

NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES

EXPRESSION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE
CHRISTIAN - JEWISH - MUSLIM MEDITERRANEAN

HOME PROGRAM FACULTY & ORGANIZERS PARTICIPANTS FACILITIES FAQ

Thomas Burman (Faculty)

Biography:

Thomas E. Burman is Distinguished Professor of the Humanities and Head of the Department of History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His scholarly work focuses on the intellectual, cultural, and religious interactions between Medieval Christians and Muslims in the western Mediterranean. His first book, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050-1200* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) examined the learned culture of the Arabic-speaking Christians of Islamic Spain, while his *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) traced the reactions of medieval and early-modern Europeans to Islam's holy book, whether they read it in Latin translation or the Arabic original. It won the American Philosophical Society's Jacques Barzun Prize in Cultural History and was named a Choice Outstanding Academic title. In 1992-93 he was Rockefeller Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Islamic Societies and Civilizations at Washington University, St. Louis; in 2002-03 he was an NEH Fellow and also Abdul Aziz Al-Mutawa Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. He has given invited lectures at institutions such as Columbia University, Dumbarton Oaks, and the Warburg Institute at the University of London, and was a plenary speaker at the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies (2010).



Lecture Abstract:

Ramon Marti and the People of the Book: Jews, Muslims, and the Limits of Christian Mission in the Thirteenth-Century.

This lecture will explore why the thirteenth-century Spanish Dominican, Ramon Marti, who was the Latin world's greatest authority on the Arabic language and Islamic texts and beliefs (all of which he knew intimately), nevertheless devoted his greatest scholarly efforts to refuting Judaism using Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic sources, even though Judaism represented only a minimal political and religious threat to Latin Christianity, while Islam was a clear and present danger on both accounts. I will suggest that in this he is representative of the whole scholastic movement which, though dedicated to defending Christendom intellectually against all comers, was very slow to recognize the significance of Islam, and still found it far more meaningful and useful to clarify its identity in conversation with Judaism.

Seminar Abstract:

Translation and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean.

In this seminar we will explore the highly ambiguous role of translation in both collapsing and reinforcing boundaries between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Large-scale translations movements, for example, brought vast libraries of Greek and Syriac science and philosophy from Byzantine and Oriental Christian culture into Arab-Muslim culture and then the same range of texts from Arab-Islam into Latin-Christianity. On the one hand these remarkable acts of borrowing were made possible by periods of exceptional openness to the cultural wealth of rival religious civilizations. But on the other hand, by giving Aristotle and Arabic voice or Avicenna a Latin voice, translators were insuring that Arab-Muslim and Latin-Christians never had to learn Greek or Arabic themselves, effectively closing the door on further exploration of the rival.

Bibliography:

Primary sources:

- Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, "My Syriac and Arabic Translations of Galen."
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1. 1-8 [Primary source demonstrating how overwhelming Aquinas' doctrine of God derives from sources translated into Latin from either Greek or Arabic]

Secondary Sources:

- Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek thought, arabic culture: The graeco-arabic translation movement in baghdad and early 'Abbāsid society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*. London: Psychology Press, 1998.
- Burman, Thomas E., "The Cultures and Dynamic of Translation into Latin," in Hexter, Ralph, and David Townsend, eds. *The Oxford handbook of medieval Latin literature*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Burnett, Charles. "The coherence of the Arabic-Latin translation program in Toledo in the twelfth century." *Science in Context* 14, no. 1-2 (2001): 249-288.
- Szpiech, Ryan. "Latin as a Language of Authoritative Tradition," in Hexter, Ralph, and David Townsend, eds. *The Oxford handbook of medieval Latin literature*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Contact Information:

- tburman@utk.edu
- <https://utk.academia.edu/thomasburman>
- [University of Tennessee Knoxville](#)

Important: Generally, US citizens who wish to stay in Spain for tourist or business purposes for up to 90 days do not need a visa. They should travel with a round trip air ticket and a passport valid for a minimum of six months. To confirm this, and for visa information for foreign visitors to Spain, click [here](#).

Disclaimer: Information provided on this site and the documents linked to it is provisional and subject to change without notice at the organizers' discretion. Neither the NEH, UCSC, nor the Mediterranean Seminar take responsibility for the content of external internet sites.

Sponsored In Part By:

