima del mondo nel pensiero di  
Mullā Ṣadrā e 'Allāmah Maḡleṣī

**'Ali Asghar Sanaei**

(RCIPT Research Center for Islamic Philosophy and  
Theology, Qom)  
La razionalità e la qualità dell'eternità nella filoso-  
fia di Mullā Ṣadrā

Biblioteca e Centro di ricerca La Pira  
via U. Maddalena 112 (loc. Poggio Ridente) 90137 Palermo +39 091 9101866  
Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII  
via San Vitale 114 - 40125 Bologna +39 051 239532

Coordinamento scientifico  
Organizzazione e logistica  
Mediazione culturale:

Ivana Panzeca  
Francesco Cargnelutti  
Seyed 'Ali Hosseini s

panzeca@fscire.it  
cargnelutti@fscire.it  
eyedalih@gmail.com

## Fscire's partner and its project

The Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy (ISCA) affiliated to the Islamic Propagation Office of Qom Seminary which started its activities in 1984 was established with the definitive license of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

The Academy is a seminary-affiliated, research and scientific institution which deals with explaining and expanding belief, perception and Islamic values, together with the development of Islamic sciences and knowledge, through playing an active mediating role among seminaries according to the religious needs of people and The Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Research Center for Islamic Philosophy and Theology (RCIPT) affiliated to ISCA was established in 1994 in order to explain and introduce the theoretical doctrines of Islam applying a rational-narrative approach, recognizing and reconstructing the philosophical and theological heritage and responding to intellectual doubts.

Owing to the significance of anthropological issues for Islam and other Abrahamic religions and the theological implications of mind-body theories, the Center decided to found studies on the philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology ('ilm al-nafs) in order to reformulate and reintroduce the Islamic traditional theories of it, with a consideration of, and comparison with, contemporary theories of the philosophy of mind. Therefore, the macro-project of "the mind-body relation" was established in 2006.

After the approval of the conference in the Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy, 103 Farsi papers, 9 Arabic papers and 21 English papers were received by the Secretariat of the conference, both through the call-for-papers and by the Iranian and Non-Iranian invitees. The first conference was held on March 9-10, 2011.

The second International Conference will, as part of the Macro project of "Mind-Body Relationship", be held under the theme of "the Immortality of the Soul in Islam and Christianity" in March 2020 on 5 main topics and 40 sub-topics.

Like the first conference, the ISCA are holding some pre-meetings with related lectures and paper presentations in Iran and other countries in cooperation with other universities. Regarding the field of work of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies, the topic for one pre-meeting was "the Immortality of the Soul in Islam and Christianity".

Speakers and topics:

The Participants at the pre-meeting were as follow:

- Ebrahim Alipour, Head of the Research Center for Islamic Philosophy and Theology  
Human life before the world in the thought of Mulla Sadra and 'Allamah Maglesi
- Ali-Asghar Sanaee, Faculty Member of the Research Center for Islamic Philosophy and Theology  
Rationality and the quality of eternity in the philosophy of Mulla Sadra
- Amos Bertolacci, IMT School for Advanced studies, Lucca  
Immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body in Ibn Sina

Content of the conference:

Bertolacci's speech dealt with the intellectual debate between al-Ghazali (1058-1111), a theologian, and Ibn Sina, a philosopher (980-1037). The former accused the latter of spreading false ideas, such as the eternity of the world, the fact that God does not know particulars and the philosopher's rejection of the resurrection of the body. From this starting point, Bertolacci moved on to analyse in greater depth Ibn Sina's positions on these three issues. Alipour focused on the ideas of Mulla Sadra, a theologian and philosopher (1572-1640), and more precisely on his existentialist conceptions of the relations between God, humans and the world. Sanaee talked about the same thinker, Mulla Sadra, focusing instead on the function of rationality in the way human beings struggle to reach happiness.

# Conference on Francis, Sufism and Spiritual Poverty Comparative Insights

Event  
Conference on Francis, Sufism and Spiritual  
Poverty: Comparative Insights

30th September 2019

Location  
Palermo

Organizer  
Fondazione per le scienze religiose  
La Pira Library and Research Centre for  
Islamic History and Doctrines

## Francis, Sufism and Spiritual Poverty: Comparative Insights

**Jason Welle, O.F.M.**  
Pontifical Institute for Arabic and  
Islamic Studies, Rome

30<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Palermo ~ La Pira Library  
via U. Maddalena 112 ~ loc. Poggio Ridente  
90137 Palermo  
+39 091 9101866  
palermo@fscire.it  
www.fscire.it



On 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the seminar of Professor Jason Welle, O.F.M., Dean of Studies at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, took place. The title of the seminar was “Francis, Sufism and Spiritual Poverty: Comparative Insights”. The seminar saw the participation both of the Palermo (where the meeting was actually held) and Bologna branches, connected via Skype.

The seminar focused on three main themes:

- Francis and the Sultan
- The figure of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Fārisī
- Comparative insights

The first part of the seminar, based on an essentially historical approach, focused on the encounter between the Saint of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. Prof. Welle explained how the great number of scientific researches, which reflected on a possible influence of Sufi, and by al-Fārisī himself, have attempted to demonstrate that a direct link between the work in this specific area of the Islamic world helps account for al-Kāmil's gracious hospitality toward Francis and his treatment of the Poverello. Moreover, this first part of the seminar included a general introduction on the field of Sufi studies and the identification of some principle trends among contemporary scholars working in different languages. In particular, Prof. Welle provided some resources to aid scholars interested in archival research: the state and pace of the digitization of manuscripts in different libraries in Western Europe and in the Muslim-majority world can be a vexing matter for them.

The second part of the seminar focused on texts. Professor Welle explained that none of the treatises attributed to al-Fārisī have been published, but several remain extant in manuscripts. The key theme that he explored is that of spiritual poverty. While he was historically skeptical that al-Fārisī played a significant formative role in al-Kāmil's piety, and even more skeptical that he was present in Damietta for Francis's meeting with al-Kāmil, he was convinced instead of the acute interest of the shaykh in the difference between Sufism, material poverty, and spiritual poverty. Moreover, Professor Welle examined in greater depth the development of Sufi thought in that period (XIII century): while scholars of Islamic mysticism have long noticed the above-mentioned distinction, the level of research and discussion in European languages is low. By comparing some key passages from al-Fārisī's treatises with some relevant texts concerning poverty from early Franciscan literature, Prof. Welle revealed how many early Franciscans were obsessed with the meaning of poverty. The comparison further highlights the modes of engaging with these questions across the Mediterranean in two spiritual traditions that had no dependence on each other.

In the third part of the seminar, Prof. Welle explored the concepts of voluntary / involuntary poverty and that of poverty understood as a virtue, drawing inspiration from the text belonging to the Franciscan Sources “*Sacrum commercium*” of 1230. Particular attention was paid to the concept of faqr (material poverty) as a starting point for an inner spiritual journey capable of leading the subject to the highest levels of closeness to God. According to Prof. Welle, material poverty was considered by the Sufi world as a tool that allows a person to reach spiritual perfection: the term faqr can, therefore, be translated by the word ‘humility’. The focus on the sources relating to the general study of Sufism finally allowed the Professor to focus specifically on the Egyptian area in the Ayyubid period and the effects that it had not only on the meeting between St. Francis and the Sultan al-Kāmil but on the whole broad horizon of relations between Islam and Christianity in that particular historical period.