

The Wise Fools
Asceticism on Cross-Roads of Islam
and Christianity

**Venue: Grote vergaderzaal (Leiden University Library)
Witte Singel 27**

Thursday 4 & Friday 5 February 2010

Programme

Day One: Thursday 4 February 2010

09.00 Coffee/tea

09.30 Welcoming address: Harm Beukers (Director of the Scaliger Institute) & Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

09.45 Francois de Blois (SOAS)

Strategies of encratism in east and west

Chair: Karel Innemée (Leiden University)

10.30 Ab de Jong (Leiden University)

Spiritual Elites in Late Antique Mesopotamia

11.00 Johnny Cheung (Leiden University)

Asceticism from the perspective of a former Manichaean

11.30 Bernd Radtke (Utrecht University)

Zuhd and tasawwuf in the 3./9. century

12.00 Lunch (only for speakers and those invited)

Chair: Petra Sijpesteijn (Leiden University)

14.00 Remke Kruk (Leiden University)

Animals and ascetes: moral lessons in the Rasâ'il Ikhwân as-Safâ'

14.30 Priscilla Soucek (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University)

Religious Images in late Ottoman prayer books

15.00 Coffee and Thee

Chair: Jan Schmidt (Leiden University)

15.30 Lenny Lewisohn (University of Exeter)

Asceticism in Persian and Arabic Hagiographies

16.00 Wim J. Aerts (University of Groningen)

Ascetism is no foolishness, God's foolishness in not Allah's. Some considerations

16.30 Nicolaas Biegman (Independent scholar)

Muslim Mass Mysticism

18.00 Conference diner (at Het Prentenkabinet)

Day Two: Friday 5 February 2010

Chair: Maarten Kossmann (Leiden University)

09.30 Nasrollah Pourjavady (University of Tehran)

Vegetarianism in Early Muslim Asceticism and Sufism

10.00 Burcht Pranger (University of Amsterdam)

Withdrawal and Annihilation: On the Nature of Christian Asceticism

10.30 Coffee and tea

11.00 Sander van Maas (University of Amsterdam)

Gesture in Sellars, Messiaen and Francis of Assisi

11.30 Rokus de Groot (University of Amsterdam)

Music and renunciation in Sufi practices

12.00 Lunch (only for speakers and those invited)

Chair: Rokus de Groot (University of Amsterdam)

14.00 Annabel Keeler (University of Cambridge)

Bāyazīd (Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī) and zuhd

14.30 Jan Hofstra (Independent Scholar)

Why construct a full-time fool for Christ's sake? Leontios of Neapolis and Symeon Salos

15.00 Coffee and Tea

15.30 Karel Innemée (Leiden University)

The image of the Holy Fool in Egyptian and Syrian Christianity

16.00 Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)

'Eat little, say little and harm no one': Nezami's Aesthetics of Asceticism

Abstracts

François de Blois (SOAS, London)

Strategies of encratism in east and west

Asceticism is the practice of religiously motivated abstinence. The three main components of most ascetic traditions are fasting (total or partial abstinence from food), poverty (renunciation of property) and encratism (sexual abstinence). In this paper I shall concentrate on the last of these.

In a broad historical context we can distinguish several conflicting models of socially normative behaviour with regard to reproduction and non-reproduction, which I shall illustrate with examples from different societies and epochs.

On the one hand there is the so-called “Ancient model”, the predominant norm in the whole of the ancient Mediterranean, Near Eastern and Iranian worlds, in pre-Buddhist China, but also still today in Islamic societies. This model regards marriage and procreation as a civil and religious duty and rejects the concept of celibacy, even though it might (especially in Islam) tolerate other aspects of asceticism. It manifests itself in an “urban” (or “Hellenic”) variety, which does accept certain forms of non-reproductive sexual activity as a complement (not an alternative) to marriage, and a “rural” (or “Hebraic”) variety, which rejects any sexual activity outside of marriage.

On the other hand there is the so-called “Mediaeval model”, characteristic of Mediaeval Christian societies in Europe and the Near East, but also of Indian and Buddhist societies from ancient times down to the present. This model regards celibacy and chastity as the highest form of holiness. These societies gladly maintain a large non-reproductive clerical population side by side with laymen, who, for their part, can attain a lower form of holiness through (for example) the Christian sacrament of marriage. Alongside this there is a more radical form of encratism exemplified by ancient and mediaeval Christian and para-Christian dualist sects, which abjure reproduction entirely, with the argument that the world is bad and that reproduction perpetuates the existence of an evil creation.

Since the Reformation, Western Christendom has turned against clerical celibacy and has essentially reinstated the Old-Testament model of marriage and the family as the sole acceptable form of Christian life. Modern post-Christian societies are still searching for an alternative to this.

François de Blois has published extensively on languages, literatures and history of the Near East and Central Asia. He served as professor of Iranian studies at Hamburg University from 2002 to 2003 and is currently a teaching fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he has been teaching Syriac, Middle Persian and Bactrian.

Albert de Jong (Leiden University)

Spiritual Elites in Late Antique Mesopotamia

The modern Middle East is home to a number of religious communities that are difficult to classify. Some of these are considered to belong to the wider Islamic tradition, in which case they are classified as “sects”, most often as “extremist” Shi’ites, a derogatory label that derives from Muslim heresiography and therefore must be rejected. Some of these movements, however, are not considered to be part of Islam – the Druze, the Yezidis, and the Mandaeans are the best known examples. Although there are many differences between these various communities, they share a particular social-religious structure, in which – unlike mainstream Islamic patterns of organization – knowledge of the tradition is (supposedly) vested in a small section of the community only, and special rules and prescriptions (and prerogatives) apply to them only. In the paper, some suggestions will be made with regard to the genesis of this particular aspect of these movements in Sasanian Babylonia and the early Islamic Empire.

Albert de Jong is Professor of Comparative Religion in the Leiden University Institute of Religious Studies. In his research he tries to combine work on method and theory in the study of religion with historical work on Zoroastrianism and the religious history of the Iranian world.

Johnny Cheung (Leiden University)

Asceticism from the perspective of a former Manichaeon

A well-known fact about one of the most prominent Church Fathers, Augustine, is his Manichaean upbringing. This upbringing is often stressed in order to understand and interpret many of Augustine's later religious and philosophical beliefs. Both his strong emphasis on the reproductive and social functions of marriage, and his conversion to an ascetic form of Christianity can be interpreted as the two sides of the same coin, viz. a riposte to his youthful notions, when he was a Manichaean Auditor and living with a concubine. A brief survey of his critical views on asceticism and its potential pitfalls, in conjunction with events in his private life, will be presented in this talk.

Johnny Cheung is currently teaching Persian at the Persian Dept. of the School of Middle Eastern Studies, Leiden University. He has read Indo-European and Iranian subjects at Leiden University, where he graduated in 1995. In 1999, he finished his PhD on Ossetic, which was published as *Studies in the historical development of the Ossetic vocalism*, and afterwards participated in the *Bactrian Documents Project* (based in London-Cambridge, 2003-8). He has produced many articles on Iranian linguistics and has extensively travelled in Iran.

Bernd Radtke (Utrecht University)

Zuhd and tasawwuf in the 3./9. century

There is the view that during the 3.rd/9.th century an older asceticism (*zuhd*) was replaced by mysticism (*tasawwuf*). Based on early source material on Islamic piety it will be examined whether this view can still be maintained.

Bernd Radtke was born in 1944. He studied at Hamburg and Basel University. He has taught at Basel, Bern, Saarbrücken, Berlin, Bergen (Norway), Utrecht, and has published numerous publications on Islamic mysticism and intellectual history.

Remke Kruk (Leiden University)

Animals and ascetes: moral lessons in the Rasâ'il Ikhwân as-Safâ'.

In the *Rasâ'il* of the Pure Brethren of Basra, forsaking the pleasures of this world in favour of a higher spiritual life is a prominent theme. It is brought forward explicitly in the story of the Case of the Animals against Man. This story can be read as a long moral diatribe in which the animals blame man for his greediness and his lack of piety and respect for God's creation. Man's behaviour, they say, stands in sharp contrast to the sober and pious life of the animals. The moral superiority of animals over the majority of mankind is demonstrated by the fact that pious men and ascetes tend to seek the company of wild animals, preferring to share their abode over living among their fellow human beings. Reminiscences of, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount crop up in the argumentations of the animals.

Remke Kruk is Emeritus Professor of Arabic Language and Culture at Leiden University, The Netherlands. She has published on a wide variety of topics. Among her specific research fields are Arabic popular epic and the reception of Greek natural philosophy, in particular biology, in the Arabic tradition. She also translated several classical Arabic texts into Dutch. Her Dutch translation of the *Case of the Animals against Man*, from the *Rasâ'il Ikhwân as-Safâ'*, will appear this spring.

Priscilla Soucek (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University)

Religious Images in late Ottoman prayer books

This paper focuses on the role of images in prayer books of the 18th and 19th century written by and for Ottoman Sufis resident in Arabia. They depict objects associated with the prophet including his coat, staff, hand and foot, beard and prayer beads. Although they bear no text the images belong to anthologies with litanies extolling the prophet intended for recitation. This paper explores their function in late Ottoman religious life.

Priscilla P. Soucek is a Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University where she also serves as Deputy Director. She has made the artistic and literary

culture of Iran the focus of her research and writing. Her publications deal with a range of topics and periods from early Islamic seals to Qajar coins, but many focus on the arts of the book. She is writing a monograph on regionalism in Iranian art.

Leonard Lewisohn, (University of Exeter)

Sufis and the Moral Law: Reflections on the Antinomian Vocabulary of Classical Persian Poetry

Several representative figures of early Sufism, in particular Sulamī (d. 412/1020) and Abū Saʿīd ibn Abī'l-Khayr (d. 440/1048) were central to the development of the mysticism of the School of Blame (*malāmatiyya*) in early Sufism, the doctrines of which first appeared among Sufi mystics who flourished in the city of Nishapur in Khurasan during the third/ninth through the fifth/eleventh centuries. This talk will highlight the antinomian vocabulary underlying early Sufi *malāmatī* spirituality, and show how its lexicon and ideas were celebrated by the main classical Persian Sufi poets, including 'Aṭṭār of Nīshāpūr (d. 618/1221), Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. after 737/1337), Nizār Quhistānī (d. 721/1321), Khwājū Kirmānī (d. 742/1342), Kamāl Khujandī (d. 803/1400), and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389). All these poets contrasted their jurisprudence of the heart (*fiqh al-bāḥīn*) with the exoteric demands of the Islamic canonical legal code, elaborating the paradoxical notion of sin as a vehicle which causes the devotee to find God, thus creating a unique antinomian spirituality which remains today far more relevant and responsive to the needs of man and the human heart than the literalist *Sharī'a*-centric piety that is commonly identified with 'Islam'.

Dr. Leonard Lewisohn is Lecturer in Persian and Iran Heritage Foundation Fellow in Classical Persian and Sufi Literature at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies of the University of Exeter in England where he currently teaches Persian language, Sufism, the history of Iran, as well as courses on Persian texts and Persian poetry in translation. He specializes in translation of Persian Sufi poetic and prose texts. He is the author of *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (London: Curzon Press 1995), and the editor of *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford: 1999), vol. 1: *The Legacy of Mediæval Persian Sufism*, vol. 2: *Classical Persian Sufism from its*

Origins to Rumi Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi, vol. 3 (with David Morgan): *Late Classical Persianate Sufism: the Safavid and Mughal Period*—covering a millennium of Islamic history. He is editor of the *Mawlana Rumi Review*, an annual journal devoted to Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273). He is also editor (with Christopher Shackle) of *The Art of Spiritual Flight: Farid al-Din 'Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition* (London: I.B. Tauris 2006), co-translator with Robert Bly of *The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door: Thirty Poems of Hafiz* (New York: HarperCollins 2008), and editor of *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (forthcoming London: I.B. Tauris 2010). Dr. Lewisohn has contributed articles to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, *Iran Nameh*, *Iranian Studies*, *African Affairs*, *Islamic Culture*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and the *Temenos Academy Review*.

Wim J. Aerts (University of Groningen)

Ascetism is no foolishness, God's foolishness in not Allah's. Some considerations

From history it is clear that mastering the affects of one's own body is a human want, often dictated by the consideration that human imperfectness should be repaired by striving after what is seen as a higher ideal, conformity with a higher world. Examples in Antiquity are e.g. Pythagoras, the wise Diogenes, in Christianity the Fathers of the Desert. Fools for Christ's sake, such as Symeon Salos and Andreas Salos, need asceticism, but for another purpose. They play their fool's role in order to present a negative of human existence as a reflection of what the real life should be. Jesus himself is its utmost example by accepting – as God- the humiliation of human life and an ignominious death, which is also his triumph. Paul expresses this as God's foolishness, which outreaches human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:25). As far as I am aware of: Muhammed's interpretation of almighty Allah makes such an approach in Islam impossible.

W.J. Aerts was professor Byzantine and Modern Greek at the University of Groningen (1967-1990). Publications a.o.: *Historia Syntomos* (on the name of Psellos), *Lexicon on the Chronicle of Morea* (with Dr. Hero Hokwerda), the eldest Greek and Latin translations of Pseudo-Methodius (with Dr. GAA Kortekaas), translations in Dutch of the Life of Symeon Salos and John the Almsgiver (with Dr Hero Hokwerda). He is working now on a new edition of the Byzantine Alexander Poem (14th c.).

Nicolaas Biegman (Independent Scholar)

Muslim Mass Mysticism

Mysticism, as the expression of a passionate longing for God and of the desire to establish an intimate, personal relationship with him, is shared by the monotheistic religions. In Islam it is called Sufism. Some Sufis will say they are in love with God. The Sufi rituals are meant to make the participant draw ever closer to God, losing him/herself in God, becoming one with God. The uniqueness of Islam in this regard is that mysticism is a mass phenomenon. In Egypt alone the Sufi orders claim a combined membership of six million, and Sufism is very much present in other Muslim-majority countries, as well. In the West, there is little awareness of this, mainly because the Sufis rarely have a political agenda. More often than not Sufi ritual is carried out in groups headed by their sheikh. This «dhikr», centred on a rhythmic repetition of some of God's «most beautiful names», has an important physical component, and can be very dynamic and passionate. In the *dhikr* a Sufi doesn't sit, or dance for God, he dances with God. In so doing he empties his heart of anything it may contain and fills it with God. Depending on the order, the role of the Saints may be more or less important, but they are always there. They help the Sufi attain his objective, appear in dreams and intercede in various ways. Their tombs are everywhere and their miracles are innumerable.

Dr Nicolaas (Niek) Biegman (b.1936) studied Arabic, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian and Islam at Leiden. He first came into contact with Islamic mass mysticism in 1965, fell in love with it at first sight, and developed his interest in it in the course of prolonged stays in Egypt in the 1960s and '80s and in Macedonia between 2002 and 2004. In those periods and during travels elsewhere in the Balkans and the Middle East he befriended some Sufi sheikhs who were willing to explain Sufism as they saw it and who allowed the author to record their rituals. Biegman has published three books with photos of Sufis and their rituals: *Egypt- Moulids, Saints, Sufis* (1990, Arabic edition 2009); *God's Lovers, a Sufi Community in Macedonia* (2007), and *Living Sufism on rituals in Egypt, Syria, Macedonia, Bosnia*

and Herzegovina and Kosovo (2009). His working life was spent in the Dutch Foreign Service.

Nasrollah Pourjavady (University of Tehran)

Vegetarianism in Early Muslim Asceticism and Sufism

Certain practices among some early Muslim ascetics and mystics were associated with Christian monasticism, such as vegetarianism. Though Muslim ascetics and mystics never expressed a belief in vegetarianism, quite a few of them observed vegetarian diets and even practiced veganism. These ascetics and mystics were commonly criticized for following the ways of the Christian monks, rather than observing the Traditions (sunnah) of the Prophet, who was believed to have liked meat himself, wanted his ummah to be carnivorous, and accused those who practiced vegetarianism for living like Christian monks. Despite all that, vegetarianism has continued among some Sufis even up to the present time, not to speak of those shaykhs with great piety who believed in animal rights, had compassion for all creatures of God, and actually practiced *ahimsa*.

Nasrollah Pourjavady was born in Tehran and received his early education there. He went to the United States in 1962 to study Western philosophy, and having obtained his BA in 1967 returned to Iran and earned his MA and PhD degrees from the University of Tehran . Subsequently, he taught philosophy and mysticism at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran , and then at the University of Tehran until 2008, when he retired. As a visiting professor, he has taught at Colgate University, NY State (2002), at the Gregorian University in Rome (2005), the University of Maryland (Spring and Summer 2008), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Spring2009). Over the last thirty five years, Pourjavady has written some 30 books as well as over a hundred essays and articles in the fields of Islamic mysticism, philosophy, and Persian literature. These include: a critical edition of Ahmad Ghazzali's *Sawanih* (1980) and its English translation (1986); *Ru'yate mah dar asman (La vision de Dieu en theologie et mystique musulmane)* (1996); *Eshraq o erfān (Illuminationist philosophy and Mysticism)* (2001); *Do mojaddeh* (2002), which is a study of two key figures in the development of Islamic thought, Abu Hamid Ghazzali and Fakhruddin Razi;

Zabane hal (2007), a survey of Persian literature from the point of view of the usage of one literary device; *Badaye 'eshq* (2008), a study of the meaning of wine as a metaphor in Persian poetry; and most recently, introductions and notes to the Persian philosopher Shehaboddin Sohrawardi's allegorical works, translated into Italian and published under the title of *IL FRUSCIO DELLE ALI DI GABRIELE, Racconti esoterici* (Milano 2008). His Persian book *Do Mojadded* was awarded as the book of the year in Iran, and his *Zabane hal* received the 2008 International Society for Iranian Studies award for the best book on Persian studies published in any language in the two previous years. Pourjavady was also the general editor of a monumental, three volume English language book on Iranian art and culture, *The Splendour of Iran* (London 2001). He has also edited and introduced the works of several lesser known classical Iranian mystics and Persian poets, such as Abu'l Hasan Busti, Abu Mansur Esfahani, Mobarakshah Marvirudi, Yar Ali Tabrizi, and Awhad al-Din Razi. As the founding director of Iran University Press, the largest academic publishing house in Iran after the Revolution, he supervised the publication of some 1,200 academic books and 11 periodicals in Persian, English, French, and German for 24 years, until the Spring of 2004. He personally edited two of these journals, *Nashr-i Danish* and *Ma'arif*. He is a member of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature, which awarded him the Academy's Persian Literature Award in 2004. He also received the Alexander von Humboldt Research Award in 2005, and spent the year 2006 as a research scholar at the Free University of Berlin. <http://pourjavady.com>

Burcht Pranger (University of Amsterdam)

Withdrawal and Annihilation: On the Nature of Christian Asceticism

In my paper I will start out with Weber's thesis with regard to Calvinism as a twisted prolongation of medieval asceticism: 'inner-worldly asceticism'. Regardless of the merits of this thesis, it raises the general question as to the status of asceticism as a distinct feature of Christianity. This question becomes all the more urgent if another general assumption holds true: the fact that Judaism is in essence a non-ascetic religion. Illustrating my argument with passages from Augustine, Jerome, Bede, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Calvin, de Sales and Berulle. I will try to refine the notion of asceticism so as to link it to other

supposedly Christian notions of interiority and subjectivity. Not surprisingly, a more subtle interpretation of asceticism will evoke the problem of mysticism as the 'natural' container of interiority and mental withdrawal. Is it true that mysticism thus conceived broadens the scope of confessional religions and functions as a bridge between various religions and non-religions? To which degree do asceticism, interiority and withdrawal contribute to the annihilation of Christian religion and/or religion tout court?

Burcht Pranger is professor in the history of Christianity at the University of Amsterdam. He has written extensively on the Christian, monastic tradition. His major books are: *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought* (Leiden, 1994) and *The Artificiality of Christianity* (Stanford, 2003). He has just completed a monograph on Augustine: *Eternity's Ennui. Temporality, Perseverance and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature*.

Sander van Maas (Utrecht University and University of Amsterdam)

Gesture in Sellars, Messiaen and Francis of Assisi

In 1992 director Peter Sellars staged Olivier Messiaen's opera on Saint Francis of Assisi. This performance, which was the first independent production after the 1983 world premiere in Paris, staged the confrontation between two different religious visions. While Messiaen's view of his subject is ascetic and transcendent Sellars's approach foregrounds immanence and subjective spirituality. The difference between these visions of Francis is played out on stage through the gestures prescribed for the characters. For these Messiaen drew on the Franciscan frescoes of Giotto; Sellars, by contrast, engaged in a dialogue with a range of traditions including Muslim and Buddhist ones. In more recent work Sellars, influenced among others by the video art of Bill Viola, again showed interest in the embodiment of religion through mime and dance. In this paper the question shall be how this immanent approach of religion is related to the general theme of asceticism in the Franciscan tradition, in particular as represented and enacted by Messiaen's opera.

Sander van Maas is Buma Professor of Dutch Contemporary Music at Utrecht University and Assistant Professor of Contemporary Music at the University of

Amsterdam. His work focuses on the philosophy and criticism of twentieth and twenty-first century music. Key themes in his work are theories of listenership and musical postmetaphysics and religion. His publications include *The Reinvention of Religious Music: Olivier Messiaen's Breakthrough Toward the Beyond* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009) and his inaugural lecture at Utrecht University, *Wat is een luisteraar? Reflectie, interpellatie en dorsaliteit in hedendaagse muziek* (2009, forthcoming in English). His current research focuses on the constitution of the listener in recent musical history and he is preparing a new book on Messiaen. Van Maas is Chairman of the Dutch Association of Aesthetics and founding editor of *Esthetica: Tijdschrift voor Kunst en Filosofie*.

Rokus de Groot (University of Amsterdam)

Music and renunciation in Sufi practices

During the formative years of Sufism, renunciation of the 'worldly', the development of inwardness, and the refinement of love towards God were shaping concepts. Though renunciation is often associated with barrenness, this is not self-evident. Especially the element of love of the divine, and in particular the longing for it, has engendered rich traditions of poetic language in Sufism. The question whether *music* belongs to the worldly, and should be renounced, or, conversely, whether music is conducive to the development of inwardness and love, and should be cherished, has been met in different ways by the various Sufi schools at different moments in time. Generally spoken, music has been viewed as an ambiguous practice. Even in Sufi schools like the Chishtiyya of Pakistan and India, which do accept music as part of spiritual practice (*samâ'*), music is considered as necessary but dangerous. In my presentation, I will assess the tension between 'necessary' and 'dangerous' in Indo-Pakistani poetic-musical traditions (*qawwali*) connected with the tombs (*dargahs*) of Chishtiyya saints. Also I will look into the more recent *qawwali* practice as a stage performance by celebrities like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan: how is the musical acting out of texts by Sufi saints on stage in large popular venues legitimised? Finally I will discuss briefly how in the context of European music – which has been often looked upon by authorities of various Christian churches likewise as 'necessary but dangerous' for spiritual practice – renunciation has been internalised *musically*.

Rokus de Groot (*1947 Aalst, Netherlands), musicologist and composer, conducts research on music of the 20th and 21st centuries, especially about the systematics and aesthetics of composition, about the interaction between different cultural traditions, about (re)conceptualizations of past and present religious and spiritual ideas, as well as about polyphony as a metaphor, in particular in the work of Edward Said. He holds the chair of musicology at the University of Amsterdam, after occupying a personal chair 'Music in the Netherlands since 1600', at the University of Utrecht (1994-2000). He obtained his MA at the University of Amsterdam (Frank Ll. Harrison, Ton de Leeuw) and his PhD at the University of Utrecht (Paul Op de Coul, Jos Kunst). Recently he edited, together with Albert van der Schoot, *Redefining Musical Identities: Reorientations at the Waning of Modernism* (Zwolle 2007), and published 'Perspectives of Polyphony in Edward Said's writings', in F. Ghazoul ed., *Edward Said and Critical Decolonization* (Cairo 2007). In 2009 he delivered the Edward Said Memorial Lecture at the American University, Cairo. He composed danced music theatre in which singers, musicians and dancers from different traditions cooperate in polyphonic ways and by mutual learning, such as *Song of songs: The Love of Mirabai* (New Delhi 2005), *Layla and Majnun: A Composition about the Night* (Amsterdam 2006), and *ShivaShakti* (Chennai 2009). See also; home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.degroot

Annabel Keeler (Cambridge University)

Bāyazīd (Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī) and zuhd

The celebrated 9th century mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, better known in the Persian-speaking world as Bāyazīd-e Bisṭāmī, is perhaps most widely associated with his ecstatic utterances (*shatḥiyyāt*), such as 'Glory be to me!' (*ṣubḥānī*), or the intoxication and insatiable longing expressed in his words, 'Is there any more?' (*hal min mazīd*). Yet other well-known sayings of Bāyazīd indicate that he had a strong inclination towards the renunciation of the world, as, for example, his 'divorcing the world three times', and several anecdotes about him describe the rigorous ascetic practices undertaken by him, such as his denying his *nafs* water for a whole year. In fact, quite a number of sayings attributed to Bāyazīd

discuss or relate to the subject of *zuhd*. This paper will examine this material as recorded in some of the earliest sources, and will consider the sometimes contradictory or ambivalent view of *zuhd* that appears to be reflected in Bāyazīd's sayings.

Annabel Keeler obtained her doctorate from the University of Cambridge in 2001. Her doctoral dissertation, revised and expanded, was published in 2006 under the title *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur'ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, and was in 2008 awarded a Book of the year prize in Iran. A translation of the Qur'ān commentary of Sahl al-Tustarī, with full annotation and an introduction, will be published in early 2010 by Fons Vitae. Annabel is now a Resident Senior Member of Wolfson College in Cambridge, where she continues her work in the field of Islamic mysticism, with a particular interest in the Sufi interpretation of the Qur'ān. She also regularly contributes to the teaching of Persian literature at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University.

Jan Hofstra (Independent Scholar)

Why construct a full-time fool for Christ's sake? Leontios of Neapolis and Symeon Salos

Leontios of Neapolis is the only early byzantine author who presented a fool for Christ's sake as a specific category of holiness. The Life of Saint John the Almsgiver shows his interest in hidden servants of God with humility and self-sacrificing love. Here he gathered and proofed the bricks for building his antihero in The Life of Symeon, the Fool for Christ's Sake. Leontios of Neapolis wrote just before the Arab invasion, so Islamic influence was impossible. Several scholars tried to find traces of cynicism, but in my opinion the author presented a genuine Christian saint.

Leontios of Neapolis constructed his sainthood on the basis of few historic references, the reading of ascetic stories and especially the new testament. He placed Symeon in a Syrian context, but the author was "the captive" of a non-Syrian dilemma, as it is shown in a comparison with the Skala Paradisi. His work should be understood as a very subtle critical attitude towards asceticism.

Leontios of Neapolis was certainly not a promoter of “the mad way of life.” He was rather an advocate of the poor monks who became madmen, as they were unable to cope with the high ideals of their vocation.

Karel Innemée (Leiden University)

The image of the Holy Fool in Egyptian and Syrian Christianity

Both in Egypt and Syria people have tried to find a way towards God by dissociating themselves from society in a rigorous way. This could be achieved for instance by seeking the ultimate seclusion of the desert or by loading scorn on themselves through deviant behaviour. In both cases the goal was not to become a saint in the eyes of the world, on the contrary. The anchorite would ultimately be invisible to the world and offend no-one by being naked or whatever kind of behaviour, the Holy Fool’s objective was to become an anti-hero or seemingly the opposite of a saint. Does this mean that their self-imposed missions failed by ending up in hagiographical literature and the synaxaria of the churches? And how did the church react to their non-conformist behaviour? Was their image in iconography and hagiography adapted and edited to match the standards of what was considered appropriate to a saint? This paper tries to explore a number of questions that should lead to a new research project in the near future.

Karel Innemée studied History of art, Classical Archaeology and Egyptology at Leiden University. He wrote a PhD thesis on *Ecclesiastical Vestments in Nubia and the Christian Near-East* (1990) and was until recently Associate Professor of Early Christian and Medieval Art at Leiden. His present research focuses on monastic culture in Egypt.

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)

‘Eat little, say little and harm no one’: Nezami’s Aesthetics of Asceticism

Ascetics and ascetic ideas occur so frequently in Persian romances that one cannot remain indifferent, not asking the question on the relationship between

asceticism and romances. In early Persian romances written before the twelfth century there are no traces of asceticism. Asceticism is absent in romances such as *Varqa and Golshah*, *Wameq and Adhra* and several romances in Ferdowsi's epic *Shah-nama (The Epic of the Kings)*, completed 1010), but Nezami (d.c. 1209) changed this by introducing an ascetic dimension to the protagonists. Even his most erotic romance about the pre-Islamic Persian king Bahram, the *Seven Beauties* can be read as an ascetic tale, in which the hero divests himself of the world of nature and mysteriously disappears in a cave. Nezami exercised a perpetual impact on Persian romantic epics as he was imitated more than a hundred times not only in the Persian-speaking world but also in other areas where Persian literature functioned as a literary vehicle and the language of prestige. In this paper, I will examine what the essential ascetic codes are that Nezami added to his romances, and why he did this.

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