

**Refutations, Rivalries and Revenge.
Polemics in the Premodern Islamic World
(ca. 800–1500)**

International Conference

Organized by Dr. Nadine El-Hussein and Prof. Dr. Mohammad Gharaibeh
Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany
28–30 January 2027

Polemics appear constantly in all epochs, from Antiquity to our modern times. During all historical periods, criticism and competition, disputes and disagreements, reproof and reprisals indicate conflictual interactions up to violent encounters. However, polemics are far more than mere attacks: They reveal social complexities and have social functions. They are important contributions to discourses, they have always determined the intellectual, religious and political developments of an epoch.

These are the initial points of the international conference **Refutations, Rivalries and Revenge. Polemics in the Premodern Islamic World (ca. 800–1500)**. The conference aims at an in-depth understanding of polemics in their specific premodern configurations, along with the forms, functions, reasons and developments of polemics in the premodern Islamic World. Approaching polemics and the inherent complexities from an interdisciplinary point of view, both polemics in texts and polemical practices will be studied. Drawing on a range of academic disciplines, especially Islamic Studies and History, Mediterranean Studies and Literary Studies, the conference calls for papers that deal with affronts, badmouthing, criticism, disputes and disagreement, invectives, reproof and, evidently, with revenge, rivalries and refutations from regions of the Islamic West and the Islamic East. Case studies from other contexts and conflictual interreligious encounters (e. g. in Central Europe or on the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages) are highly welcome as the conference will reflect on polemics also from a comparative perspective.

While addressing different levels and dimensions of polemics, the key topics and objectives of the conference are:

- **Authors of polemics, texts and contexts**

Polemics appear in a broad spectrum of texts. Therefore, they are not to be understood as a specific genre. Case studies that engage with and contextualise polemics in historiography, literary works (*adab*, including poetry), legal treatises, philosophical works and, of course, refutations (*radd* literature) are of interest. Who were the authors of the polemics? When, why and in which social and intellectual contexts were the polemics and refutations written?

- **Addressees and target groups of polemics, reasons and purposes**

Who were the addressees of the polemics? That also means: What do we know about the directionalities, about the purported and the actual audience? Against whom or

which groups were the polemics directed and why? Of interest are case studies from within Sunni and Shi'i contexts, from conflictual Sunni-Shi'i encounters, but also interreligious polemics, for example Muslim scholars writing against Christians and Jews, or vice versa.

- **Levels of polemics at the interplay between politics, religion and scholarly careers**
Which function did polemics fulfil within scholarly, political or religious rivalries? Why and how did scholars polemicize against rulers or dynasties? In how far did scholars ridicule other scholars, engage in badmouthing? What was the purpose of polemics within scholarly establishments?
- **Practices, positions, performances and temporalities of polemics**
Polemics do not only appear in texts, but also as practices. What are the practices of polemics? What are the temporalities of polemics? How are polemics and acts of revenge placed during conflictual encounters?
- **Methodological framework and polemics as a concept**
The conference aims also at establishing a methodological framework and to conceptualize polemics as a category from a historical point of view. How do the case studies contribute to a conceptualisation of polemics?

The conference is organized by Dr. Nadine El-Hussein and Prof. Dr. Mohammad Gharaibeh (Chair of Islamic Intellectual History, Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology) and will take place at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany, from **28–30 January 2027**.

Please note that English will be the language of the conference. The conference is intended for a maximum of 25 participants, and the presentations are scheduled to last 20 minutes for the talk and 10 minutes for the discussion. The organizing project will pay for travel and accommodation costs, according to German research fund regulations, for those researchers whose papers will have been selected.

Please submit the title and abstract of your paper (250–max. 500 words) with a short academic CV (including up to five relevant publications) to Dr. Nadine El-Hussein (nadine.el-hussein@hu-berlin.de) by **30 June 2026**. The acceptance of papers will be announced by the end of July 2026.

The conference proceedings will be published in a collective volume. Please submit the first draft of your contribution by **31 May 2027** to Dr. Nadine El-Hussein (nadine.el-hussein@hu-berlin.de). Details on the formal guidelines and standards will be provided in due course.