

Tefsir Arařtırmaları Dergisi

The Journal of Tafsir Studies

مجلة الدراسات التفسيرية

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/tader>

E-ISSN: 2587-0882

Cilt/Volume: 8, Sayı/Issue: 2, Yıl/Year: 2024 (Ekim/October)

Interview with Professor Aaron Hughes: American Orientalism and Understanding the Qur'an in the Light of Late Antiquity*

Prof. Aaron Hughes ile Röportaj: Amerikan Oryantalizmi ve Kur'an'ı Geç Antik Çağ Işığında Anlamak

مقابلة مع البروفيسور آرون هيوز: الاستشراق الأمريكي وفهم القرآن في ضوء العصور القديمة المتأخرة

Görüşme Yapılan / Interviewee

Aaron Hughes

Pr. Dr. Rochester Üniversitesi, Klasikler ve Din Bilimleri Fakültesi

Professor, University of Rochester, Faculty of Religion and Classics

New York, USA

aaron.hughes@rochester.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3401-8463>

Görüşmeci / Interviewer

Bayram Kara

Doktora Öğrencisi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi

Temel İslam Bilimleri, Tefsir Ana Bilim Dalı
PhD Candidate, İstanbul University, Faculty of Theology

Basic Islamic Sciences, Department of Basic Islamic Sciences,
İstanbul, TÜRKİYE

byrnkr74@hotmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7724-4471>

Makale Bilgisi – Article Information

Makale Türü/Article Type: Söyleşi / Interview

Geliş Tarihi/Date Received: 17/09/2023

Kabul Tarihi/Date Accepted: 15/10/2024

Yayın Tarihi/Date Published: 30/10/2024

Atıf / Citation: Hughes, Aaron. "Interview with Professor Aaron Hughes: American Orientalism and Understanding the Qur'an in the Light of Late Antiquity" (Görüşmeci: Bayram Kara, Görüşme Tarihi: 05/09/2024). *Tefsir Arařtırmaları Dergisi* 8/2 (Ekim/October, 2024), 764-775.

<https://doi.org/10.31121/tader.1551665>

İntihal: Bu makale, intihal.net yazılımınca taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

Plagiarism: This article has been scanned by intihal.net. No plagiarism detected.

Bu makale Creative Commons Atıf-GayriTicari 4.0 Uluslararası Lisans (CC BY-NC) ile lisanslanmıştır. This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC).

Yayıncı / Published by: Ali KARATAŞ / TÜRKİYE

* We extend our warmest gratitude to Professor Hughes, and University of Rochester for their hospitality and the opportunity to engage in such an insightful interview.

Abstract

This study includes our interview with Aaron Hughes, who continued his studies on Islam in the United States. Hughes, a professor at the University of Rochester, is highly knowledgeable and widely recognized in the field of Religious Studies. The questions we posed to Hughes were related to two subjects: American Orientalism and Late Antiquity. As far as we can determine, there are very few studies on these two subjects in Türkiye. This interview will attempt to contribute to the Turkish academic community. The question of which centuries are included in the Late Antiquity created by Peter Brown is a matter of debate. This period, which generally covers the period from the 2nd century AD to the end of the 8th century in historiography, is constantly being stretched by researchers in the United States. Garth Fowden, who expanded the period even further and extended it to a longer period, put forward the theory of the "First Millennium". This periodization, which has made a great leap forward in the field of history with the studies conducted in recent years, has begun to be used effectively in Qur'anic studies. Angelika Neuwirth, a German-born orientalist, has conducted an intertextual reading by placing the Quran within the epistemic fabric of Late Antiquity with her Corpus Coranicum project. This method, which is also used in the works of American orientalists such as Stephen Shoemaker, Daniel Beck, Sean Anthony, Gabriel Said Reynolds and David Powers, seems likely to dominate the field in the coming years.

Keywords: Tafsir, Qur'an, United States, Orientalism, Aaron Hughes, Late Antiquity

Öz

Bu çalışma Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde İslam çalışmalarını devam ettiren Aaron Hughes ile yapmış olduğumuz söyleşiyi içermektedir. Rochester Üniversitesi'nde öğretim görevlisi olan Hughes, alanında (Religious Studies) son derece bilgili ve geniş çapta tanınmış birisidir. Hughes'a yönelttiğimiz sorular iki konu ile alakalıdır: Amerikan oryantizmi ve Geç Antikçağ. Bu iki konu ile alakalı bizim tespit edebildiğimize göre Türkiye'de yok denecek kadar az çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu söyleşi ile Türk akademisine katkı sunmaya çalışılacaktır. Peter Brown'un yaratmış olduğu Geç Antikçağ'ın hangi yüzyılları içerdiği meselesi tartışma konusudur. Genel olarak tarih yazımında MS II. yüzyıldan VIII. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar olan süreci içerisine alan bu dönem, Birleşik Devletler'deki araştırmacılar tarafından sürekli esnetilmektedir. Dönemi daha fazla genişleterek uzun bir sürece yayan Garth Fowden "Birinci Bin Yıl" teorisini ortaya koymuştur. Tarih alanında son yıllarda yapılan çalışmalarla büyük bir sıçrayış gerçekleştiren bu dönemselleştirme, Kur'an araştırmalarında etkin bir şekilde kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Alman asıllı bir oryantist olan Angelika Neuwirth Corpus Coranicum projesiyle Kur'an'ı Geç Antikçağ'ın epistemik dokusu içerisine yerleştirerek metinler arası bir okuma yapmıştır. Amerikalı oryantistler arasında yer alan Stephen Shoemaker, Daniel Beck, Sean Anthony, Gabriel Said Reynolds ve David Powers gibi isimlerin çalışmalarında da kullanılan bu yöntem, önümüzdeki yıllarda alana hâkim olacak gibi gözüküyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tefsir, Kur'an, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Oryantalizm, Aaron Hughes, Geç Antikçağ

الخلاصة

تشمل هذه الدراسة مقابلتنا مع (أرون هيووز). الذي واصل دراساته حول الإسلام في الولايات المتحدة. و(هيووز) أستاذ في جامعة روتشستر. يتميز (هيووز) بمعرفة واسعة كما أنه معروف بشكل كبير في مجال دراسة الأديان. وكانت الأسئلة التي طرحت على (هيووز) مرتبطة بموضوعين. هما: الاستشراق الأمريكي والعصور القديمة المتأخرة. ويقدر استطاعتنا تم تحديد الاتي ان هناك دراسات قليلة جداً حول هذين الموضوعين في تركيا. مما يتيح لهذه المقابلة بالمساهمة في المجتمع الأكاديمي التركي. وكان موضوع النقاش عن: أي القرون كانت تشملها العصور القديمة المتأخرة كما وضعها بيتر براون. (وهذه الفترة تغطي بشكل عام من القرن الثاني الميلادي إلى نهاية القرن الثامن في الكتابات التاريخية)، ولقد تم العمل على توسيع هذه الفترة باستمرار من قبل الباحثين في الولايات المتحدة ومن هؤلاء الباحثين جارت فودن، الذي قام بالعمل على اطالة هذه الفترة بشكل أكبر، كما قدم نظرية "الألفية الأولى". وحققت هذه الفترات الزمنية فقرة كبيرة في مجال التاريخ مع الدراسات التي أجريت في السنوات الأخيرة وبدأت تُستخدم بشكل مؤثر في الدراسات القرآنية وايضا أنجيليكا نويورث المستشرقة التي ولدت في ألمانيا. قامت بإجراء قراءة نصية من خلال وضع القرآن ضمن النسيج المعرفي للعصور القديمة المتأخرة من خلال مشروعها "كوروبوس قرآنكوم". و يبدو أن هذه الطريقة هي التي تُستخدم أيضاً في أعمال المستشرقين الأمريكيين مثل ستيفن شوميكر، ودانيال بيك، وشون أنطوني، وغابرييل سعيد رينولدز، وديفيد باورز، وايضا من المرجح أن تسيطر هذه الطريقة على هذا المجال في السنوات القادمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفسير، القرآن، الولايات المتحدة، الاستشراق، أرون هيووز، العصور القديمة المتأخرة

Introduction

Before presenting the interview, I would like to provide a concise explanation of the concept “Late Antiquity”. It is a very intriguing subject but it is not well known in Türkiye. The Turkish academy has very few studies about this topic. “Late Antiquity” is a periodization term. The late antique period, which covers a wide period and geography, has recently become a subject of interest for Western researchers (especially in the USA). In the past few decades, very productive and exciting developments in the study of Late Antiquity have led to a prodigious expansion in our knowledge of pre-Islamic Arabia, a subject that has been rarely explored. Western scholars have begun to understand early Islam through the lens of Late Antiquity after these developments. They positioned Islam within the broader fabric of the epistemic world of late antiquity. This historical approach has become a new perspective in Qur’anic studies. The Qur’an has been analyzed in the light of non-Islamic texts that emerged during late antiquity. But we must also consider about who pioneered this broad field of study. The answer is Peter Brown. This is significant because the pioneer shaped this field according to his own tendencies.

This periodization emerged at a time when Classical and Medieval historiography had reached a standstill and struggled to offer new insights. It brought together several different disciplines (including Orientalism) that had previously been studied in isolation. “It began as a project of inclusion. The discipline of late antiquity sought to break down boundaries separating classical, early Christian, Patristic, early medieval, Byzantine, Jewish, Syriac, and early Islamic studies.”¹ The intellectual framework and methodological infrastructure that made possible were established by none other than the historian Peter Brown. “In 1971, a book by Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, described Late Antiquity as a long-lasting phenomenon (200–800 C.E.), during which the dissolution of the ancient Mediterranean world led to the creation of three civilizations, all equal heirs of antiquity: Western Europe, Byzantium, and Islam. Later, in *The Making of Late Antiquity* (1978), Brown proposed defining Late Antiquity by its religious and cultural themes, in their relation to the social evolutions at the heart of the Mediterranean world.”²

Peter Brown sought to challenge the idea of decline (of the Roman Empire) as proposed by Edward Gibbon in *The History of Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon attributed the decline to both Christianity and Barbarians. Brown, however, disagreed with this thesis and introduced a new periodization to highlight the continuity of the Roman Empire and ancient cultures. He depicted a richly complex Christian World. Hence this field negotiated through Christian discourse. Building on this, Garth Fowden extended Late Antiquity to encompass the entire First Millennium.

Angelika Neuwirth, the director of the Germany based project *Corpus Coranicum*, which is working on a critical edition of the Quran, proposes reading the Quran as the final

¹ Marginalia, “Late Antiquity Dissolves- By Anthony Kaldellis”, (13 September 2024) <https://themarginaliareview.com/late-antiquity-dissolves-by-anthony-kaldellis/>.

² Hervé Inglebert, “Introduction: Late Antique Conceptions of Late Antiquity”, *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-4.

product of a complex dialogue rooted in Late Antiquity. Apart from Neuwirth, this periodization has been used by orientalists in the United States to understand early Islam and the Qur'an. Stephen Shoemaker, Daniel Beck, Sean Anthony, Gabriel Said Reynolds and David Powers are prominent names in this regard. Understanding the Quran by situating in the context of Late Antiquity is likely become a dominant approaching the field in the coming years. I hope that this interview with Aaron Hughes will foster interaction within the Turkish academic community.

Interview

KARA- Thank you, Professor. First and foremost, we would like to thank you for sparing your time for this interview. Could you begin by sharing with us an overview of your academic career?

HUGHES- Sure. Well, before we get started, I'd like to thank you for coming to talk to me. I'm absolutely thrilled and delighted and honored. My academic career is a tough one, so let me go back to the beginning, as it were. My dad grew up in poverty in the east end of Glasgow. My mom is Lebanese. My grandparents, her parents, came over from what was then the Ottoman Empire. Today is south Lebanon, a village called Srifa. They were Twelver Shia. In fact, as far as I can tell, they were the first documented Shiites in Canada and he was a fur trader in the Canadian Arctic. He would trade goods for fur from indigenous peoples and bring them to my hometown of Edmonton to sell at auctions, and then take more stuff up North. I'll tell you why this is important in a bit. My grandparents were two of the pioneering families who were responsible for building the first mosque in Canada, the Masjid Al Rashid in 1938. My mom was Lebanese Muslim, at least in name only. My dad was Scottish Catholic. They got married. Didn't talk a lot about religion. I grew up secular, always aware that, from my dad's side, I was to support Glasgow Celtic (a Scottish football team), but also aware that from my mom's family I inherited something different and interesting. When I went to university as an undergraduate, I thought "you know I'd like to learn more about Muslims and more about Islam". I took a course in Arabic, and I began to learn about Islamic studies. And then, I guess the rest is history. I went and did my PhD, post doc in Islamic studies, oftentimes, dealing, at least in the past, with Islamic-Jewish relations, which I think will probably bring us nicely into the Late Antique period. And then I got a variety of academic positions. My first one was at the University of Calgary, in Western Canada. Then I moved to the U.S. in 2012. (I long to go back home to Canada, I miss it a lot.) I've written a lot over the years, after spending a lifetime studying Arabic, Arabic texts; I also learned Hebrew, and Muslim-Jewish history. Now, as I approach 60, I've returned back to that question of my mum's family. I've just completed a hundred-thousand-word monograph called *Islam: A Canadian History*. Basically, it's the very first history of Islam and Muslims in Canada. No one's ever written a book like this before. That is going to come out with the University of Toronto Press, sometime next year. And the Institute for Ismaili Studies in London, at the Aga Khan University, has commissioned me to write a history of the Ismaili community of Canada. I am determined to write the history of Muslim presences in Canada. I also mentioned that I have this ongoing love of football, which the Americans call soccer, and I've started to write a little bit

about this. I have an edited volume, *The Beautiful Game on a Muslim Pitch*, which is coming out with Edinburgh University Press next year. And I'm also working on another monograph called *Religion, Football and Globalization*. That's pretty much it in terms of my career.

KARA- Thank you so much. Is it possible to talk about an American Orientalism? If so, do you believe that orientalist studies need to be decolonized?

HUGHES- Okay, I think that's a tough question, I'm going to come at it from two ways. The first thing, and here let me bring up the work of Majid Daneshgar's book, which seems to want to reclaim the term orientalism in a manner that avoids the more traditional, top-down approach to orientalism. He argues that we need to think about all those nameless and faceless orientalists who were trained in places like SOAS, and who then went out into the various colonies, making travel writings, reports, and so on. They knew their languages and, as low-level functionaries, they tried to make sense of the social worlds in which they found themselves. Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, which was published in 1978 focuses not on these individuals, but on "big names," who often made rather strange pronouncements. His book certainly came out at the right time. But we must remember that Said was not a historian; he was an English professor or a literature person. I've written a little bit about how an argument from English literature has now been metamorphosed into a historical argument. Look, I'm a big fan of Edward Said and he played a large role in my own career. He changed the shape of the field. A year after the publication of that book, all these Department of Oriental Studies suddenly became departments of Near Eastern or Middle Eastern studies. I think you're absolutely right that before Said came on the scene, a lot of people in the United States would have been quite happy to call themselves Orientalists. So there definitely is an American orientalism. But, as I've also written about, I think there are other kinds of American Orientalists. If orientalism is an approach that denies Muslims agency, then I think a lot of scholars, in the aftermath of 9/11, engaged in a rhetoric of authenticity; "This is real Islam. This isn't real Islam. No real Muslim could do it." With such statements, those critical of Orientalism, and followers of Said, had no problem telling us what true or authentic Islam was or is. And in so doing that, they're denying certain Muslims agency, if that makes sense. But there's this attempt to say, no Muslim could do this, because real Islam is this.

KARA- I think some of them tried to create liberal Islam. Like John Esposito and Asma Afsaruddin.

HUGHES- Completely. I was just looking at Asma Afsaruddin's book and using it for a chapter, I'm writing on presentism. Many pretend to be historians and seek to make sense of the past, but often they reshape the past for their own ends. To say, for example, that the prophet Muhammad preached a gay friendly or L-G-B-T message is presentist. To go back to your original question: I think there are two kinds of American orientalism. There's old school orientalism that people like Bernard Lewis did. He went a little over to the dark side when he wrote *What Went Wrong?* But even one of my teachers, John Walbridge, who's worked a lot on Islamic philosophy, he also thought that Said's Orientalism was to quote him "madcap." I guess it depends how we define orientalism. If we want to define an Orientalist as someone that knows the languages, somebody that reads text in their original and someone who descri-

bes those text contextually, is that an Orientalist? If so, what's wrong with that? But I think critics want to add to that mix, and say that Orientalists somehow reify the Muslim mind. For example, Sean Anthony's recent book, which I like very much. Is that orientalist? I mean, this is a guy that is smart, knows the languages and can theorize about them, but he's certainly not engaging in madcap ideas about reifying the Arab mind, or the Muslim mind. So, I think we need to work with a clear definition of orientalism. Knowing texts well, knowing the languages, being able to write comfortably about them. If that's orientalism, I'm okay with that. I think critics of Orientalism, in particular, the neo-orientalists that I talk about that are reifying Islam in other ways, they want to use the term to criticize or undermine anybody that they disagree with. So now anyone white or male can no longer talk about Islam. This is a slippery slope. Orientalism and the critiques of Orientalism can easily slide, as so many things do today, into identity politics. Critics, taking Said's argument to an extreme conclusion, can now say, "how can you say that, you're just a white man? You're an Orientalist". I think, and here I'll follow Daneshgar, it is okay to be an Orientalist if, by that term, we mean someone who knows their languages, know the textual and manuscript tradition, but doesn't engage in silly flights of fancy and civilizational reifications.

I remember once I was at conference and I think it was Stephen Shoemaker who was giving a presentation and someone in the audience said you have no right to speak about the Quran because you're a white guy and not a Muslim. I think implicit in that is "you're an Orientalist, you're a settler-colonialist", and all those other trendy buzzwords. Orientalism, then, is a word that is multivalent or polysemous and critics of the term lock in only on meaning often to create a strawman. This is related to the question: Do Islamic studies need to be decolonized? I'm going to say yes and no. I'm going to say yes because I certainly take Joseph Lumbard's point about Quranic studies. We tend to ignore Arabic and Muslims sources as if they were secondary. And he certainly has a point there. But the problem is that I have yet to see a manifesto for decolonization. What would the decolonization of Islamic studies look like? I don't know. I'm intrigued and I really want to know what it would look like. If it simply means recreating a Madrasa in the secular, post Enlightenment Academy, I don't know what use that would be. But if it means something much more epistemic, saying that, to use a simplistic example, rather than call the Quran the Muslim Bible, why don't we call Jesus the Muslim Quran or something like this, then I am intrigued. Islamic studies in the west like Hindu studies or Buddhist studies uses western categories and tries to make sense of others. It makes others fit into our categories, which may not be the most helpful. If decolonizing Islamic studies means thinking (or rethinking) how we describe Islam using our categories, then I am all for it. If it means slipping into identity politics (who can or cannot speak), then I am suspicious. Russell T. McCutcheon and I wrote two books together called *Religion in 50 Words* and *Religion in 50 More Words*, where we take essentially a hundred of the main words in religious studies and show where they come from, showing how our main terms and categories emerge from the Christian West, and that we have subsequently forced other people and other religions to use to speak about themselves. And I think that's the problem. I don't think there's been enough reflection on our categories. Decolonizing Islamic studies would ideally start by rethinking how we describe Islam? What are the terms and categories we use?

Let me summarize: I'm interested in decolonization. But it has to be done properly, and it has to be done intellectually. And it can't resort to atavism, where we go back to this idea that if you're not a Muslim or if you're white, you can't contribute to this conversation. If the new decolonized Islamic studies is simply a madrasa on the third floor where Muslims are walking around theologizing, I don't think that has a place in the modern university. But if we mean a decolonized Islamic studies where people can know and read texts, argue about interpretations, and have knowledge of the sources; a place where everyone does not have to be Muslim (or an Arab, Turk or Persian), then that I can get behind. Then I think that's interesting.

KARA-Thank you. Do you think there have been any changes in Quranic studies after 9/11?

HUGHES- Let me speak in general, about Islamic studies, I'll tack Quranic studies on to that in a second. I've thought and written a lot about this; indeed, I just spent six weeks in Sweden where I gave versions of a lecture on how 09/11 changed everything. My first week on the job was as a wet-behind-the-ears and naive assistant professor, fresh out of grad school, was the week of 9/11. And I was in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. It changed everything. I think I'm one of the few people that resisted the change, but I'll talk about that in a second. All of a sudden colleagues came up with this rhetoric, saying "that wasn't real Islam; the people that did that weren't real Muslims". I understand saying that is probably better than saying "all Muslims believe that" but the fact is that many began to believe that rhetoric. It was a slippery slope from that to the idea that there's an authentic Islam and there's an inauthentic Islam. And then there began the cottage industry of presentists books by the likes of Asma Afsaruddin, and Tariq Ramadan. Universities across the country opened up positions in Islamic studies; campuses wanted a person, preferably a brown person or a Muslim, to be on campus to tell students that real Muslims didn't do this. I really began to resist this paradigm. I published a few books critical of this approach: *Theorizing Islam* and *Islam and the Tyranny of Authenticity*. I argued, especially in the latter, that our goal as secular professors of religious studies is to not describe who's authentic or who is unauthentic, but to shine the torch back a little further and say what is this rhetoric of authenticity doing? It certainly rubbed some people the wrong way. Because I also work in Jewish studies, some began to acquaint me with being Jewish and they'd say, "as the Jewish scholar of Islam says", which I found really crazy and, again, based on identity politics. I'm not even Jewish, if anything, I'm Canadian and the religion I feel closest to was Islam. But I'm not going to lie about it! It hurt a little but that was the way my critics tried to discredit me. It's funny though a lot of them were converts and they were critical of me. I think I must have hit a button. Today, we're now a generation after 09/11 and I think my work has been picked up most by young Muslim scholars in the Islamic world. Here I should be clear: I've never been critical of Muslims at all, but I've been critical of some of the people that study Islam.

So now, I think if we try to fit the Quran into this, we have to say that- and I think this takes us also back to the Orientalist question- is that textual criticism of the Quran is verboten (forbidden), at least in religious studies circles. You can certainly talk about the Quran as an Ethical text. And there's all these interesting books that have come out recently, like Aysha

Hidayatullah's *Feminist Edges of the Quran*. My own intellectual proclivities, however, is to engage in textual criticism this is why I am so excited about situating early Islam against the late antique milieu. I mean, look, I feel close to Islam, it's the religion of my heritage, but the secular person in me admits and realizes that books don't fall from heaven. So, the question becomes, where does the Quran come from? Every text has a subtext, has influences. I think that historically this is where the uglier features of Orientalism comes in: reducing the Quran to the sum of its parts. But I think, as I've tried to write about, if we situate the Quran against a late antique backdrop, then the Quran becomes a text like any other text, a text that also influences other texts and isn't just influenced by other texts. In the Late Antique period, there were not simply discrete "Jews," "Muslims" or Christians." Rather there were complex social formations that shared a similar vocabulary. So rather than adopt the traditional Orientalist approach, that Islam is simply the sum of its sources, I think Late Antique studies, maybe we'll call it the new Orientalism?, is much more sophisticated and realizes that social communities, social groups in the late antique period had no problem adapting in similar ways to text, to common stimuli and environments. If we look at the Theodosian Code, for example, a Late Antique Christian text that dealt with religious minorities, how does it relate to early Islamic texts, like the Constitution of Medina, which was also trying to situate and categorize other religious and social groups. Do we just say that these texts are not related? Well, Islam spread out into a geographic area that had witnessed Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, and we know that the early Muslims had very little bureaucratic infrastructure of their own. As Muslims moved into those previous areas, they certainly took over some of the bureaucratic offices that were in place, and made them their own. That doesn't mean that they copied them, but they had to. And that to me is important, because rather than see Islam as the terminus of late antiquity, we now see early Islam as the continuation. And I think that is really important. The problem, especially for graduate students, is that one needs a lot of linguistic work to undertake such study. I hold out much promise for all those inscriptions that we haven't yet processed, taxonomized catalogued. This is why I am so intrigued by the work of Ahmad Al Jallad and others.

KARA- Thank you Professor Hughes. As a doctoral student on Late Antiquity, I would like to ask you a question about this periodization. I have noticed that Late Antique studies have seen a significant surge in USA. What do you think the reason is for this?

HUGHES- Could I answer with the short answer?

KARA- Yes.

HUGHES- Peter Brown.

KARA- I claimed that in my thesis. Peter Brown created this field. And the second person is Averil Cameron.

HUGHES- Absolutely. Both Peter Brown and Averil Cameron have worked in Christian antiquity and I love the fact that we now have colleagues in Islamic studies who have brought Islam into these conversations. I think Stephen Shoemaker and Sean Anthony are good examples of that. David Powers to an extent. I tell graduate students, however, to be

careful when it comes to late antique studies. People know what the classical world is; they know what the medieval world; the Renaissance, and so on. Sometimes late antiquity is a tough rubric, because where does it fit? Where does it fit in the modern university? Should it be classics (which unfortunately only seems to be interested in Greece and Rome)? In religious studies or history? When we hire positions in religious studies, we rarely hire someone in late antique religion/s. But I do think that the future at least of early Islam is in late antique studies.

KARA- In late antique studies, the Quran is approached only in a historical way. Do you think it negatively affects the work in this field?

HUGHES- Let me say that's a tough one. It is approached historically, but not necessarily to undermine the text. Think of someone like Abraham Geiger, who in the late nineteenth century tried to argue in his "What Did Mohammed Take from the Jews?" and that was translated into English as *Judaism and Islam*. He tried to show that there are words in the Quran that derived from rabbinic or biblical sources, and that Mohammed would have used such words to appeal his message to a new audience that would have been familiar with them. I think Geiger went a long way in trying to historicize the Quran, but it remains a product of its time. I think late antique studies is much more firmly grounded. But having said that, I think a lot of devout Muslims would have a hard time with Stephen Shoemaker's work or anyone else who tries to historicize a text that is seen as the work of a divine author. Does that mean that Stephen Shoemaker shouldn't do his work? No, not at all. It means that Muslims have to be comfortable enough in their own shoes to realize that non-Muslims are interested in Islam, and that they've gone and learned the languages, and they want to understand how Islam fits within the Western imagination. The great thing about Late Antique studies, is it's not trying to say that Islam is the "other", but that Islam is clearly a Western religious formation. Late Antique studies does a great job of showing how what emerged as Islam came from the same crucible in which all other religions took shape. It is difficult, in other words, in Late Antiquity to talk about distinct Jewish groups, distinct Muslim groups, distinct Christian groups. There's an overlap. On the topic of overlap I forgot to mention the work of Jack Tannous, a student of Brown, Jack Tannous, who does a lovely job of showing the fluidity of Late Antique period as simple Christian believers became simple Muslim believers. And I think it's that fluidity that's so exciting. That is not the same thing as saying that the Quran, that the early Muslim framers simply copied other traditions. But it is to say that in this very fluid environment, different social groups were thinking with and about each other using a shared vocabulary. That's clearly historical, but it's a new way to think about Islam that doesn't deprive it of its originality. It just shows how that originality is part of a larger human condition to make sense of our complex social world. And then with time as later Muslims come on the scene, as Islam becomes more discrete and more distinct, then we witness the rise of the ulema, the rise of the Fuqaha, the rise of all the other jurists that begin to articulate and frame Islam. Before Islam becomes a discrete or distinct tradition, it was an intimate part of late antiquity. And I think the rabbis are doing the same thing. Like their later Muslim counterparts, they, too, tried to create a normative Judaism. That's the beauty of the Late Antique

studies, is it doesn't put the cart before the horse. It says that, wait a minute, Islam (or Judaism or Christianity) didn't fall from heaven fully formed, it emerged out of this late antique environment. And only later, as Christians and Jews and Muslims became more discreet social groups, they then look back to that chaotic period and tried to make sense of it.

KARA- Thank you so much. Can we see Late Antique studies as a revival of their revisionist school?

HUGHES- Well, I think Hagarism got the whole ball rolling. I mean, at least Stephen Shoemaker cites that work, and especially Patricia Crone, as a big influence. I think Hagarism, as flawed as it was, was for me an eye opening. When I was in grad school, I had friends who were working in New Testament studies and in early Christianity, and they were doing all this cool theoretical stuff. And I remember I would go to my Quranic seminars in grad school, and most of the people were devout Muslims around the table. And they were like, the Quran says this, this is this, this is that. I went to my one of my professors, and I said, why are people in New Testament asking such interesting questions and doing such interesting things, but there is nothing like this in Quranic studies? And he said to me, I have just the book for you. And he gave me John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* and, also Cook and Crone's *Hagarism*. I was intrigued, because no one had ever spoken like that (at least to me) when it came to early Islam. I'd never read anything like that before. So, while they are certainly revisionists, they represent the first generation. And I think people like Shoemaker, and Anthony, who cite them as influences, represent the new generation who are aware of some of the gross generalizations that earlier generations made. But both generations – like Late Antique studies in Islam more generally – work on the assumption that we should not simply cite as truth what later Muslim sources tell us about where the Quran comes from, and that we also need to look outside the tradition, to non-Muslim sources, which is exactly the premise behind *Hagarism*.. Another important scholar in this regard is Robert Hoyland and his book *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. Patricia Crone, John Wansbrough and Michael Cook came up with the idea of looking to non-Muslim sources, but Hoyland (and those like Shoemaker and Anthony, Tannous, and I might also add my colleague Philip Wood to this list) followed that insight through in a more systematic matter. While I do not think the latter represent a revision of the revisionist school, they are clearly indebted to the insights of the earlier generation. And this, to me, is much more interesting and scholarly than what many scholars in religious studies do when they simply describe early Islam using works like Sira literature, which is written 200 years after the fact. Those in Late Antiquity instead say, “well, okay, that's interesting, but that comes much later and is a projection of what later Muslims wanted to happen as opposed to what actually happened.” But what happens if we look at Aramaic sources? What happens if we look at what other groups are saying? So, while I think this is an iteration of the revisionist school, it is more grounded. And much more interesting for it, and much more readable (unlike, say, the important work of John Wansbrough).

KARA- His book is not easy to read, you would need a teacher or John Wansbrough himself to be able to read it. I think Wansbrough did it intentionally

HUGHES- Yes, I, too, think he did it intentionally. Whereas Crone and Cook in *Hagarism* at the preface, make the bold claim that their book is written by infidels for infidels and any Muslim whose faith is as a grain of mustard seed should find no difficulty in rejecting it. We don't see such claims in the work of Shoemaker or Tannous, however. While it's certainly offensive to some to say that maybe Mohammed didn't die in Mecca but instead died on the battlefield in Jerusalem. But the larger point, namely, that the early Islamic period makes a lot of sense when situated against the larger late antique environment of apocalypticism that was centered on Jerusalem. Later Muslim sources don't tell us that, so it is certainly revisionist in the sense that it's revising and rethinking that early Islamic period. Look, I'm not a devout Muslim, and I'm not sure that the role of scholarship is to appeal to devout Muslims. But as a scholar who's very much interested in curating the human condition, I would say that Islam makes more sense when it's in conversation with other traditions historically, even in terms of interfaith dialogue, than when it's not. The people that are doing late antique studies are trying to show that Islam is not the "other", but it's us, part of something much larger and interesting. We're all in this together. We're talking about the early period, if we want to talk about contemporary trends in Quranic studies or contemporary trends in hadith studies, then obviously that's not so relevant. But I do think for someone that works in that period, it's very exciting. I've sent a couple students to Yale to work on the sort of Late Antique period. I maintain that Late Antique studies reveal the Quran as part of a much larger environment of human meaning-making and ingenuity in the face of uncertainty.

I might even end by saying that my most recent work on Muslims in Canada does something similar by showing how Canadian Muslims aren't just refugees and migrants, but Canadians who built the country just like Jews, just like Ukrainians, and just like Scots and English.

KARA- Thank you so much dear professor. I benefitted a lot.

HUGHES- My pleasure.

Etik Beyan / Ethical Statement

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur / It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

TEK YAZARLI

Yazar(lar) / Author(s)

Bayram KARA

Finansman / Funding

Yazar bu araştırmayı desteklemek için herhangi bir dış fon almadığını kabul eder / The author acknowledges that received not external funding support of this research.

Çıkar Çatışması / Competing Interests

Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan ederler / The author declares that he have no competing interests.