



**VISITING
SCHOLAR
PROGRAM**

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Public Lecture Offerings

"Paper, Paper Everywhere": Writerly Culture in 9th-century Baghdad

In spite of the considerable attention devoted to 9th-century Baghdad—one of several high points in Arabic literary and intellectual culture—disproportionate emphasis has been placed on a handful of celebrated figures. There have been very few attempts to describe larger literary or cultural phenomena. In this talk, I re-evaluate the literary history and landscape of that century, by demonstrating and emphasizing the significance of an important — and irrevocable — transformation, namely the transition from a predominantly oral and aural literary culture to an increasingly textual, book-based, writerly one.

Doing It Justice: Translating the Qur'an's (Most?) Important Features

New full translations of the Qur'an into English now appear every year. These (and preceding) translations continue to fall well short in one very important way: they ignore the acoustic qualities of the original—cadence, rhythm, assonance, sound clusters, and end rhyme, and accordingly do not explore fully the possibilities afforded by English style, English form, and even English type and typography. In this talk, I will show how this can be attempted, and possibly even achieved, in translations of several Qur'anic chapters, including Joseph (12), The Cave (18), Mary (19), Solace (94) and Sincere Belief (112). In addition to rhyme, rhythm and cadence, I demonstrate and showcase the possibilities, advantages, and gains of using what I term storyboarding, nesting, alternation, and reiteration.

What (and Where) on Earth is Waqwaq?

For over a century, there has been disagreement about the legendary islands and tree of Waqwaq and attempts to identify, categorize, classify, locate, and domesticate it have burgeoned. It is now Madagascar, now Sumatra; now a milkweed tree, now a pandanus tree; now a bird, now a woman-fruit. In this lecture, I ask: What and where are the roots of Waqwāq? What routes has it taken and how? We travel from Iraq to China, from India to the Philippines, from Japan to the Mascarenes, from Istanbul to the New World, and even to Hell and back.

Classroom Discussion Topics

1. **The Classics of Arabic Literature: A Canon or a Corpus?**
2. **The Qur'an and Modern Arabic Literature: Influence and Reaction**
3. **The Literary Dimensions of the Qur'an**
4. **The Challenges of Teaching Arabic and Islamic Civilization**
5. **Helping Create the Library of Arabic Literature (NYU Press)**
6. **The Literature of Mauritius**
7. **Being a Muslim Academic**