The 46[Th] Annual Conference of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS), which focused on "Muslims and the City," was cosponsored by the Islamic Civilizations and Societies Program, Boston College, Newton Campus, MA (September 29, 2017). The Conference Program Chair, Kathleen T. Bailey, Associate Director of the Islamic Civilizations and Societies Program, welcomed the guests and expressed the College's excitement in hosting the event. Since NAAIMS President, Jon Mandaville (Portland State University, OR) was not able to attend, Bailey read the following opening remarks prepared by Mandaville: "The setting of Islam has been from its beginning in Mecca *al-Mukaramah,* a setting of cities stretching from Indonesia and India to the Middle East and North and West Africa, an urban dynamic with a focus on trade and industry, art and music, poetry, book markets and scholarship. Every Islamic city has its own distinctive features, whether it be calligraphy on the walls, music in the halls, soup kitchens for the poor, or hospitals for the sick."

Four panel sessions analyzed critical aspects of the city: The opening session which examined **"The City in Words,"** was moderated by the Panel Chair and Discussant, Sheila Blair (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA).

The first presentation on "How the Citizens of Damascus Protected their City in Words," by Dana Sajdi (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA), focused on how "Damascene scholars visualized their city using words," while "Dutch artists of the Golden Age and the Venetian painters of the late Renaissance immortalized their cities in images." She examined how the tradition of describing and preserving a city in words began in the 12th century when a great Damascene scholar, Ibn Asakir, actually wrote down "a description of his walk in the city," which inaugurated a "tradition of memorializing Damascus by its citizens which continued until the 20th century." His elegant, descriptive style launched "a new way of walking, viewing, and writing about the city." The discussant, Sheila Blair, noted that Sajdi's presentation gave a "fascinating juxtaposition of the different ways that Muslims used words to describe their cities [in Damascus, while] chroniclers used verbal descriptions to 'paint' their cities." Her presentation focused primarily on how "some native Damascenes described and remembered their city over the centuries for the purpose of revising, preserving, and protecting its image in words."

During the Q & A period, Jonathan M. Bloom (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA), stated, contrary to Sajdi's remarks, that "there were images and descriptions of Venice much earlier than the 18th century." She noted that although she was aware of the "presence of earlier renditions of Venice, it was not until the 18th century that the Venetian cityscapes were a stable genre at the hands of Canaletto and others." Bloom also asked Sajdi whether she had looked at the "descriptions of Damascus by travelers and geographers in addition to the textual cityscapes she had studied." She stated that "the authors of Damascene cityscapes were actually responding to the administrative geographies issued by the Imperial City, Cairo, when it was under the Mamluk Empire. … [She added that] since the purpose of these administrative geographies was to scan for revenue, they represented Damascus' hinterland as a rich productive area ripe for exploiting. The response of the Damascene authors was to emphasize the religious and cultural value of the hinterland and downplay its agricultural riches, and therefore, they were contesting Cairo's imperial power."

This was followed by a presentation on how "Calligraphy Keeps Decorating Mosques in the Modern Era" by Hilal Kazan (Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey). Kazan analyzed works of

Turkish calligraphers and "compared inscriptions used in older or earlier mosques to contemporary architectural styles and techniques used today." She highlighted the "relationship between space and text through selected examples to show the difference in styles of writing and modern compositions of classical Islamic calligraphy and techniques." Her description of the mosque as being the most significant symbol in the religion of Islam and the social life and culture of Muslims explains why calligraphic inscriptions of Qur'anic verses are an essential feature in mosque designs.

Kazan stated that "beginning with the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina, all mosques from the Ka'ba to the most modest ones have always been considered to be the House of God (*baytullah*) across the Muslim world." She noted that Islamic architecture in mosques began in the 8th century under the Umayyad dynasty, and that the use of calligraphy to decorate various areas of mosques (the walls, *mihrab*, dome or minaret) with Qur'anic verses, the Prophet's sayings or poems became a tradition. Her presentation illustrated that "since the mosque is the center of a Muslim city" Islamic architecture goes "beyond temporal, spatial, geographical, and societal conditions and engages with the idea of infinity and metaphysical questions regarding the place of human beings in this world [and the concept pertaining to] the unity of God." Her statement that mosques are considered to "represent harmony between the material and the spiritual" further elaborates why Qur'anic verses are essential in mosque designs.

In her comparisons of Islamic architectural designs in various cities in Turkey, Kazan explained that "from the 18th century onwards, the Ottomans experienced political and social transformations adopting Western paradigms" in their artistic movements. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, these social and political transformations established a modern Turkey. Modern reforms which were introduced until the 1950s excluded Islamic cultural values from the Turkish lifestyle, including the removal of "courses on mosque architecture … from the curricula of university faculties of architecture." According to Kazan, religious architecture in mosques was ignored by reformist architects during the early Republican period, and after the coup in 1980, "mosques were built with a Western and modern outlook." Her presentation included numerous diagrams and Islamic artwork of classical and modern mosques in Turkey. The discussant, Sheila Blair, said that Kazan clearly explained and demonstrated "how calligraphers designed inscriptions to decorate their cities and mosques in Istanbul [and noted that] two nicely illustrated cases of ekphrasis and epigraphy" were among the architectural designs and styles highlighted.

Kazan's illustrations of mosques built in the 1980s included "the Batikent Mosque" which was built in 1983 without a *mihrab*. Another example was a mosque built inside the Turkish Parliament complex in 1989, where "a prism replaced the dome, and a symbolic cypress tree was used instead of a minaret." Kazan's comparisons of classical and modern mosque architectural designs illustrated different calligraphic styles of writing such as the Cufic Script, the Celi Sülüs Script and the Riq'a Script used in decorating different areas of the mosque (dome, minaret, *mihrab,* etc). She noted that when it came to the types of materials used for sustainable calligraphic inscriptions, "wood was the oldest, most protected and most legible [and if properly maintained] can be preserved for centuries without any deformations, … [but] stone or marble inscriptions are preferred for calligraphic writing since those materials are easy to acquire, and are endurable against climatic changes."

The second panel session, **"The Multi-faceted City,"** was moderated by the Panel Chair and Discussant, Jonathan M. Bloom (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA).

In her presentation on " 'Why Can't We Talk about Ottoman Churches?': Towards a Multi-confessional History of the Islamic City," Emily Neumeier (The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH), compared architectural projects focusing primarily on mosques and churches during the pre-modern period in the Ottoman Balkans. She presented three case studies from Ioannina, Thessaloniki, and Sofia. By simultaneously examining Islamic and Christian monuments, her talk clarified how "different religious spaces may have related to one another within the urban context of Islamic cities, perhaps suggesting shifting balances of power in political administrations."

Questions were raised during the Q & A period about the multiplicity of holy places from churches to synagogues to Sufi lodges. Neumeier stated that according to the 1820 map of Ioannina which is currently housed in the Bibliothèque National, one has a sense of the town's religous makeup. She noted that "only Muslims and Jews were permitted to reside within the old city walls (the Kastro), and as a result there were no churches in this quarter, only the two mosques sitting on the two crests of the peninsula, and a synagogue in the northwest quarter." She added tht "beyond the walled city, neighborhoods seem to have been fairly mixed with regards to religion, with many churches situated almost adjacent to mosques."

In addressing questions pertaining to Ali Pasha's rule, Neumeier argued that "Ali Pasha worked to establish strong connections with many different religious groups in the Ottoman Empire (what is now Greece and Albania) through architecture, including churches, mosques, and Dervish lodges." In response to a question by Sheila Blair on whether Ali Pasha's marriage to a Christian woman was a politically-motivated decision to help him cement his strong connections with different ethnic and religious groups, Neumeier stated "his marriage to a Christian woman could be interpreted as politically-motivated … [and that] Pasha sought to establish connections among the communities under his rule through architecture, and rather lenient policies about dress, education abroad, trade, etc."

This was followed by Johan [Hanna] MacKechnie (Queen's College, Kingston, Ontario, Canada), who gave us a stunning examination of "The Contemporary *Funduq*: A Medieval Muslim Institution Alive and Well in Modern Venice." MacKechnie's presentation highlighted how "all versions of the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi,* past and present, model themselves on the commercial facility of the *Funduq*, originally encountered in Muslim port cities" during the Middle Ages. She stated that during medieval times, traders, merchants and travelers in transit were housed at the *Funduq* on the upstairs floors with limited windows to the outside world, and limited interaction with members of the community. MacKechnie stated that the origins of the early modern *Fondaco dei Tedeschi,* constructed in 1228, "can be traced back to an earlier North African model, the *Funduq*." In her examination of the similarities and differences between *Funduqs,* hostels and other structures used for traders, travelers, and storage containment, she noted that "like the *Funduq*, the *Fondaco* shared the same commercial infrastructure. Both were regulated by state officials and relied on both lodging and trade as sources of revenue. Both restricted access to certain nationalities and/or faith groups and heavily taxed the products foreigners sold."

During the Q & A session, questions about the public's response to the renovated *Fundaco dei Tedeschi* were highlighted. This renovation project, which was one of Venice's largest and most iconic buildings, the 9,000 square meter *Fondaco dei Tedeschi,* located on the Grand Canal, was vilified by the media, which sparked controversy and debate among local government officials and renovation experts because it seemed to lose its status symbol as a medieval North African commercial hub. MacKechnie stated that "after years of negotiation, it was decided that [although]

the renovation project would not make any changes to the size or height of the building … housing a luxury department store in the modern *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* created controversy … [since] the space had become increasingly commercialized [with such labels as] Gucci, Fendi, and Armani."

In her examination of how travelers were accommodated, Mackechnie mentioned that "as Olivia Remie Constable argued, in many *Fanadiq/Fondacos,* in the Middle East and Arab-influenced Iberia, people in transit were meant to have limited interaction with the outside world since the windows which existed on the upper floors where they were housed were blocked." The discussant, Jonathan M. Bloom, had a different understanding, he compared the renovation of a similar *Funduq* structure in Cairo to Mackchnie's interpretation of the *Fondaco* structure in Venice, and noted that since the *Fondaco* in Venice was built overlooking the Grand Canal, where upper stories had galleries around the courtyard, travelers and/or merchants could not have had limited interaction with the outside world. Various interpretations and understandings seem to follow the *Fondaco* of Venice.

The second panel session was followed by the Luncheon Keynote Address, given by Ahmed Ragab, The Richard T. Watson Associate Professor of Science and Religion (Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA). His address examined *"**Prophetic Medicine: Medical Piety in the Medieval and Modern Islamicate Societies.***"* His most inspiring lecture dealt with individual piety and individual experience of illness, as well as communal obligations toward those who are ill. For example, when it came to visiting the sick, he said it should be viewed as *ayadah* rather than *ziyarah* (visit). His talk focused on the importance of one's introspection when trying to understand how and why suffering introduces the concept of forgiveness. According to Ragab, since the ninth century, Muslim scholars compiled prophetic traditions that "addressed anecdotes about the prophet's episodes of sickness, the treatments that he and his companions received, and their various medical habits." He stated that although these traditions were not presented as an "alternative medical tradition to the contemporaneous learned practice, they constituted an important moral and intellectual force that influenced medical knowledge and practice, changed how pious patients and physicians dealt with one another and conducted their lives, and affected the various institutions of medical practice." He examined how illness could be viewed as a "test of faith in God," and from a pietistic approach, illness could be introduced as a "conduit for forgiveness."

Ragab also noted that one should focus on body and spirit in relation to God, rather than looking at a body, mechanically. In his analysis of pietism within the realm of hadith and medicine, he spoke of works of ibn al-Qayyim, including that of ibn Sina and how ibn Sina's work did not engage in pietistic approach to medicine and illness. Whereas, on the other hand, the research and work that Ragab is undertaking focuses on hadith literature as being a "purer" approach to prophetic medicine. He stated that "around the nineteenth century, a revival of these writings [about prophetic traditions] took place linking them this time with modern European medicine and carving a new identity within a new landscape of medical practice. [His lecture explored] some of the history of 'prophetic medicine' and [focused] on how these writings influenced scholars, physicians and patients, and what effects they had on the medical landscape in the medieval and modern period."

The third panel session, "**City Spaces,"** was moderated by the Panel Chair and Discussant, James W. Morris (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA).

This session began with an outstanding presentation by Aila Santi (Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy), "Anjar: A Study on an Early Islamic Urban Experiment." According to Santi, the 8th century Umayyad city of 'Anjar, located in the southwest corner of Lebanon's Biqa' Valley,

stands as a significant exception to early Islamic urbanism. She explained how this city was distinguished by "its urban fabric strictly shaped in accordance with the criteria of Hippodamian city planning, constituting a unique *trait d'union* between the Hellenistic-Roman tradition and the first Islamic urban experiments." She noted that recent archaeological excavations of the ancient ruins in this Ummayad city confirmed that the Umayyad royal palace and mosque of al-Walid 1 were built on a pre-existing Byzantine town. She added that "the classical conception of urban space in 'Anjar and the emerging demands of the Muslim civilization reached a definitive working compromise … [and that the] Islamic lifestyle fit in harmoniously without compromising the order of the Hippodamian grid."

According to the discussant, James W. Morris, Aila Santi's fascinating case study "focused on the early Umayyad city of 'Anjar which noted historians have treated either as a pre-Islamic city, or as a new royal city founded by the famous Umayyad ruler al-Walid 1 (705-715 CE)." He noted that her presentation is a "remarkable illustration of the ways that archaeological and historical evidence can be carefully brought together to solve or illuminate longstanding historical mysteries." The discussant explained that during the past century we have seen an "expansion in the use of archeological research and methods to fill in our very limited contemporary written historical resources for the first two centuries of the Islamic era, especially in the pioneering use of epigraphic and paleographic research regarding the background and writing of early Arabic, including key scriptural documents." During the dynamic Q & A period, Santi explained that "due to the short period of settlement, the city of 'Anjar escaped overlapping, successive urban fabrics, therefore, constituting an unblemished crystallized archive of first-hand information on the early Islamic urban life in *Bilād al-Shām*." She concluded that " … a well-ordered hybrid where ancient features satisfied new needs in an elegant layout, strongly contradicted the abused Orientalist stereotype of a paradigmatic, cluttered and picturesque Islamic city."

The next speaker, Pelin Kadercan (Brown University, Providence, RI), highlighted "Re-imagining a Marginalized Identity: Music and Alevi Youth in Istanbul (1800s to the Present)." Her riveting analysis of how Turkish folk-music, Western and/or Eastern music influenced the identity formation among the Alevi youth is the key to understanding why "the change of space from the private sphere to the public realm [in Turkey] influenced the performance of Alevi musicians and their involvement with religion and politics."

Kadercan's presentation highlighted how the Alevi minority group was marginalized first under the Ottoman Empire, and later during the Republican era under the leadership of various political leaders, including Kemal Ataturk. The early Republican regime suppressed Ottoman institutions which ultimately silenced and/or censored religious rituals, including musical traditions associated with Sufi orders. She noted that Turkey's "state elites from the beginning of the establishment of the Turkish Republic had perceived the Eastern style of music as being morbid, which internalized an Orientalist mindset and recognized the West as the authority in musical matters." This resulted in the reorganization of music education where "*la turca* (Eastern-style music) changed into *la franga* (Western-style music)." This drastic and harsh reorganization of music genres that shunned Turkish folk-songs created deep resentments among intellectuals and music performers at that time. Kadercan stated that "during the early Republican era, no one really dared to mention religious forms of music, and that Sufi music included Alevi forms of music, but Alevism was never visible until the 1990s." She concluded that the "Alevis have come to attribute new meanings to their belongingness and identities and that, in turn, affected their music-making practices."

During the Q & A session, the discussant, James W. Morris, noted that this presentation examined how the continual marginalization of the Alevis first began with "Ataturk's suppression of Ottoman institutions that ensured their repression and isolation for several centuries, [which was followed by] massive immigration from Eastern Anatolia to Istanbul and other major cities [due to the] wider popularity of Alevi music and poetry, at times associated with 'left' political movements." Morris added that her paper highlighted how "recent political developments potentially threatened their movement for cultural, religious and political free-expression [and gave importance] to the significant ethical, religious and political role of responsible scholars and researchers in recognizing [and exposing] … the contributions of … creative minority voices in each country."

Mary Elston (Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), addressed the concept of "Social Media Ṣuḥba: The Practice of Companionship in Contemporary Cairo." Her presentation focused on how social media (Facebook and Youtube in particular) is transforming the traditional practice of suḥba, companionship. According to Elston, "ṣuḥba is an educational practice by which a teacher and student build a personal bond that allows the student to absorb the instructor's virtuous dispositions and knowledge. Most often, a student will undertake suḥba by remaining in the presence of the teacher as much as possible – studying, reading, talking, eating, and worshiping with him."

Her fascinating study is based on ethnographic research "including participant observation in Islamic study circles and interviews with shuyūkh and their students." According to the discussant, James W. Morris, Elston's presentation was an "extraordinary, insightful and revealing study, based on very recent fieldwork with leading religious scholars and their disciples in Cairo, [as it revealed how the] … sociological and spiritual role of suḥba (student/discipleship) in Islamic fields of learning, and in personal forms of spiritual guidance (typically in Sufi tariqas in Egypt) has been radically undermined and simultaneously reshaped" through digital media and cell phones.

During the dynamic Q & A session, Elston noted that 'ulama use social media, and that just before this conference began, she watched on Facebook Live "one of the lessons at al-Azhar mosque in tasawwuf, [and wondered] how the shuyukh understand 'Facebook Live' in relation to others uses of social media, and how it is similar or different from watching a video recording of a lesson, or even viewing the newsfeed of a shaykh, and under what circumstances would watching a lesson on 'Facebook Live' be considered ta'līm." She noted that she is interested in exploring "how new technologies have impacted traditional forms of Islamic education (ta'līm), and notions of knowledge ('ilm), ethics (akhlāq/adāb), and embodiment in the contemporary Muslim world?"

Elston repeatedly stated that governments in the Muslim world and traditional scholars ('ulama) recognize the fact that through Facebook and other social media platforms, religious education is available to a wider audience (men and women), including audiences otherwise deprived of religious learning. She examined how the internet puts in question who has authority over religious and spiritual guidance, and analyzed how the authority of the 'ulama in religious education can be undermined by social media. The discussant said that Elston's "remarkably balanced and nuanced presentation carefully presents what has been lost [through digital media] in the transmission of disciplined religious learning … and personal support needed for one's spiritual growth and transformation."

The fourth panel session, **"The Ideal Islamic City,"** which consisted only of one presentation, was moderated by Panel Chair and Discussant, David M. DiPasquale (Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA). Daniel P. Wolk (The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL), spoke about "Emergency Aid in Iraqi Cities: Forging Partnerships between a Secularist Non-Governmental Organization and Mosque-based Charities." The socio-political and economic complexities in Iraq were reinforced by Wolk's research on how "technical expertise in international development is lacking in Muslim charities." He confirmed that although "Muslim charities have local financial backing of rich donors, and knowledge of persons in need, such as orphans and the disabled," these charities are not accessible to the secularist NGO establishment.

In addressing the case of Islamic charities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Wolk suggested that resources of the international humanitarian aid networks, both governmental and non-governmental, remain inaccessible to them because of a lack of "technical expertise," narrowly defined in the international aid and development culture. "[Although] most charity-work in Iraq is still mosque-centered, … most Islamic-based charity efforts have had to move underground [or disguise their faith-based philosophy], because, unable to comply with the secular international standards [of that international aid and development culture], they have been prohibited by the Iraqi government from officially registering [as Islamic charities]."

Wolk explained how the important work of local, mosque-based charities seldom receives any attention in the news media. Working in such a politicized and conflict-ridden environment such as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, important Islamic charities have been careful to avoid discriminating on the basis of religion, to remain independent of the military and security forces, and to avoid recruitment to the Islamic political party that sponsors them. In response to questions that came up during the Q & A period, Wolk elaborated on how, in contrast to other local charities, the Islamic charities on which he was focusing "have successfully eluded the appearance of any collusion with political or private business interests, steering clear of the many rival political party-based militias, and managed to depoliticize their appeals for financial and other support from potential donors." For these and other reasons, he is optimistic that it will be possible for Islamic charities and experts in international humanitarian aid to establish productive modes of cooperation and partnership.

Wolk's presentation on charities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq transpired in the midst of momentous events in the Region. He noted that Iraqi Kurds voted in a referendum on September 25 overwhelmingly for independence from Iraq. On a side note, two weeks after this vote, beginning on October 15, Iranian-backed Iraqi-Armed Forces, as well as *Shiʿite* Popular Mobilization Forces, attacked Kurdish-controlled Kirkuk and other disputed territories, and re-imposed central government authority throughout the Kurdistan Region.

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Layla Sein
NAAIMS Executive Director, and
Director of Academic Affairs
Managing Editor, *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies (JIMS)*
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