

# Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations

■ Lucy Ballard [PhD]

*Dreams of D-Mecca: Racial Crossings and Islamic Renewal in the Two Detroits*

On the Motor City's West Side, DREAM of Detroit ("Detroit Revival Engaging American Muslims"), a Muslim-led non-profit organization, is remaking the disinvested neighborhood around an historic Black American mosque, once slated for service shutoffs and depopulation. Analyzing qualitative data collected through participant-observation and forty-eight interviews conducted over two years of fieldwork, my dissertation examines the nature and limits of multiracial Muslim place-making in the segregated U.S. city, taking DREAM as an ethnographic case study. As the birthplace of the Nation of Islam, the city of Detroit is known by some Black U.S. Muslims as "D-Mecca." Yet the city—once an international metonym for municipal failure and urban decay—evokes disdain and avoidance amongst many non-Black Muslims who tend to live in the metropolitan area's sprawling suburbs. Approaching the city as both discursive construct and lived geography, I show how DREAM mobilizes religious ideals and strategies of community organizing to encourage Muslims to cross racial and socioeconomic boundaries. Through a range of programs, DREAM stimulates faith-based commitment to civic action, interracial sociality, and an expansive understanding of Islam that prioritizes ethical relations and just works over doctrinal or ritual conformity. Bringing together conversations in U.S. Islamic studies, urban studies, and racial and ethnic studies, I show how DREAM of Detroit is remapping its neighborhood and the city of Detroit as a sacred and attractive place of pilgrimage and reverence for U.S. Muslims, contravening prevailing racial-spatial logics. In this, I contend that scholars should consider civic spaces like DREAM as not only expressions of religious beliefs and values, but as sites of cultivation and negotiation in which understudied and novel forms of U.S. Muslim leadership and religiosity take shape. As the Muslim domestic non-profit sector expands, I ask how race and religion coalesce in this civic space and examine the ways in which DREAM's project of urban place-making is embedded in the broader drama of Detroit's contemporary "renaissance."

Adviser: Malika Zeghal

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### ■ Carleigh Beriont [PhD]

*“For the Good of Mankind”*: Marshallese, Missionaries, Militaries and the Making of American Empire in the Pacific, 1857–1957

During the 1940s, the United States occupied the Marshall Islands and conducted sixty-seven nuclear tests on the atmosphere, land, waters, and people for what the U.S. military told the Marshallese people—and the world—was “the good of mankind.” Based on extensive archival and oral history research in the U.S. and the Marshall Islands, I argue that U.S. nuclear testing marked the culmination of a longer history between Marshallese people and American Christianity that began in 1857, when American Protestant missionaries first arrived in the Marshall Islands. However, American missionaries and Protestant Christianity did not exclusively serve American imperial or American Protestant ends. In the hands of the Marshallese, these encounters and the relationships and faith commitments that resulted from them helped form the basis of a profound rebuke to American power—religious and political—and nuclear testing. They have also enabled Marshallese people to claim moral authority in the fight for nuclear and climate justice in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

My dissertation demonstrates how the American missionaries’ errand—undertaken for what they hoped would be the good of humanity and to advance the kingdom of God on earth—and stories about the nineteenth-century encounter between American missionaries and Marshallese people ended up in the service of twentieth-century American imperialism in the Pacific and, in particular, U.S. nuclear testing. As an examination of the relationships between Marshallese people, American Protestant missionaries, and the U.S. military in the Marshall Islands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, my project interrogates the theoretical, theological, and imperial logics that shaped these relationships and the conditions of power that have rendered this history of American religion and imperialism in the Marshall Islands invisible within contemporary American political, religious, and historical discourse.

Adviser: Catherine Brekus

### ■ Joshua Abramson Cohen [PhD]

*The Food of One’s Own Blood: Educating Christian Bodies in Renaissance Spain*

This dissertation traces the repetition of a certain scene of instruction across Renaissance Spanish writing—the scene of suckling, in a word. While modern readers might balk at the notion of suckling as a mode of education, Renaissance writers assumed that the Christian infant’s daily meals enacted a kind of moral formation. Still, the suckling scene badly fit into humanist visions of education. The back-and-forth represented did not involve a highly learned master and his hungry disciple, but a woman, nearly always an unlearned woman, and a barely willing assemblage of flesh; the pedagogical media used were not written words, let

alone written words handed down in a line from antiquity, but bodies. The infant's *bodily* instruction (as certain writers tried to classify it) seemed to unfold outside every rule. And yet, as lowly and messy as such a scene appeared to be, prominent humanists insisted that a person's intense intimacy with the woman who nursed him—his regular eating and absorbing of her body—made him into who he was. (I use masculine pronouns in order to reflect my texts' presumption of male gender.) In this sense, my readings are oriented toward a different, frequently overlooked, original scene in the fashioning of Renaissance selves: not grammatical training, but the hard-to-categorize bodily mingling that occupied the interval between birth and school.

The relationships generated by suckling are difficult to historicize, not only because they are hard to name, but because they tend to seem timeless. The Christian force of the pedagogy in question is not always easy to draw out either. Across my chapters, I argue that Renaissance scenes of bodily instruction expected, demanded even, to be read as fraught with the background of the Eucharist. At their most explicit, such scenes were grounded in the ancient pedagogical (and pagan) rule that the newborn must be fed on the food of his own blood—on the food of his mother's menstrual blood, which had furnished his own body at conception; which he had eaten in the womb; and which incarnated as milk uniquely fitted to him after birth. At the same time, the self-continuity staked in infant pedagogy was experienced as a worldly blurred mirroring of the continuity promised by the eating and drinking of Jesus' body and blood, in which the communicant was taught to receive and taste who he was. Assuming the perspective of Christian thought, I thus argue that by studying ordinary scenes of suckling—in which a wet nurse is paid to stand in for the Christian's first mother—scholars of religion in Renaissance Spain can begin to make visible the transformation of bodily blood from a given into a problem. Language about "Christian blood" will be deeply familiar to scholars of Inquisitorial society. And yet, in light of the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre*, morally charged uses of the word "blood" have only ever been taken as biological metaphors for lineage. By shifting from ideas about sexual reproduction to scenes of instruction, and from the history of mentalities to the history of practices, my argument newly problematizes blood as the stuff of Christian selfhood. From there, I suggest, we can discern a particularly historical set of concerns not just for the vulnerability of infants to being altered by and through the presences of outside bodies, but for the alterability of Christian blood—including the blood currently taking the shape of one's body—generally.

The introduction situates the dissertation's interventions within the study of bodily practices as it has been understood by scholars of religion, especially aligning my readings with newly emerging questions about the role of intimacy in generating religious forms of subjectivity. (There, by way of several of Augustine's expositions of the Psalms, I also explain the theological resemblance ongoingly generated between the meal of ordinary women's flesh and the meal of Christ's body

and blood.) Chapter 1, “Joining Mirrors,” reads the Salamancan bishop Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo’s *De arte, disciplina, et modo alendi et erudiendi filios, pueros et iuvenes* (On the Art, the Practice, and the Technique of Feeding and Cultivating Sons, Children, and Adolescents) (1453) alongside Antonio de Nebrija’s *De liberis educandis* (On Educating Children) (1509); Chapter 2, “Raw in Christ,” reads Juan Luis Vives’s *The Education of a Christian Woman* (*De institutione feminae Christianae*) (1524) alongside Erasmus’s “The New Mother” (*Puerpera*) (1526); Chapter 3, “Tastes Not of God,” turns to the Salamancan Franciscan and humanist Juan de Pineda’s *Diálogos familiares de la agricultura cristiana* (The Intimate Dialogues of Christian Agriculture, roughly) (1589). In my conclusion, I turn back to my reading of Pineda’s *Diálogos familiares*, asking what Renaissance scenes of bodily instruction might have to teach us about the varied theological reuses of the Castilian word *raza*—race, perhaps—across sixteenth-century Spanish thought.

Adviser: Amy M. Hollywood

## ■ Rong Huang [PhD]

*The Luminous Wind Fanned the East: A Comparative Study of the East Syriac Christian Documents in China (618–907)*

This dissertation explores the Chinese manuscripts of East Syriac Christianity, also known as the Church of the East, during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) in China. Originating within the Sassanian Empire and driven by doctrinal disputes, this Christian tradition embarked on a journey eastward, eventually reaching Tang China via the Silk Road by the 7th century. Referred to as *Jingjiao* 景教 (Luminous Teaching) in Chinese, this form of Christianity took root within the cosmopolitan landscape of Tang China. By carefully analyzing the six *Jingjiao* texts discovered in Dunhuang, this dissertation sheds light on the missionary activities and theological adaptation of the *Jingjiao* community in Tang China.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation investigates how *Jingjiao* missionaries, amidst dominant religious traditions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in Tang China, borrowed from Chinese religious vocabulary to convey Christian teachings effectively. An evolutionary trajectory can be discerned in the *Jingjiao* texts, from early Tang documents characterized by biblical content to late Tang manuscripts exhibiting a strong synthesis with Chinese religious thought. The authenticity of these texts, particularly the early Tang manuscripts, is scrutinized in light of contemporary scholarly debates, with arguments for their genuineness grounded in textual analysis and historical context.

This dissertation employs a comparative framework and draws on theories of translation studies and Paul Ricoeur’s theory of “threefold mimesis” to examine the intricate interplay between East Syriac Christianity and Chinese religious traditions during the Tang dynasty in China. Recognizing the necessity of understanding both the Chinese religious context and the East Syriac context, this study aims to

elucidate how *Jingjiao* texts make the East Syriac theology intelligible to a Chinese audience while also preserving its Christian core.

Chapter 1 investigates the Early Tang Christian text *Discourse on the One God* (*Yishenlun* 一神論), focusing on two terms—*zhongxing* 種性 (seed nature) and *wuyin* 五蔭 (five aggregates)—and their East Syriac theological implications such as the emphasis on human potentiality and the pedagogical and salvific purpose of the humanity of Christ. Chapter 2 analyzes the late Tang *Jingjiao* text *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy* (*Zhixuan anle jing* 志玄安樂經), exploring its key passages through both Chinese Buddhist and East Syriac ascetic lenses. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of theological themes in extant *Jingjiao* texts, highlighting such themes as the transcendence of God, Christ's redemptive role, and ascetic practices. Chapter 4 incorporates archaeological findings of the Tang *Jingjiao* community and discusses its ascetic practices and distinct Sogdian influences.

Ultimately, this dissertation illuminates the complex interplay between East Syriac Christianity and Chinese religious traditions, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of the *Jingjiao* community in propagating its faith within the diverse cultural milieu of Tang China.

Adviser: Charles M. Stang

### ■ Elizabeth Rowe Lee-Hood [PhD]

*Divine Daily Prayers and the Quest for Nearness to God: A Journey into Ṣalāt in Islamic Spiritual Literature from the Qur'ān to Rūmī, Bringing Traditional Light to Contemporary Understandings of Religion and Ritual*

This study brings light to ways in which traditional insider discourse on ṣalāt in early and classical Islam illumines our understanding of religion and ritual in general, in Islam and other religions of the world. It identifies and explores salient themes that are key to understanding the place of the divinely-prescribed daily ṣalāt prayers in the quest for nearness to God by examining Islamic spiritual discourse — the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and selected texts of early and classical spiritual literature, especially texts associated with the traditional Islamic religious science of sufism (*taṣawwuf*).

The texts, in Arabic and Persian, date from the formative early and classical periods of Islam that span some 700 years, from the era of the Prophet Muḥammad (Sal.) in the 1st/7th century AH/CE to the 8th/14th century, shortly after the close of the 'Abbāsīd era. The texts have been selected for their influential character and to represent a wide array of literary genres, including Qur'ān exegesis; manuals and treatises; compiled sayings, sermons, and discourses; letters of advice; hagiographical biographies; biographical entries on women; autobiographical writings; dream and vision accounts; collections of devotions; and lyric and epic poetry and song.

Recognizing the ongoing need in the Western academic study of religion for more in-depth “interpretive study of Muslim ritual on its own terms—namely those of Muslim interpretation and understanding,”<sup>1</sup> this study takes a phenomenological, “emic” approach, striving to understand Islamic “insider” discourse on ṣalāt “on its own terms.” In addition to illuminating the core Islamic devotional practice of ṣalāt, this study provides insights into Islamic teachings, spiritual ethics, and the role of sufism (*taṣawwuf*) within the Islamic tradition in the formative centuries.

For the broader comparative and historical study of religion, this study finds that this traditional discourse, taken as insider theory, calls for important expansions of contemporary academic and public understandings of religion and ritual: a more integrative understanding of ritual and an expanded understanding of religion beyond orthodoxy and orthopraxy that includes the major dimension of virtues and character.

Adviser: William A. Graham

### ■ Erik Nordbye [ThD]

*The Cost of Free Religion: Church, State, and Economy in Eighteenth-Century New England*

“The Cost of Free Religion” argues that religious liberty in eighteenth-century New England was not simply a matter of church and state, but rather church, state, *and* economy. It investigates the far-reaching economic consequences of separating church and state, offering a revisionist history of disestablishment, democracy, and capitalism. Based on research in legal and ecclesiastical archives, this argument revolves around two insights. First, in early America, “establishment” named a fundamentally economic relationship between civil governments and state churches, built on compulsory taxes. And second, campaigns to disestablish religion coalesced around minorities’ efforts to defend their property against majority-controlled governments.

This dissertation follows the explosion of evangelical dissenters—Separates, Baptists, and other “New Lights”—following the First Great Awakening. Confronting an oppressive “Standing Order,” they put forth a new argument for religious liberty: that ecclesiastical taxes violated not only their consciences, but also their property rights. This claim captured the radicalizing experience of having estates taxed and possessions distrained. It also thrust dissenters into the heart of the discourses surrounding representation, rights, and taxation during the American Revolution. Historians have neglected the way property disputes steered the trajectory of religious liberty, yet this research shows that economic dimensions of dissent are key to understanding why the campaign for disestablishment evolved to

<sup>1</sup> William A. Graham, “Islam in the Mirror of Ritual” (1983), repr. in *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies: Selected Writings* (ed. John Hinnells; Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works; Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) 92.

encompass commitments to voluntary charity, limited government, and free markets. When dissenters severed the finances of church and state, they fused evangelicalism and property rights into an enduring vision of American political economy.

By focusing on the economics of dissent, this dissertation balances the legal emphasis of most scholarship on religious liberty with a detailed account of how dissenting churches raised and spent money. Voluntarism proved challenging: religion was expensive, and oppression left dissenters hypersensitive to covetous clergy and prone to elevate the prerogatives of stewards over their duties to the community. But over time they achieved a stable ecclesiastical economy, proving that religion could thrive without state support. This dissertation finds that more than arguments about toleration, conscience, or Christian liberty, dissenters liberated themselves from ecclesiastical taxes by providing a viable alternative to the coercive economy of the state churches.

Adviser: Catherine Brekus

### ■ Luan Henrique Gomes Ribeiro [PhD]

*The Great Archangel of Many Names: Angelomorphic Christology and the Limits of Theological Imagination*

This research focuses on Christian texts from the first and second centuries CE in which Christ, or the Son of God, is portrayed as a great angel. These works usually designate Christ as an archangel—most often Michael, the Angel of the Lord of the Hebrew Bible, or simply as a great and glorious angel. Three writings serve as my primary sources: the Apocalypse of John, the Epistle of Jude, and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*. I argue that angelomorphic Christologies were not (as some maintain) simply Jewish “relics” that transferred to the Christian tradition, relics that gradually disappeared as more complex forms of Christology developed, but rather a way in which Christians intentionally expressed their views on the Messiah. I contend that “Jewish Christianity” sometimes works as a heresiological category in which early Christian theologies that eventually would not correspond to later creedal formulation or even modern theological proclivities are set aside. I also contend that the marginalization of such an important dimension of early Christology is a blatant reflection of the theological preferences of many modern scholars for whom the idea of Christ taking the form of an angel has been deemed improbable. Finally, I conclude that such a failure in imagining different Christological possibilities, including angelomorphic ones, has effectively hindered a more accurate reconstruction of the beliefs and practices of the early Christians.

In chapter one, I explore Christological imagery in John’s visionary experiences, drawing on Paul Ricœur’s theories of symbols and metaphors. Focusing on Revelation 1 and 12, I suggest that the “one resembling a son of man” in Rev 1 is featured as a principal angel, challenging traditional interpretations. Additionally, I argue that Rev 12 aligns with ancient combat narratives, indicating that the male child and the archangel Michael are one. In chapter two, I analyze Jude’s utilization

of diverse judgment traditions, in which the author emphasizes a principal angel as the executor of divine will. I propose that the concept of an angelomorphic Jesus has led to variant units in the manuscript tradition as well as modern scholarly disputes. I conclude that angelology underpins Jude's theology, with Jesus positioned as the primary angel. Finally, chapter three delves into Justin Martyr's portrayal of Jesus as a celestial being who appeared as an angel on Earth. I examine his exegetical practices and argue that his defense of an angelomorphic Christology is entangled with his overall theology and evangelistic objectives.

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