International Workshop on Rationalism and Sacred Text, 10th–12th Centuries

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The field of Judeo-Arabic studies has undergone major changes since the early 1990s, when the Firkovich collections in the National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg, became accessible to scholars outside Russia. These collections were brought to Russia by the manuscript-collector Abraham Firkovich, whose sources included Karaite libraries in Cairo, Jerusalem, and Hīt (Iraq); Firkovich donated one collection to the library during his lifetime and bequeathed the second after his death. Together they contain on the order of fifteen thousand manuscripts, many of them in Judeo-Arabic. Their ongoing investigation has transformed scholarly work on medieval philosophy – a field in which Karaite thinkers had a decisive influence on both Jewish and Islamic thought – as well as on Jewish biblical exegesis and medieval Semitic linguistics.

This three-day conference focused on literary production in Islamic lands between tenth century and the twelfth, from which the surviving manuscript material is unprecedentted in both quantity and importance. The intellectual developments in the eastern part of the Islamic world, beginning in Iraq and spreading west in the tenth century, transformed literary production as far west as al-Andalus; current research has further revealed that Karaites from the eastern parts of the Abbasid caliphate served as vital links in the transmission of kalām to Egypt. Much of the literary production of this period – and that of the Karaites in particular – was characterized in one way or another by rationalism: the interpretation, analysis, and transmission of ideas, texts, and language according to principles of reason (*'aql*) and to a greater or lesser extent independently of the authority of revelation (*naql*).

Twenty scholars currently working in Europe, the United States, and Israel convened and shared their recent work on these issues, with an emphasis on Jewish authors, both Rabbanite and Karaite, as well as Muslim authors and the impact of rationalism in general. The papers will appear in a volume edited by the conference's organizer, María Ángeles GALLEGO GARCÍA. Meanwhile, what follows is a preliminary summary of each presenter's interventions.

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Three senior scholars delivered plenary addresses. Haggai BEN SHAMMAI (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) opened the conference with a lecture entitled "Exegesis in the Service of Rationalist Theology: Se'adya's Interpretation of Deterministic Expressions in the Bible." Ben-Shammai focused on the great rabbinic scholar and philosopher Se'adya b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmi (882–932), arguing that reason played a decisive role in his exegetical system. Ben-Shammai noted that Se'adya defined precise guidelines according to which exegetes not only *may* but *must* deviate from the plain or obvious meaning of certain scriptural verses, holding that the correct interpretation of Scripture should balance tradition and reason. But Se'adya's system left the application of these guidelines to the reliable and faithful exegete. Furthermore, Se'adya did not expound these rules systematically, but explained exegetical techniques and devices in various places with regard to his discussion of specific issues.

The main text Ben-Shammai analyzed was a set of unpublished fragments of Se'adya's commentary on Exodus 9, in which God is described as hardening the heart of Pharaoh. The scriptural passage may be interpreted as denying human free will – an absurd possibility for Se'adya. Accordingly, Se'adya assembled numerous similar scriptural examples, dividing them into groups according to the exegetical devices required to negate their interpretation along predestinationalist lines. A similar discussion, Ben-Shammai noted, can be found in Se'adya's philosophical *summa*, *Kitāb al-amānāt wa-l-i'tiqādāt*, a work that postdates the commentary in question. One thus sees that specific biblical passages served Se'adya as a laboratory in which he worked out the abstract principles he presented in his philosophical work.

The second plenary lecture, delivered on the second morning of the conference by Judith OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER (CNRS and EPHE, Paris), was entitled "Rationalism in Medieval Hebrew Linguistics." Olszowy-Schlanger discussed the rational technique known as *qiyās* (analogy – usually legal analogy) as applied to early Hebrew grammatical thought, especially that of Karaite grammarians. Many passages in the Bible, early rabbinic literature and exegetical commentaries, she noted, follow some implicit method of linguistic analysis or contain accounts of the origins and nature of language in general and the Hebrew language in particular. But it was only in the gaonic period that the study of the Hebrew language became an independent discipline with its own theoretical bases and a full-fledged methodology. Some scholars posit as the impetus for this the invention of a vocalization system for the Hebrew Bible, but most agree that it was the development of an independent scientific discipline of Arabic linguistics beginning in the eighth century.

Arabic linguistics in its object was a branch of theology and exegesis of the Qur'ān, but its methodology was related to logic, mathematics, medicine and jurisprudence. Thus in defining rationalism in the linguistic sciences, Olszowy-Schlanger focused on the etymological sense of *ratio* (roughly equivalent to the Greek *analogia*, the Arabic *qiyās*, and the Hebrew *heqqesh*), meaning *analogy*, or "measuring and comparing two things one of which is accepted as the model or criterion for the other." The term *qiyās* appears in Jewish grammatical literature, and while Hebrew grammarians considered the appeal to analogy as a self-evident and basic principle – since Hebrew was primarily a written language and analogical derivation came from a limited corpus of written texts, especially the Bible – they used it without resort to definitions and theoretical discussions. Latin, Greek and Arabic grammarians, by contrast, did pay attention to the definition and theory of analogy. They also perceived that it could potentially come into conflict with *consuetudo* or *ijmā'*, the common and accepted usage by the community of speakers.

The assumption that language in general and Hebrew in particular follow underlying analogical patterns is not obvious. Rather, it implies a complicated system of interacting semantic and grammatical categories. Hebrew grammarians used analogy in two ways, Olszowy-Schlanger argued: as a heuristic device to explain the meanings of words, and as a generative device to create unattested forms. Citing examples from Abū l-Faraj Hārūn ibn al-Faraj (*al-Kitāb al-kāfī* and *al-Kitāb al-mushtamil*), Se'adya Gaon (*Kitāb faṣīh lughat al-'ibrāniyya*), Yehuda Ḥayyūj, and Yūsuf ibn Nūh (*Kitāb al-diqduq*), she noted that the early Hebrew grammarians implicitly followed a principle of analogy similar to that of the classical grammarians: "all words that start from similar forms should be inflected similarly" (Varro: *ut a similibus similiter omnia declinentur verba*). At the same time, they also implicitly restricted the use of the principle according to sets of conditions under which analogies between words could be carried out.

The third plenary lecture, on the last day of the conference, was delivered by Daniel J. LASKER (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) and entitled "The Use of Reason in Rabbanite and Karaite Exegesis of the Bible." Lasker's lecture surveyed the divergent ways in which Karaites and Rabbanites used reason in their legal and theological interpretations of the Bible, arguing that while the two groups diverged in their legal conclusions, they arrived at similar theological views.

The differences between Karaite and Rabbanite religious practices, Lasker explained, rested on divergent norms of biblical exegesis, either differing uses of rationalist analysis or disagreements over the proper use of reason altogether. Thus Karaites argued that syllogistic reasoning (*qiyās*; *heqqesh*) as

guided by the personal effort of the interpreter (*ijtihād*; *ḥippus*) could serve as a valid determinant of law, while Rabbanites argued that syllogistic reasoning was permissible only when sanctioned by tradition – especially in laws based solely on revelation and not derivable from reason. Thus the Rabbanite exegete Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–ca. 1164) embraced rational tools in his commentaries but did not accept the legal consequences of his interpretations if they contradicted rabbinic tradition. Lasker went on to explain how Karaites and Rabbanites, even though they disagreed in legal matters, often shared the same philosophical positions.

The rest of the conference was divided into five sessions over three days.

The first session focused on Jewish BIBLICAL EXEGESIS, including both Karaite and Rabbanite biblical commentaries.

Juan Pedro MONFERRER-SALA (Universidad de Córdoba) gave a paper entitled "Reasoning Tradition: Sa'adyah ha-Ga'on's Judaeo-Arabic Translation of Psalm 29." Monferrer-Sala argued that Se'adya's non-literal translation of Psalm 29 (28 in the Septuagint and Vulgate) harmonized rational thought (*'aql*) and rabbinic tradition (*naql*). Se'adya's technique fused the dual needs of conveying the sense of the text in clear language while providing his readers with a theologically correct translation. Thus he did not hesitate to resort to what Monferrer-Sala called "*traductio ad sensum sive etiam paraphrastica*" (translating the meaning, even if paraphrastically), that is, paraphrasing the original text and changing its word-order in the service of greater semantic clarity and textual fluency. In so doing, Se'adya lost some features of the original Hebrew text, such as parallelisms and repetition.

Michael WECHSLER (University of Chicago) spoke on "Parallels to the 'Five Theses' of the Mu'tazila in Yefet ben Eli's Commentary on Esther." The paper assessed Yefet's use of parallels with Mu'tazilī doctrine, especially in his introduction to his commentary on Esther, where he presents parallels to all five of the fundamental theses (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) of the Mu'tazila (God's absolute unity, His necessary justice, His obligatory fulfillment of His promise and His threat, the existence of an intermediate state, and the obligation of every believer to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil). While al-Qirqisānī is usually identified as one of the primary mediators of Mu'tazilī philosophy in Karaite thought, Yefet is usually seen as an elaborator rather than a mediator: al-Qirqisānī drew directly from Mu'tazilite sources while Yefet disparages the Mu'tazila as "the most foolish among the [Gentile] population" (*ajhal al-ra'īya*) and elaborates their doctrines only to the extent that they were already considered Karaite. But the introduction to Yefet's commentary on Esther forces one to consider whether, at least in this instance,

Yefet may have had the doctrinal canon of the Mu'tazila in mind. Wechsler argued that the relationship of Mu'tazilī thought to Yefet's writings should not be characterized simply as either direct influences (where Yefet knew Mu'tazilī writings at first hand and quoted them verbatim or used their terminology) or indirect influences (where Yefet relied on Mu'tazilī thought as absorbed by other Karaite authors). Rather, individual parallels reflect both of these kinds of borrowings as well as the use of similar rationalistic approaches and hermeneutics without direct or indirect borrowing.

Mariano GÓMEZ ARANDA (CSIC, Madrid) gave a paper entitled "Abraham ibn Ezra's Rational Approach to the Book of Esther: Tradition and Innovation." Abraham ibn Ezra wrote his first commentary on the book of Esther in Italy in 1140–42 and his second commentary in France in 1153–56. In both cases, he addresses an audience familiar with the interpretations of the book of Esther found in rabbinic literature (Talmud, *targumim* and *midrashim*). But Ibn Ezra's rational approach to the book of Esther attempts not only to explain the literal meaning of the biblical text, but also to argue against some of the rabbinic responses to questions such as the absence of the name of God in the book, the meaning of its proper names, the identification of its characters with other biblical characters, and the motivations for its characters' behavior. Ibn Ezra rejects rabbinic statements that he considers unreasonable, but tries to justify others in an attempt to base them on logical principles.

Friedrich NIESSEN (Cambridge University) contributed a paper titled "The Rationalistic Exegesis of a Karaite Commentary on Hosea." Niessen discussed an anonymous commentary on Hosea discovered in the Cairo Geniza and presumably of Karaite authorship. The commentary evidences a rationalistic approach to exegesis and a preference for focusing on the meaning of the biblical text rather than on interpretations imported from an exegetical tradition outside it. Specifically, the author's rationalist methods are clearly evident in his methods of translation and his approach to grammar and language in explication.

The second session focused on POLEMICAL WORKS and other kinds of RATIONAL ARGUMENTATION used by Jews and Muslims on behalf of religious and political legitimacy.

Sabine SCHMIDTKE (Freie Universität, Berlin) offered a paper entitled "An Anonymous Jewish Refutation of Samaw'al al-Maghribī's *Ifḥām al-yahūd*." *Ifḥām al-yahūd* is a polemical tract against Judaism composed in the wake of its author's (d. 570/1175) conversion to Islam. Many converts' autobiographies and refutations against their former religion were intended to reach the new co-religionists, a fact supported by the frequently numerous manuscript copies of such tracts. But little is known about the extent to which

such compositions were read, copied, and refuted among converts' former co-religionists. The only Jewish reaction to *Iḥām al-yahūd* known so far is that of 'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284), *Tanqīh al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth*, an examination of the three faiths, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Schmidtke brought to light two fragments recently discovered in the Firkovich Collection containing Samaw'al's *Iḥām al-yahūd* and a refutation of it. The significance of the discovery lies in part in the dearth of surviving Jewish polemical writings against Islam and of evidence that Jews refuted the polemics of Jewish converts to Islam and other Muslims.

Amira BENNISON (Cambridge University) delivered a paper entitled "The Vagaries of Almohadism: Reconciling Rationalism and the Needs of the *'awwām*." Bennison's intervention focused on the problem of how Almohadism was represented before the masses. On the one hand, the proof Ibn Tūmart offered for the existence of God demonstrates his debt to Ash'arism, and in particular the "rational" Ash'arism originating with al-Ghāzālī (d. 1111). But the way Almohadism was promulgated among the peoples of the Islamic west demonstrates that the so-called Shī'ī elements of Almohadism were of equal, if not greater, importance. In fact, Bennison argued, the Almohad theory of an *imām-mahdī* militated against the development of rationalist discourses even among the intellectual elites of the empire. The movement thereby replaced one form of *taqlīd* (adherence to tradition) with another.

Delfina SERRANO RUANO (CSIC, Madrid) offered a paper called "A Matter of Faith, a Matter of Reason: Two Andalusian Refutations against Anthropomorphism." The paper considered two refutations of anthropomorphism composed in al-Andalus during the Almoravid period. In the Islamic west, the adoption of *kalām* took place relatively late compared with the central regions of the Islamic world. The positions on interpreting sacred texts ranged from a radically literalist conception of sacred texts (Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*), even in anthropomorphic descriptions of God, to the privileging of reason over the letter of the text. Ash'arī theology managed to monopolize the middle point on the spectrum. Controversies over how believers should conceive of God reached their peak in the second half of the twelfth century, when the Almohads declared holy war against their political predecessors, the Almoravids, whom they declared infidels for having allegedly promoted anthropomorphic beliefs. Serrano Ruano argued that Almohad thinkers did not reject but in fact appropriated the achievements of their predecessors in order to legitimize their own claim to religious and political supremacy, instrumentalizing the debate over anthropomorphism

even while sincerely rejecting anthropomorphism itself. Serrano Ruano further argued that the Almohad instrumentalization of anthropomorphism serves as a useful way to measure the intellectual prestige gained by the proponents of this middle position and by the moderate resort to reason in the interpretation of the sacred texts, particularly in a context in which the proponents of traditionalism are said to have gained ground from the thirteenth century onward.

The third session investigated Karaites' and Rabbanites' relationships to ISLAMIC HISTORY AND THE ISLAMIC STATE.

Fred ASTREN (San Francisco State University) delivered a paper entitled "Explaining and Exploiting the Past: Strategies for Historicizing Islam by Karaites and Others," in which he focused on historical or historicizing narratives that purported to account for the place of minority and sectarian groups within Islamic culture through rationalization and historical contextualization. Astren analyzed the meaning and function of these narratives by reading them as deliberate reworkings of narratives from Islamic history and literature. At first blush, Astren argued, such narratives appear to be the minority group's attempt to explain its existence as a religious, ethnic, or other anomaly in Islamic society through resort to a fictionalized version of the past. But on closer examination, they reveal a kind of negotiation between the dominant culture and the sub-culture, rulers and subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims, or rabbinic leaders and heretics. Thus the myth of Karaite origins depicts the purported eighth-century founder of Karaism, Anan ben David, as imprisoned by the Abbasids for his heretical beliefs and receiving advice from a Muslim scholar on how to create a legitimate and officially tolerated religious community; while it has been suggested that the story was invented by rabbinic Jews to explain the existence of a non-rabbinic Jewish group, in fact, Astren argued, it attests to a Jewish understanding of Islamic history and law and asserts Muslim responsibility for the very existence of Karaism. Thus it is neither surprising nor ironic that the story was later internalized by the Karaites themselves and adopted as their myth of origin. Manipulation of the dominant culture by minority groups is known from other sources, such as the claims of Khaybari Jews to be exempt from certain *dhimmī* taxes because of the settlement that Muḥammad imposed on their ancestors after their defeat by the Muslims. Such narratives, Astren argued, should be understood as instances in which the dominant Islamic religion and culture received permission to tolerate the existence of religious minorities and anomalies.

Marina RUSTOW (Emory University, Atlanta) followed with a paper entitled "The Social and Institutional History of Rabbanite-Karaite Relations in the Eleventh Century and Its Implications for the History of the Medieval Jewish Community," which like Astren's paper pursued the theme of Jewish uses of Islamic political culture, but through edicts, petitions and other documents rather than narrative sources. Thus while literary materials show various Karaite authors invoking the state (Tulunid, Abbasid, Fatimid, or Islamic in general) as either the arbitrator of conflicts between Rabbanites and Karaites or as taking the side of the Rabbanites against the Karaites, documents from the Cairo Geniza show that both Rabbanites and Karaites mobilized state power to compensate for their lack of power to use direct criminal sanctions (imprisonment, corporal punishment, and the death penalty) as instruments of religious coercion. Jewish authorities thus petitioned the state in cases of religious conflict, particularly when the rabbinic ban of excommunication failed. Discussing seventeen instances between 969 and 1050 in which Jews petitioned the Fatimid state or the Fatimids issued some edict in response to a petition, Rustow argued that understanding how the Jewish community utilized state power in internal communal conflicts forces a reconsideration of the historiographic consensus on Jewish "communal autonomy" under Islamic rule, which argues that the Jewish community formed a "state within a state" but fails to consider either the Karaite segments of the Jewish community or Jewish patterns of calling upon governmental power. In practice, she argued, both rabbinic authority and the "autonomous" Jewish community required state support in order to be effective.

The fourth session focused on LINGUISTICS and the ways in which rational thought revolutionized medieval scholarship on Semitic languages.

María Ángeles GALLEGO GARCÍA (CSIC, Madrid) delivered a paper entitled "Extended Meanings: Semantic Rationalism in Karaite Grammatical Thought," focusing on the linguistic theories of Abū l-Faraj Hārūn ibn al-Faraj (second quarter of the eleventh century), the foremost grammarian of the Karaite tradition. Though Abū l-Faraj never devoted a study to figurative language in and of itself, there is a theory of *majāz* (non-literal language) and *ḥaqīqa* (true meaning) embedded in his grammatical works. Gallego analyzed Abū l-Faraj's views on *majāz* and *ḥaqīqa* in the specific field of semantics as reflected in his grammatical work *al-Kitāb al-kāfī*, concluding that his rationalistic perception of language is evident in his division of linguistic features into two classes: those that derive from conventional agreement among human beings (including *majāz*), and those that derive from human mental perception and are thus shared by all languages universally.

Gregor SCHWARB (University of Fribourg) gave a paper called "Mutazilite Theories of Signification (*Dalāla*) and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts." Schwarb offered a close reading of passages in selected Mu'tazilite compositions on *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-dīn* that show particular awareness of linguistic theory, semantics and hermeneutics. Classical *kalām* treatises discuss the conditions for God's speech to be meaningful and intelligible and the modes of its signification, closely linking these questions with the term *dalāla*. Some offer full-fledged theories of signification and the relationship between the linguistic signs contained in God's speech and their legitimate meaning(s). The interpretation of sacred texts was thus bound by the premises set forth in these works; thus familiarity with the pertinent texts is essential to understanding scriptural commentaries of a kalāmic bent, including Jewish Bible commentaries of the tenth and eleventh centuries, since Karaites, and to a considerable extent also Rabbanites, adopted or reworked the phraseology, techniques and theoretical concepts of Mu'tazilite hermeneutics.

José MARTÍNEZ DELGADO (Universidad de Granada) gave a paper on "The Lexicographical Theories of Shelomo ben Mubarak the Karaite in his *Kitab al-Taysīr*." The paper identified and described a newly discovered work previously known only in the chronicle of Ibn al-Hītī: the *Kitāb al-Taysīr* of Shelomo b. Mubārak, a biblical lexicon written in Judeo-Arabic in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in Cairo. The work has been preserved in two separate versions in the Firkovich collections. The lexicon combines both anagramatical and grammatical tendencies with Arab linguistic theories; the morphological material remains implicit and the author focuses on meanings. This fact is an innovation in the history of Hebrew lexicography and it seems to be intended to facilitate the translation of the Bible. The dictionary also includes significant rabbinic material.

Omar ALI DE UNZAGA (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London) gave a talk called "The Human Rational Soul in the Qur'an: An Examination of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā''s Theory of the Soul and Qur'ānic Exegesis." The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the pure brethren) contain elements of a religious philosophy and a philosophical religion, in both cases exalting the role and function of the human rational faculty. Focusing on theories of the soul in two passages of qur'ānic exegesis in the Epistles, Ali de Unzaga argued that like other Muslim works, they adopted the analysis of the human soul expounded by Aristotle and transmitted by later commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200 CE) and the neoplatonist Porphyry (d. 304 CE). The Epistles moreover encouraged readers to follow their "intellectual path" (*shāri'atinā al-'aqliyya*). He discussed two passages, one equating the rational

soul with the qur'ānic *khalīfat Allāh*, and a second interpreting the angels in the qur'ānic story of Adam's creation as a symbol of the rational soul. The result, he argued, is a rationalistic angelology based on hermeneutical thinking and a compromise between revealed religion and philosophical thought.

The fifth session returned to the place of reason and tradition, rational and anti-rational interpretations, in the study of SACRED TEXTS.

Camilla ADANG (Tel Aviv University) delivered a paper entitled "Rationalism and Anti-rationalism in Ibn Ḥazm's Approach to the Scriptures," which focused on the Z□āhirī legal scholar, theologian and man of letters Ibn H□azm of Cordoba (d. 456/1064) and his literalist approach to the Qur'ān and h□adīth in establishing both legal and theological doctrines. At first sight, Adang argued, it seems that Ibn H□azm strove to reduce the rational element in exegesis to an absolute minimum. But, she explained, in fact he attached great importance to reason as the instrument that allows humans to understand God's will, to distinguish right from wrong, and to arrive at the truth. Yet Ibn H□azm held that reason cannot be used to add to God's commandments and prohibitions or subtract from them. Since God expressed himself clearly, Ibn H□azm held, any attempt to go beyond the literal sense of sacred texts is unwarranted, and the hermeneutic devices derived from reason that were in liberal use among other Islamic schools of exegesis were unacceptable to him. He also declared certain forms of tradition unacceptable, including following the authority of someone other than the Prophet Muh□ammad. Rather, he held that *ijtihād* (the efforts of the individual interpreter) was a duty imposed by God upon every Muslim, male or female, and could be based solely on a close reading of revealed sources, as well as on the consensus of the Prophet's Companions if it did not disagree with the Prophet's God-given instructions. Thus for Ibn H□azm, the role of the '*ulamā*' was severely circumscribed.

Mordechai COHEN (Yeshiva University, New York) spoke about "Maimonides and Samuel ben Ḥofni on the Terms *Peshuto shel Miqra* and *Ẓāhir al-Naṣṣ*" arguing that these scholars interpreted the rabbinic maxim that "Scripture does not leave the hands of its *peshaṭ*" (first found in the Talmud) each in service of his own particular hermeneutical needs. *Peshaṭ* is usually defined as the philological–contextual sense of Scripture, and indeed the maxim was known in the medieval rabbinic tradition as the motto of the philological–contextual method of exegesis that reached its zenith in the twelfth century (Rashi, his students Joseph Qara and Rashbam, Abraham Ibn Ezra) and contrasted *peshaṭ* with the non-scientific midrashic methods of previous rabbinic interpretations. Among those exegetes the term *peshaṭ* also had a tone of approbation as the correct or genuine sense of the biblical text,

as opposed to fanciful rabbinic homiletics. But Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon (d. 1013), in a list of guidelines for the interpreter of Scripture, in fact equated *peshaṭ* not with the correct sense of the text or even the philological–contextual sense, but with its obvious sense (*ẓāhir*). Maimonides, meanwhile, used the rabbinic maxim as the basis of the second of the fourteen cardinal rules in his *Sefer ha-miṣvot* (Book of the Commandments), where he established that "the *peshaṭ* of Scripture" should be interpreted according to the "received tradition" transmitted to Moses at Sinai – even if that does not accord with *ẓāhir al-nas*s (“the obvious sense of the text”). Thus the maxim was subjected to various interpretations before being fixed in its generally received meaning.

Salvador PEÑA (Universidad de Málaga) gave a paper called "In Praise of Islamic Humanism: The Learned Toward the Language God Spoke." The paper discussed the linguistic, hermeneutical and semiotic fundamentals of the rationalist approach to language and text developed by Arabic linguists and exegetes. Peña focused on three cases: the limits of human reason in interpreting the Qur'ān; the letter *alif* considered as a semiotic device; and the correct pronunciation of "pure Arabic."