

ATTR Fall Seminar 2017

Canon and Interpretation

Abstracts and Syllabus (in order of appearance)

Einar Thomassen, University of Bergen: “Canonisation and Codification”

Abstract:

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the final composition of the Christian Bible took place. At about the same time, Roman law was collected in the form of a written compilation, the Codex Theodosianus (to be followed a century later by the Codex Justinianus). The canonisation of Holy Scripture and the written codification of Law seem to be parallel manifestations of a desire to standardise the beliefs, norms, and institutions of the late Roman Empire. At the same time, Jewish law was codified, in the form of the Talmud, for the only legitimate non-Christian community in the Empire. In this lecture, we will look at the processes of canonisation and codification in the areas of religion and law, and ask whether a comparison of those processes, noting differences as well as similarities, is able to provide some new insights into each of them. What were the purposes of these processes? What were their effects? Do they tell us something about the relationship between religion and law? Is there religion in law, and law in religion? Do they tell us something about a new culture of the written word and the book? What institutions were necessary in order to support that culture?

Required reading:

Liebs, Detlef, “Roman Law,” in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 238–59.

Westbrook, Raymond, “Codification and Canonization,” in *Ex Oriente Lex: Near Eastern Influences on Ancient Greek and Roman Law* (ed. Raymond Westbrook et al.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 181–93.

Suggested reading:

Macdonald, Lee Martin, and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001).

Thomassen, Einar (ed.), *Canon and Canonicity*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010.

Ulrika Mårtensson, Norwegian University of Science and Technology: “Scribes, Manuscripts and Variant Readings: Implications for Interpreting Doctrine on the (Un)created Qur’an, Then and Now”

Abstract:

Within the Qur’anic text, the concepts language (lisān) and writing (kitāb) link together a specific linguistics with a canonical self-identity as Covenant. Covenant builds on the coupling of a prophet, who communicates the divine message to the (here) Arabic speaking people, with a scribe, who writes the message down, making it a binding Covenant between God and community, and a social contract between the ruler and the community. Both Covenant and social contract include the Jews and Christians and their scriptures, hence the

many Qur'anic references to them (ahl al-kitāb). The famous exegete al-Tabari (d. 923) explained that the community read the Prophet's reading in various ways, which he condoned as long as they cited him. After the Prophet's death, his scribe Zayd joined a group of scribes, who produced the canonical consonant script on command of the Caliph 'Uthman (ca. 650). After canonisation the creative dynamics between scripture, language, social groups and social contract, continued in the form of variant readings of the canonical consonants, and doctrinal-exegetical disputes over the canon. Variant readings address grammatical and orthographic considerations that reflect local, political, and school-identity, which is how the readings intersect with doctrinal disputes. Al-Tabari defined the scribes as the pen-holding authors of the Qur'anic canon, and interpreted the Qur'an through variant readings. Based on his works, I will show how the 'foundational' dispute between the Caliphal claim by al-Ma'mun in 833 that the Qur'an is created (khalq al-Qur'an), and the oppositional view that the Qur'an is God's uncreated word (kalām), blends exegesis, social contract, and relationship with Christian Byzantium. Al-Tabari came down on the side of the uncreated Qur'an: the 'Christianity-and rule of law-friendly' view. This doctrinal divide marks exegetical school- and community boundaries to this day, when it synergises with the advent of a modern printed canonical text (the Cairo edition of 1924), which blends 'stabilised' vocalisation of the canon with new awareness of Islamic community and Muslim identity in the colonial context. Slightly earlier, a project to stabilise and print the Arabic Bible initiated in late 1800, through collaboration between Lebanese Christian communities and the American missionaries, who founded the American University of Beirut (Rana Issa 2015, 2016). Today, academics are also turning to the variant readings and canon research, seeking to soften community boundaries much like al-Tabari upheld the uncreated Qur'an-doctrine for reasons partly related to Abbasid politics vis-à-vis Byzantium.

Required reading:

Déroche, Francois, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), chs. 1–2.

Suggested Reading (strongly recommended):

Mårtensson, Ulrika, "al-Tabari's Concept of the Qur'an: A Systemic Analysis." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8:2 (2016): 9–57.

Nasser, Shady Hekmat, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), chs. 1–2.

Shah, Mustafa. "The Case of variae lectiones in Classical Islamic Jurisprudence: Grammar and the Interpretation of Law." *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 29 (2016): 285–311.

Corpus Coranicum (<http://www.corpuscoranicum.de/>)

Preparations:

Kindly read as many of the readings as possible, including the *Corpus Coranicum* website, with the following points in mind:

- Where, when, and by who were Qur'anic manuscripts first produced, according to Déroche?
- What did the 'Uthmanic text consist in?
- In what terms does Déroche describe scribal variants in manuscripts?
- How does scribal variants relate to variant readings?

- What would a text-critical edition of the Qur'an mean, concretely, as envisioned by *Corpus Coranicum* project?
- How did al-Tabari work exegetically with variant readings? How is his exegesis significant for research?
- At what levels do political considerations enter production, definition, and research into the canon? How should researchers manage politics and facts, so that the former does not distort the latter?

Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Aarhus University: “Authoritative Texts and Their Reception in Light of Peircian Semiotics: Textual Apotheosis by Cannibalisation and Usurpation”

Abstract:

Ascribing authority to texts and occasionally embedding them in processes of canonisation is a way of culturally prioritising certain signs over others. There is nothing enigmatic or strange about this. It can fairly easily be understood in light of general semiotics. In this lecture I examine attribution of authority to texts and processes of canonisation from a Peircian perspective with special emphasis placed on his notion of habit and infinite semiosis. In the second part of the lecture, I turn cards by arguing that ascribing authority to particular texts and embedding them in canonisation processes may be seen as a way of making them irrelevant, cannibalising them or usurping them for one's own purpose.

Required reading:

- Klostergaard Petersen, Anders, “Constraining Semiotic Riverrun: Different Gradations and Understandings of Canonicity and Authoritative Writings,” in *Religion and Normativity Vol. I: The Discursive Fight over Religious Texts in Antiquity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), 22–41.
- . “The Riverrun of Rewriting Scripture: From Textual Cannibalism to Scriptural Completion,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43.4–5 (2012): 475–96.

Suggested reading:

Finkelberg, Margalit, and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 2; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

Jørn Øyrehagen Sunde, University of Bergen: “From Jerusalem to Bergen – How Psalm 85 became a cornerstone in Norwegian state formation in the High Middle Ages”

Abstract:

The four sisters Justice, Mercy, Truth and Peace – often referred to as the daughters of God – was well known figures in the Middle Ages. The story of the four sisters originate from Psalm 85, was elaborated on in Jewish writings, and brought into European and Christian intellectual life by Bernhard of Clairveaux. He was, among other things, abbot at the St. Victor monastery outside Paris, where all three archbishops of Nidaros between 1153 and 1205 pent time. A later abbot of the St. Victor monastery, Petrus Comestor, used the four sisters in one of his sermons, which was the model of the story as we know it from The Royal Mirror of app. 1260 and the Code of the Norwegian Realm from 1274. According to the Code of 1274, judges should be informed about the four sisters Justice, Mercy, Truth and Peace, and their role in all judgements, before passing their specific judgement. From a reference in

Psalm 85 the four sisters became coordinates to be applied when passing a judgement, and hence the foundation of an early legal method in Norway in the Middle Ages.

Required reading:

Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen, “Daughters of God and Counsellors of the Judges of Men: Changes in the Legal Culture of the Norwegian Realm in the High Middle Ages,” in *New Approaches to Early Law in Scandinavia* (ed. Stefan Brink and Lisa Collinson; Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 131–83.

Suggested reading:

Örücü, Esin, “Law as Transposition,” *International Comparative Law Quarterly* 51.2 (2002): 205–23.

Wieacker, Franz, “Foundations of European Legal Culture,” *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 38.1 (1990): 1–29.

Helge Årsheim, University of Oslo: “Canons on the Loose? The Mutual Constitutions of Human Rights, Law and Religion”

Abstract:

Drawing on Jonathan Z. Smith’s “redescription” of canon as a basic cultural process of limitation and “exegetical ingenuity”, this lecture uses canon as a heuristic device to examine the entangled and complex relationship between international human rights law, domestic legal regulations and religious organizations and individuals. Mapping the location and regulation of religion within the canon of international human rights law, the lecture traces what happens when these regulations travel to domestic law, and how their deployment in legislation and litigation affect and interact with the formation and renegotiation of canon within religious communities.

Required reading:

Comaroff, John L., “Reflections on the Rise of Legal Theology: Law and Religion in the Twenty-First Century,” *Social Analysis* 53.1 (2009): 193–216.

Smith, Jonathan Z., “Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 36–52.

Suggested reading:

Bader, Veit, “The Governance of Islam in Europe: The Perils of Modelling,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33.6 (2007): 871–86.

Balkin, Jack M., and Sanford Levinson, “The Canons of Constitutional Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 111.4 (1998): 963–1024.

Beaman, Lori G., “Battles over Symbols: The ‘Religion’ of the Minority versus the ‘Culture’ of the Majority,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 28.1 (2013): 67–104.

Moyn, Samuel, “From Communist to Muslim: European Human Rights, the Cold War, and Religious Liberty,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113.1 (2014): 63–86.

Richardson, James T., “Disciplined Litigation, Vigilant Litigation, and Deformation: Dramatic Organizational Change in Jehova’s Witnesses,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40.1 (2001): 11–25.

Yelle, Robert A., “Images of Law and Its Others: Canon and Idolatry in the Discourses of British India,” *Culture and Religion* 6.1 (2005): 181–99.

Helge Jordheim, University of Oslo: “Contextualization and Canonization. Competing Strategies of Interpretation?”

Abstract:

In this talk I will discuss to what extent canon and context can be said to offer two alternative ways of interpreting texts, and if the contextualism that has dominated many text-oriented disciplines in the last couple of decades have contributed to putting processes of canonization, tradition, and reception in the shadow. Finally, I will ask what a turn away from context, back to canon might look like.

Required reading:

Felski, Rita, “Context Stinks!” *New Literary History* 42.4 (2011): 573–91.

Suggested reading:

Greenblatt, Stephen, “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Latour, Bruno, “Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together,” *Avant: Trends in Interdisciplinary Studies* 3(2012): 207–60.

Montrose, Louis, “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture,” in *The New Historicism* (ed. H. Aram Veesser; New York: Routledge, 1989), 15–24.

Skinner, Quentin, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969): 3–53.